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JOE CIARDIELLO

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- Luiz V. '22SEAS

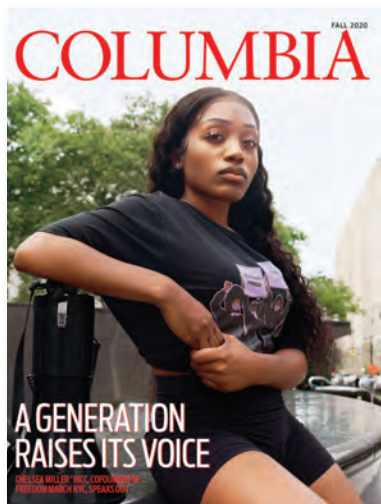
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## WISE WORDS

Each issue of *Columbia Magazine* is better than the last — if that is possible. Thanks for the consistent high quality in a publication that keeps the Columbia family not only informed but also proudly loyal to the University.

The in-depth reporting on subjects that are timely and of utmost importance is most appreciated. There is a constant need for an understanding of today's complex issues to assist readers in taking appropriate action now and in the future.

The *Columbia Magazine* editors and staff are most definitely up to the task of providing well-written, relevant information.

**Suzanne Wise '73GS**  
Santa Fe, NM

## NO MIDDLE GROUND?

The interview with Peter Coleman ("Healing the Red-Blue Divide," Fall 2020) was profound and necessary. But it did leave me uneasy. The far right and the far left do

indeed ignore a lot of facts. The middle ground is disappearing. And facts themselves are malleable. You tend to find what you want to find. Issues are often framed wrong — by social and mass media, politicians, activists, trolls, and so on — and that's where Coleman's research is and should be.

All that said, I can go through issue after issue, from global warming to war in the Middle East, and the truth content of the far right is substantially below the truth content of the far left. The far left talks a good game but boosts mainly elites. The far right boosts mainly those who believe (sometimes correctly) that they have been left behind.

Obama did appoint many Republicans to key positions. It did him little good.

The interview does not, in my opinion, focus on what Coleman knows and acts upon — that the arguments between left and right are not symmetrical. Too many readers may get the idea that if you just get the facts right,

you can solve arguments. The framing question is far more important than the space and position given to it.

My daughter Heather and I were discussing the fascinating and infuriating story from September that the CDC did not write the CDC advice for COVID-19 testing. Heather is a world-class epidemiologist, now working on ways to get the public to understand vaccines. She "marches for science" in the annual event. This CDC mess was a triumph of politics over science in an area where facts are clear.

**Steve Ross '70JRN**  
Revere, MA

Peter Coleman's approach to resolving conflict suffers defects of messenger, substance, and timing. First, he has already taken a side. Associating with Timothy Shriver does not enhance Coleman's standing with conservatives or Republicans. His idea that our representatives distance themselves from their constituents and instead form a more perfect

# FEEDBACK



An issue I will share with my granddaughter!  
**Caroline M. Staples '68SOA**  
Bryans Road, MD

I never leave the country without the latest copy of *Columbia Magazine*! Great writers from a great university.  
**Shawn Brown '05SIPA**  
Jericho, NY

I always enjoy reading your magazine. So many interesting people on your campus are "making things happen!"  
**Sue Spaid '99GSAS**  
Lasne-Chapelle-Saint-Lambert, Belgium

union with other politicians centralizes power in Washington at the expense of our representative democracy. Vote-splitting suppresses Republicans’ strength where their voter turnout is higher. Though adding someone from the other party to a cabinet is neither novel nor rare, replacing multiple cabinet officials with members of the other party is disloyal and would likely result in selecting opposition party members on their last stop to retirement or who have little following within their own party.

More immediately, there can be no compromise between conservatives and anarchists, or their enablers in the Democratic Party, at major universities and in the media. People who seek the violent overthrow of the United States or the cancellation of the free speech and livelihoods of those who are insufficiently fervent in supporting their dogma must be stopped by all lawful means.

Unless traditional centrist and center-left Democrats who (presumably) disagree with the anarchists’ tactics and their extreme positions on ending capitalism, private property, the nuclear family, and democracy cease appeasing and effectively supporting anarchists, compromise with Democrats on many core principles is tantamount to appeasing terrorists.

(As an aside, Donald Trump’s intemperate tweets are hardly the equivalent of the violent acts and McCarthyist tactics of a substantial number of anarchists and far-left Democrats. Heated



Twilight on Low Plaza.

rhetoric is regrettable and disconcerting; but violence and cancel culture directly threaten the safety and welfare of nearly every American.)

Government has to function, so compromise on specific legislation will continue. If and when traditional Democrats regain control of their agenda, compromise among the center-right, center, and center-left constituencies who represent most Americans will be welcome, though preferably utilizing means and messengers other than Coleman or Shriver.

**Kenin M. Spivak ’77CC, ’80BUS, ’80LAW**  
Beverly Hills, CA

For the past forty-plus years we have been subjected to the neo-Confederate agenda of the modern Republican Party, which seeks to limit the power of the government until its members can “drown it in the bathtub.” The current Putinist presidency is just the latest symptom of the three deadly diseases spread by this party: white supremacy, misogyny, and nativism. The members of this party regularly subvert the rule of law for short-term political gain and have gone so far as to collude with a hostile foreign power to disenfranchise the majority of fellow voting citizens.

It is difficult to see what the point of compromise might be with people who do not define what a human being is in the same way that a patriot does. Indeed, the only way to save the Union is to remove the traitors from all positions of authority in our personal, professional, and public lives. We must then complete the Reconstruction that was halted by Northern and Southern white supremacists in 1877. Anything less than this will lead to the demise of the republic.

**Pawel Grajner ’05SOA**  
Beverly Shores, IN

**MALTHUS MOMENT**  
Every action taken by humanity to prevent climate change from causing one or more major worldwide catastrophes will fail, due to the ever-increasing human population and the ever-increasing per capita usage of resources (“New climate studies show how earth is changing,” Explorations, Fall 2020). Any article discussing climate change that does not discuss population growth is misleading and useless.

**Jason G. Brent ’57BUS, ’60LAW**  
Las Vegas, NV

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS			
CODE	SCHOOL	CODE	SCHOOL
BC	Barnard College	NRS	School of Nursing
BUS	Graduate School of Business	OPT	School of Optometry
CC	Columbia College	PH	Mailman School of Public Health
DM	College of Dental Medicine	PHRM	School of Pharmaceutical Sciences
GS	School of General Studies	PS	Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons
GSAPP	Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation	SEAS	Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science
GSAS	Graduate School of Arts and Sciences	SIPA	School of International and Public Affairs
HON	(Honorary degree)	SOA	School of the Arts
JRN	Graduate School of Journalism	SPS	School of Professional Studies
JTS	Jewish Theological Seminary	SW	School of Social Work
KC	King’s College	TC	Teachers College
LAW	School of Law	UTS	Union Theological Seminary
LS	School of Library Service		



## NURSING'S CHAMPION

What a pleasure to read "The Nightingale Effect" in the College Walk section of the Fall 2020 issue. I clearly remember doing research in the Florence Nightingale collection in Maxwell Hall, the Columbia School of Nursing's previous home.

Nightingale's dedication to the patient was complete. She was a champion despite the obstacles of family and political pressure. When my daughter was an undergraduate (not at Columbia), she took a women's studies course whose text described nurses as members of the "pink-collar ghetto." My comment at that time was that her professor and the text's

author would benefit from more in-depth research.

Nightingale fought for equal opportunity for women to advance and for equal-quality care for the sick. Her lamp cleared her way through the darkness of Scutari Hospital and shed light on the poor state of patient conditions. Her zeal should be a model for those who wish to stress nurses' pivotal role in providing attention to patients' well-being and dignity.

**Monica Donnelly Williams**  
'71NRS  
Port Jefferson, NY

## SUFFRAGETTE CITY

Great article on the women's battle for the vote ("Suffragist City," Fall 2020)! Please explain to me if it's true that

the English women called themselves "suffragettes." I had always heard that using that word for suffragists was a sexist way of demeaning them by the use of a diminutive.

More such stories of women's history should be dramatized for TV or the movies so that everyone can appreciate what went into the struggle.

**Anton J. Mikofsky '68JRN**  
New York, NY

*The term "suffragette" was first used in 1906 in a London newspaper to mock the suffrage movement in Britain. Prominent British suffragists responded by appropriating the word, proudly calling themselves "suffragettes," while the Americans stayed with "suffragists." — Ed.*

## STAND, COLUMBIA

Just as *Alma Mater* represents all Columbians near and far, I'm proud that this stunningly beautiful, poetic even, visual tribute to George Floyd ("Sign of the Times," College Walk, Fall 2020) allows me to stand with him too.

**William Taylor**  
'70GSAPP  
Christiansted,  
St. Croix, VI

**QUESTIONS?  
COMMENTS?**

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# COLLEGE WALK

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Ruth Bader Ginsburg at the Supreme Court, 1997. Photo by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders '74CC.

## Monumental Justice

How Columbia helped Ruth Bader Ginsburg '59LAW, '94HON carve out her place in history

After her death in September, flowers and handwritten notes addressed to Ruth Bader Ginsburg '59LAW, '94HON piled up at the base of the *Alma Mater* statue on the Low Plaza steps. Apart from a statue of Ginsburg herself, there could hardly be a more appropriate spot to honor the Supreme Court justice who finished at the top of her class at Columbia Law School and was Columbia's first female tenured law professor.

Long before she became the second woman on the high court — before the incisive, literate opinions and echoing dissents, before the lace collars and pop-culture stardom — Ginsburg gained wisdom on Morningside Heights. Born

in Brooklyn, she went to college at Cornell and had completed two years at Harvard Law School when her husband, Marty, a tax lawyer, got a job in New York. Ginsburg transferred to Columbia, a step that would transform her life and eventually the country.

A shy, quiet student with a commanding intellect and relentless will, Ginsburg relished her time on campus. She joined the law review and made it a point to speak up in her male-dominated classes, even as she felt, when answering questions, the burden of representing all women.

While any man with Ginsburg's academic record could expect a clerkship in a federal appeals court or the Supreme Court, Ginsburg,



a woman and a mother of a four-year-old daughter, was passed over. Answering this injustice, law professor Gerald Gunther '50GSAS contacted judges in the Southern District of New York to endorse his star pupil, and Ginsburg was finally hired by Judge Edmund L. Palmieri 1926CC, 1929LAW.



RBG teaches sex-discrimination law, 1970s.

But even after her clerkship she couldn't get a job with a law firm, and in 1961, when law professor Hans Smit '53GSAS, '58LAW asked her to coauthor a book on the Swedish legal system as part of Columbia's Project on International Procedure, Ginsburg said yes. It was Smit who urged her to speak in public and write for law journals, and who kindled her passion for civil procedure, the body of rules governing civil litigation. When the book was finished, Ginsburg joined the faculty of Rutgers Law School, where she stayed for nine years until Columbia recruited her in 1971. That year, as a volunteer lawyer for the ACLU, she cowrote the petitioner's brief in *Reed v. Reed*, challenging an Idaho law that favored men in the appointment of executors of estates. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously for the plaintiff, Sally Reed.

Ginsburg returned to Columbia with purpose. Shortly after accepting the offer, she sent a letter to University president

William McGill '70HON, noting that a statement attributed to McGill in the *New York Times* implied that Ginsburg had been hired to satisfy federal diversity requirements rather than on her merits. With precision and tact, Ginsburg explained that the idea that women sought "reverse discrimination" proceeded from a flawed assumption of male superiority. Later in 1972, she campaigned against unequal retirement benefits at the University (women received less than men) and, as the law school's representative in the University Senate, supported an equal-pay salary review.

Gender discrimination was at the heart of her work. In 1973, again for the ACLU, Ginsburg argued her first case before the Supreme Court in *Frontiero v. Richardson*, which disputed the legality of unequal military benefits for men and women. To prepare for her nerve-racking debut she enlisted Columbia professors Benno Schmidt Jr. '76HON and Harold Edgar '67LAW, along with her students, to pepper her with questions. The work paid off: her ten-minute address to the Burger Court led to an 8-1 ruling that the unequal benefits were unconstitutional.

Of the six cases Ginsburg argued before the court in the 1970s, advocating for both women and men seeking equal treatment under the law, she won five. The decisions rippled through government agencies. By the time President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit in 1980, ending her teaching career, Ginsburg had already reshaped society. "She's one of a handful of people in American history who fundamentally changed the law," says David Schizer, a Columbia law professor



## THE SHORT LIST

**LISTEN** Theaters may have gone dark for the time being, but the performing arts are alive and well. Catch two of Miller Theatre's **virtual pop-up concerts** this winter: on January 19, harpist Brandee Younger teams up with bassist Dezron Douglas for a unique duet, and on February 16, the JACK Quartet performs music by contemporary German composer Helmut Lachenmann. [millertheatre.com](http://millertheatre.com)

**CONNECT** Job seekers and the social-media savvy are invited to join the Columbia Alumni Association **LinkedIn group**, where you can network with fellow alumni from across industries and around the world. [linkedin.com/groups/55739/](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/55739/)

**WATCH** Mark your calendar for *The White Tiger*, a new film adaptation of the celebrated 2008 novel by Aravind Adiga '97CC. Directed by Columbia film professor Ramin Bahrani '96CC, the movie, which takes a humorous look at India's class struggles, premieres on Netflix on January 22. [netflix.com](https://www.netflix.com)

**LOOK** Explore the digital collections of Columbia's **Rare Book and Manuscript Library**, where you can find curiosities ranging from John Jay's papers to hundreds of vintage photos of Coney Island sideshows. [library.columbia.edu/libraries/rbml/digitalcollections.html](http://library.columbia.edu/libraries/rbml/digitalcollections.html)

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## COLLEGE WALK

and former law-school dean who clerked for Justice Ginsburg in 1994–95. “That’s a monumental achievement.”

When Ginsburg’s name was in the mix for the Supreme Court in 1993, Columbia president Michael Sovern ’53CC, ’55LAW, ’80HON lobbied President Bill Clinton on her behalf. Ginsburg’s legal genius won Clinton over, and she was nominated and overwhelmingly confirmed.

As an associate justice, Ginsburg adjudicated with sober regard for the real-world effects of the law on regular people, crafting a body of penetrating, rigorously researched majority opinions and dissents aimed at jurists, lawmakers, and citizens alike. “Her mantra was ‘Get it right and keep it tight,’” says Schizer. “She scrutinized every word and would write and rewrite until she’d said exactly what she’d wanted to say.”

Ginsburg’s clerks describe her not only as a brilliant jurist but also as a loyal mentor who led by example. “She held herself to an extraordinarily high standard and taught us how to bring that deliberate care to our work,” says Columbia law professor Gillian Metzger ’96LAW, who clerked for Ginsburg in 1997–98. “It’s a lesson her clerks carry: we all have a little RBG on our shoulders.”

Likewise, millions of Americans stand on *her* shoulders. To honor this legacy, Governor Andrew Cuomo named a commission to supervise the creation of a Ginsburg statue in Brooklyn. The commissioners include Metzger and Columbia law professor Jane Ginsburg, Justice Ginsburg’s daughter. The statue will be a site of inspiration and hope, much as *Alma Mater* was in September, where among the many tributes was a note from a nine-year-old girl:

Dear Ruth Bader Ginsburg,

I’m using my fountain pen for you. ☺  
You are such an inspiration to girls and women. It’s devastating to hear you died. But death does not mean that you’re gone. You are with us Americans still.

— *Paul Hond*

## Overheard at the J-School

At the New Journalism symposium, hosted by Columbia Journalism School and the *Columbia Journalism Review*, media experts discussed where the field is today and where it needs to go. Here are a few of their insights.

“Not since the 1960s has there been such a confluence of fundamental questions about journalism: about its weaknesses, its shortcomings, but also the opportunity to remake it.”

— Steve Coll  
DEAN, COLUMBIA  
JOURNALISM SCHOOL

“We have a technological challenge, a business-model challenge, a challenge of better representing our communities, and that’s all happening against the backdrop of a rapidly changing America, one in which four in ten people now identify as people of color.”

— Sewell Chan  
EDITOR OF THE EDITORIAL PAGES,  
LOS ANGELES TIMES



“The best journalism has a moral resonance.  
It is fact-based and complex.  
But it has a moral resonance.”

— Susan Chira, EDITOR IN CHIEF, THE MARSHALL PROJECT

“We need to be in regular conversation with underrepresented communities, ... to invite them to criticize us. To tell us what we are getting wrong and what we are getting right. That’s a really important part of what an accountable media looks like.”

— Ashton Lattimore  
EDITOR IN CHIEF,  
PRISM

“Anyone looking at news independent from social media, Google search, and the web of advertising around them is fooling themselves. We are in a more complex ecosystem.”

— Ethan Zuckerman  
VISITING RESEARCH SCHOLAR, KNIGHT FIRST  
AMENDMENT INSTITUTE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

“If you create an ecosystem where good, accurate information is information you have to pay for, then free information may be less valuable and less accurate. And you create an information divide. That concerns me.”

— Andrea Valdez  
EDITOR IN CHIEF, THE 19TH





## Art Won't Wait

Wallach Art Gallery director Betti-Sue Hertz stays ahead of the curve

Last March, when COVID-19 shut down the Wallach Art Gallery at the Lenfest Center for the Arts, Betti-Sue Hertz was already looking ahead. Hertz, who ran the Longwood Arts Project in the South Bronx for seven years and was later director of visual arts at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, joined the Wallach as director in September 2019. Six months into her tenure, the virus hit. The gallery went dark, yet Hertz didn't hesitate to move forward with plans for the Wallach's next show, *Uptown Triennial 2020*, on view through February.

"We were determined to get this show up, though we knew anything could happen," Hertz says. The Wallach, which moved to Manhattanville from Schermerhorn Hall in 2017,

is dedicated to bridging the academy and the community, and most of the twenty-five artists in *Uptown* live and work in Harlem and Upper Manhattan. Though the gallery has been closed to the public during the COVID-19 crisis, art lovers can take virtual 360-degree tours by visiting [wallach.columbia.edu](http://wallach.columbia.edu).

Hertz is now planning *The Protest and the Recuperation*, scheduled to open in June. The exhibit, which showcases artists from Malaysia, Sudan, Hong Kong, the US, and more, looks at both demonstrations and the strategies of activists to recover and regroup. "I'm interested in the aesthetics of protest, the visual and performative components that enliven what we're seeing today," Hertz says. "I think about that a lot in relationship to contemporary art."



From *Uptown Triennial 2020*: (left) *Where it's at* (detail), 2020, by Derrick Adams '03SOA; (below) *Choir*, 2020, by Hugh Hayden '18SOA.



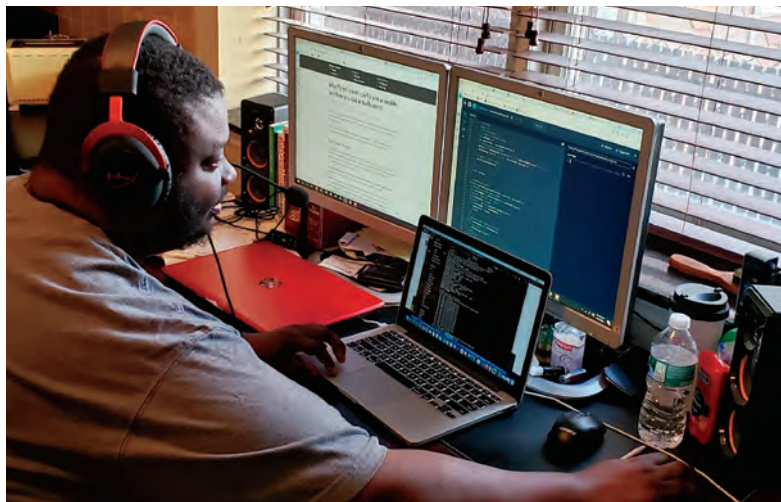
For Hertz, whose colleagues out west would joke that she was "too academic," Columbia has been an ideal fit. "I felt welcomed and found that I speak the same language as a lot of my colleagues," she says. A native New Yorker who has taught at Stanford and UC Berkeley, Hertz envisions collaborations with the University libraries as well as departments in the arts, humanities, and sciences. Recently, the Wallach featured a Zoom talk by English professor Robert O'Meally on the Harlem Renaissance vaudeville performer Johnny Hudgins, accompanied by the vibrant jazz-themed collages of Romare Bearden. In another virtual event called "*Uptown Triennial 2020 Town Hall: Building for the Future*," artists, scholars, activists, urban planners, and community leaders reflected on the possibilities of a post-pandemic,

more equitable New York.

A painter and sculptor by training, Hertz brings intellectual inquiry into all her work. "I think of curating as knowledge production, not just a decorative entertainment," she says. She also insists that the exhibitions be "relevant and timely" — which doesn't necessarily mean that the art itself has to be contemporary. "All art was contemporary when it was made," says Hertz. "It's part of a continuum."

That continuum stretches into the future as well as the past: Hertz was at work on *The Protest and the Recuperation* well before the mass protests of 2020. The 2017 Women's March had gotten her thinking about protest and democracy. "That's the trick of being a curator — projecting into the future and hoping you're right."

— Paul Hond



Left: Aedan Macdonald. Right: Antwan Bolden, a graduate of the coding boot camp and current TA for the course, works at home in Jersey City.

## From Prison to Programming

A Columbia boot camp teaches formerly incarcerated people the skills they need to build a career in tech

**“W**hen you’re in prison, all you hear is that your life is over now,” says Aedan Macdonald, who spent four years in a federal penitentiary for selling marijuana. “You’re told that the best you can hope for when you’re out is a minimum-wage job.”

Macdonald, thirty-two, is ready to challenge that assumption. As the founder and director of the Justice Through Code (JTC) program at Columbia, he’s equipping the formerly incarcerated with skills to start careers in technology, rewriting the script on who gets to be a software engineer.

JTC, a joint venture between Columbia’s Center for Justice and the business school’s Tamer Center for Social Enterprise, offers people recently released from prison a free ten-week boot camp in coding. Students learn the basics of Python, a popular programming language used by companies like Google and Dropbox. JTC also provides workshops on career skills like negotiating salaries, building networks, and finding mentors, and works with partners to supply laptops to students who need them.

“With the right resources, anyone can learn computer skills,” says Macdonald. “Technology can be a great equalizer. Society tells us there’s one type of person who works in tech, but that’s not true. We need people of all backgrounds.”

The high US incarceration rate disproportionately impacts low-income people of color, and statistics show that, on average, formerly incarcerated people are five times as likely to be unemployed as the population overall. Those who do have jobs often live below the poverty line, earning a median yearly income of under \$11,000 three years after release from prison.

Macdonald understands that his journey after prison was atypical. When he was released in July 2019, he enrolled in Columbia’s School of General Studies, and he plans to graduate in May. Living in New York, he noticed that the booming technology sector offered a steady supply of high-paying jobs. He took a coding boot camp outside Columbia and thought the University could run one too. Macdonald met with Damon Phillips, the Lambert Family Professor of Social

Enterprise and codirector of the Tamer Center. Using the B-school’s intensive coding program for reference, they developed a course for people recently out of prison.

The pandemic has created an even tougher job market and more urgent purpose for JTC. In addition to impoverishing families, increased unemployment makes it likelier that newly released prisoners will end up back in prison: studies show that 77 percent of people are rearrested within five years of release, and unemployment is a significant predictor of recidivism.

“The criminal-justice system right now wastes human potential,” says Macdonald. “We want and need the formerly incarcerated to help society, not be imprisoned by their pasts. Learning to code is one way to tap into their potential,” Macdonald, citing a 2019 Bureau of Labor Statistics report, says a Web developer can earn a median salary of \$73,760 without a four-year college degree.

JTC is now accepting applications for its third cohort of students. Its first class of seventeen students graduated in spring 2020, and it received more than



1,260 applications for the twenty places in its fall 2020 program. Some alumni have started tech apprenticeships. Others are being mentored by business-school students who are helping them meet their career goals.

At Emergent Works, a nonprofit software company, two JTC alumni have built a mobile app called Not911. It directs New York City residents in specific types of emergencies to local social services rather than the police. If a homeless person needs mental-health help, for example, the most effective first responder might be a counseling service. The formerly incarcerated engineers understood that.

Antwan Bolden, a spring graduate and a teaching assistant in the program, speaks to the transformative impact of JTC. He studied engineering before his incarceration but says that after his 2009 release, “so many doors were slammed in my face.”

“This coding program has been a lifesaver for me. Literally. There were times when I felt like I had nothing and suicide went through my mind,” says Bolden. “I’m just so grateful to the instructors at Columbia who treat us like human beings.”

The credibility of an Ivy League program made Bolden feel empowered. When he got a University e-mail address, that Columbia name next to his initials made a huge difference to him.

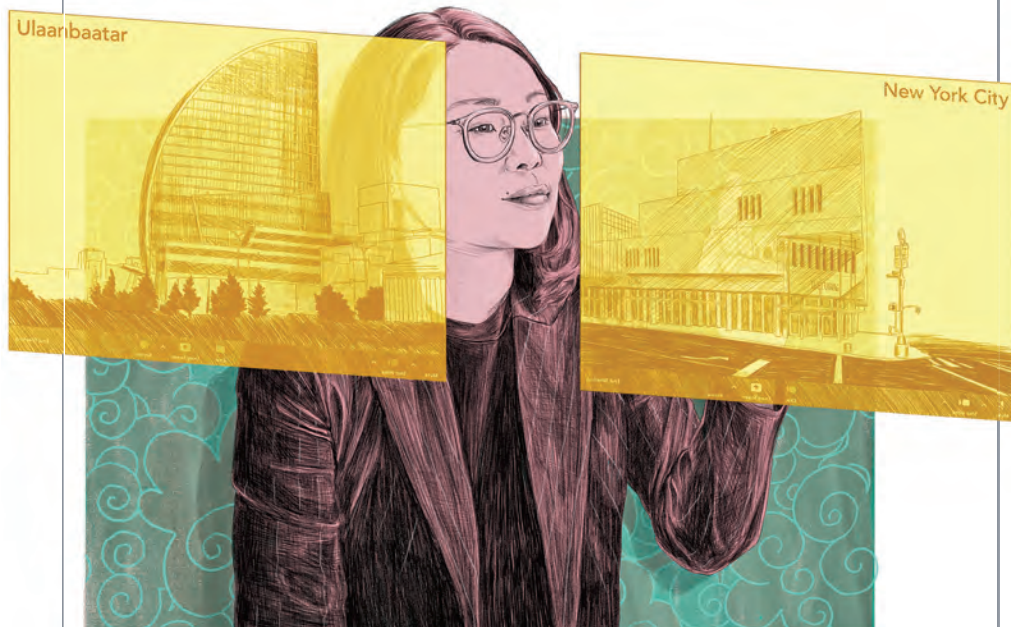
“It’s the small stuff, but that gave me hope,” says Bolden. “Give us a chance to prove ourselves. That’s all we ask.”

— Rebecca Kelliher '13BC

# Zooming in Mongolia

## Catching up with one of our Obama Scholars

The Obama Foundation Scholars Program at Columbia, a collaboration with the nonprofit created by former president Barack Obama '83CC, invites rising leaders from around the world to participate in a year-long residency at the University. This year's cohort is currently studying remotely. We caught up with scholar Maralmaa Munkh-Achit in Mongolia.



“The Scholars Program is designed to help me build the policy, development, and social-advocacy skills that support the work I do in Mongolia. The curriculum is very diverse. Right now, I’m auditing two classes: International Nonprofit Management and Communications for Corporations and Nonprofits. I’m also in Zoom workshops with prominent leaders and experts.

I’m currently on sabbatical from my job as the executive director of the Zorig Foundation, a nonprofit located in the capital, Ulaanbaatar. We focus on youth and education, good governance, voter registration, and community development. One of my passion projects is the Sustainable Employment for Youth Program. In Mongolia it can take almost three years for a university graduate to transition to full-time employment. We are trying to close that gap by teaching essentials like résumé writing, communication skills, and networking.

Due to COVID-19, I wasn’t able to travel to the US, so I spent the first semester at home. There’s a twelve-hour time difference, so sometimes I find myself in meetings in the middle of the night. While I’m still not used to the virtual programming and the hectic schedule, I already feel connected to the other scholars. I love hearing about the work they’re doing in their communities, from educating the next generation of journalists in India to combating climate change in Brazil. My fellow scholars are truly inspiring. We organize informal meetings outside the official programming so we can share our stories and expertise, but I just wish we could all be on campus together. The situation can be frustrating, but I try to focus on my goals. I remind myself that Mongolia is a country of only three million people and that one person can make a significant difference here.

# IMAGES OF CHANGE

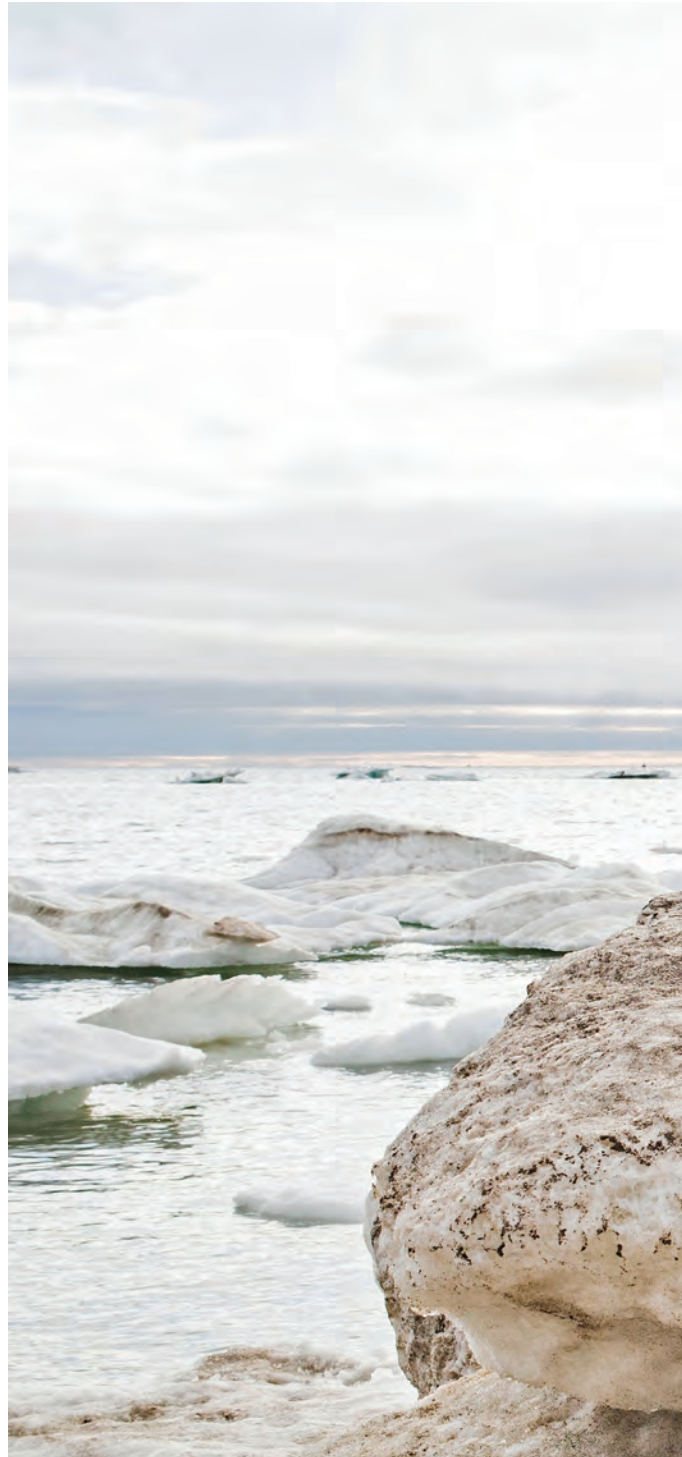
Photojournalist **Katie Orlinsky '12JRN** has spent over six years capturing the ever-shifting relationship between people, animals, and the land in one of the most environmentally vulnerable areas of the world

For close to a decade I worked as a photojournalist covering stories in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. I documented sex trafficking in Nepal and women's rights activists in Mali, and I spent time in Mexico photographing women and children whose lives have been upended by the drug war. Then, in 2014, a chance assignment for an Austrian magazine sent me to the Arctic to photograph the Yukon Quest, a thousand-mile sled-dog race along the historical route traveled by prospectors, adventurers, and mail carriers during the Klondike Gold Rush.



At that time, a trip to the frozen North American hinterlands was about as far out of my wheelhouse as you could get, both professionally and personally.

I was born and raised in New York City, and my work revolved around conflict and social issues. Though I'd had plenty of experience with roughing it on assignment, the closest I'd come to living in the wilderness was as a preteen at summer camp in Vermont. I'd never been farther north than Montreal — which was already far too cold for my liking. The Arctic was a part of the world I rarely thought about.



ASH ADAMS





▲ **A BOY WAITS FOR HIS FATHER AFTER A SEAL-HUNTING TRIP** For thousands of years, Inupiat villagers along Alaska's North Slope have hunted marine mammals such as seals, walruses, and whales. A child's first seal hunt is an important rite of passage,

but these ancient traditions are increasingly threatened by the realities of climate change in the Arctic. Weather conditions have become dangerous and unpredictable, and the communities that rely on hunting are being pressured in countless ways.



That February, when I arrived in the Canadian Yukon, average temperatures hovered around  $-30^{\circ}\text{F}$ . But I couldn't focus on the cold. The places where the Yukon Quest teams race and train are some of the most beautiful untouched landscapes in the world, and I was blown away by the sparkling snow, dramatic vistas, and muted pastel light. The race, along with the more well-known Iditarod, is one of the toughest sporting events on the planet, and the intense bond between the mushers and their incredible canine athletes both fascinated and moved me. Still, it was just one assignment. I assumed that after a few weeks I would go home to New York City and then return to covering projects in Latin America.

Yet as the race went on, something began to change. About three days in, I was driving around Dawson City, Canada, with Eva Holland, a local writer who has been covering the Yukon Quest for years. Dawson City marks the halfway point in the race, and all the teams were required to take a mandatory thirty-six-hour rest. Eva and I had started to drive across the frozen Yukon River to interview and photograph mushers who had set up camp on the other side of town. We were about twenty feet away from the shore when Eva realized that the ice road — one she had driven on every winter — was no longer frozen. After slamming the car into reverse and getting back on solid ground, we had to take a moment to get over the shock of what had just happened. Eventually we made our way to the camp upriver.

Once we got there, mushers told us their own stories about the dangers caused by erratic weather conditions. I learned that warm spells followed by cold weather create pockets of water in between deceptively thin layers of ice, destroying the trails and ice roads that both the mushers and numerous rural and indigenous villages rely on. This further isolates those communities and, worse, makes it unpredictable and dangerous to hunt by snowmobile or sled.

Hunting and fishing are the cultural and economic anchors of the North's many indigenous groups, and in addition to creating dangerous conditions for







◀ **THE ALATNA RIVER IS A CORRIDOR FOR WILDLIFE MOVING NORTH** I took this photo from a floatplane as I began my journey home after a sixty-four-mile rafting expedition. As a result of warming weather, a number of animal species — such as beavers, snowshoe hares, and moose — are migrating north. Beaver numbers in particular are booming, and you can see several of their ponds here. The beavers have the ability to transform a landscape, because by building dams, clearing trees, and creating ponds and meadows they help accelerate permafrost thaw.

▼ **A SLED-DOG TEAM COMPETES IN THE YUKON QUEST** Dog mushing has a long history. It's said that thousands of years ago, hunter-gatherer communities used dogs to pull sleds in the Arctic Circle. Once highways were built and snow machines became widespread in the 1960s, mushing became recreational and the world of competitive sled-dog racing began.

◀ **FLAMMABLE METHANE BUBBLES UP FROM THAWING PERMAFROST** Trapped under a frozen lake in winter, the gas escapes when you punch a hole through the ice, and it can be set on fire (with the help of a trained scientist). Arctic permafrost is thawing much faster than expected, releasing potent greenhouse gases that could drastically speed up climate change. In 2018 I began a multiyear story about permafrost for *National Geographic*, and what I learned is terrifying. Thaw has accelerated, and what was once hundreds of years away could now happen in our lifetime. The greenhouse gases this will release will make today's fossil-fuel emissions look insignificant.





humans, warming weather means that animals are now dying off or migrating in new patterns. This further impacts those who rely on hunting not only for nutrition and income but as a mainstay of their spiritual practices. People told me about how village elders used to be able to predict the weather by looking for certain signs in the landscape. These careful observations, preserved and adapted over hundreds if not thousands of generations, were no longer useful. I also learned about places farther south in Alaska, which I would visit years later, where climate change is exacerbating erosion, accelerating permafrost thaw, and creating storms and floods that are forcing entire villages to relocate. All over the world, communities are being displaced as a result of climate change, and in the US the majority of them are in Alaska. These tiny towns occasionally make headlines, only to recede into the background once the news cycle moves on.

It wasn't until I saw the day-to-day impact of climate change that I grasped the severity of what is happening to our planet. I knew I had to share this understanding with others, and what started as a random assignment has led to a life-changing new mission. For the last six years, I have spent much of my time in Alaska documenting the real impacts of our changing planet and exploring how climate change is transforming the relationship between people, animals, and the land. A majority of my work has been focused on the resilience, perseverance, and survival of the Alaskan Native communities that are struggling valiantly to adapt their traditional practices to increasingly hostile environments.

Scientists call Alaska ground zero for climate change, and 2019 was its warmest year on record. What is happening there should serve as a warning to the rest of the world. In my work as a photographer I try to frame big-picture political issues by capturing the intimate moments of everyday life behind the headlines. I hope that by focusing on these human stories of our warming climate, I will inspire both empathy and action. 🐾





◀ **THE BATAGAIKA CRATER IS KNOWN AS THE “HELL CRATER”**

Half a mile long and more than three hundred feet deep, this depression in northeastern Siberia started forming in the 1960s after forests were cleared, exposing the land to the sun. This caused the permafrost to thaw and the earth to collapse. The ancient soils of Arctic permafrost, seen in the wall of the crater, hold the organic remains of leaves, grass, and animals that died thousands of years ago, during the Ice Age.



▲ **BOYS CROSS A FLOODED WALKWAY**

The Yupik village of Newtok in western Alaska (population 380) is sinking and shrinking as the permafrost beneath it thaws. In a few more years it could be totally underwater. Newtok is the first community in Alaska that has begun relocation as a result of climate change. The villagers' new home, Mertarvik, is built upon rocky land about nine miles to the south.



◀ **A CURIOUS POLAR BEAR INVESTIGATES THE HOOD OF A TRUCK**

Climate change has affected the migration and diet of polar bears, which have grown increasingly hungry as melting sea ice impairs their ability to hunt seals. Now polar bears come to the city of Kaktovik after the community's annual whale hunt, to feed off the scraps. With a steady stream of tourists and scientists arriving to view and study them, the bears are growing increasingly accustomed to interaction with humans — the most dangerous predators on the planet.





Kenneth Clark

Philip Johnson

W.H. Auden

Hannah Arendt

Margaret Mead

C. Cardillo



# LET THERE BE LIGHT

After 75 years, the University Seminars  
at Columbia remain one of academia's  
shining intellectual traditions

By Paul Hond

Illustration by Joe Ciardiello

In the days leading up to the seminar, Robert Pollack '61CC wrestled with his chosen text. Pollack's credentials are impeccable: a biology professor and dean of Columbia College from 1982 to 1989, he is a former Guggenheim Fellow and recipient of the Alexander Hamilton Medal, the highest honor bestowed by the Columbia College Alumni Association. Yet still he fretted. In a matter of days, twenty people — scientists, writers, educators, artists — would convene on Zoom to discuss *I and Thou*, by the German-Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. The book is a short, aphoristic, notoriously opaque work, and Pollack, who with Peter Gruenberger '58CC, '61LAW is co-chair of a University Seminar called Science and Subjectivity, hoped it wouldn't be too off-putting.

The word "seminar" may rouse images of a circle of students and a professor, but the University Seminars are a different beast: a network of thinkers who convene regularly during the academic year to discuss issues of perennial concern. They gather not in classrooms but in the meeting rooms and dining rooms of Faculty House (currently they meet virtually), where they hold democratic, freewheeling, civil, sometimes excited, and always revelatory conversations about everything from American studies to Zoroastrianism. Members include not just the faculty of Columbia and other universities but also public officials, businesspeople, and labor leaders, as well as historians, doctors, linguists, painters, and poets.

At seventy-five, the seminars are a thriving institution with a remarkable tradition of intellectual ferment. Pollack's seminar is just one of

ninety-two groups engaged in constructive, creative dialogue. "The principle of the University Seminars is the honest but non-hostile exchange of views on a topic which may be tendentious and troubling or just interesting and difficult," says Pollack, who started his seminar in 2018 and directed the program from 2011 to 2019.

The avenues of interrogation are implicit in the seminars' names: Language and Cognition, Memory and Slavery, Energy Ethics, Ecology and Culture, Religion in America, Economic History, Women and Society. Usually lasting ninety minutes, seminars are closed to the public and press (thus their low profile) and, to further ensure academic liberty, are autonomous from the central administration. A paid graduate student, called a rapporteur, takes minutes of the meetings, which may be kept under seal for five years at the choice of seminar members before being archived in Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. There is no audience for the sessions, no remuneration, no academic credit, no acclaim. What the program does offer is a chance for participants to take intellectual risks without fear of judgment — and to encounter new ideas.

The lure of that opportunity is reflected in the roster of University Seminars members over the decades. Columbia professors like historian Richard Hofstadter '42GSAS, anthropologist Margaret Mead '28GSAS, '64HON, Nobel-winning physicist I. I. Rabi '27GSAS, and jurist Ruth Bader Ginsburg '59LAW, '94HON, as well as guest speakers like poet W. H. Auden and political philosopher Hannah Arendt, all joined the seminars to challenge themselves and each other.

That dynamic continues today, furthering with every spirited roundtable what Pollack calls “an ongoing experiment in continuity and novelty.”

In 1944, with the world at war, professor of Latin American history Frank Tannenbaum 1921CC and eighteen other humanities professors approached acting president Frank D. Fackenthal, who had just replaced the retired Nicholas Murray Butler. The professors wanted to start a program that would break down the walls of academic specialization and combine the brainpower of the University to tackle subjects beyond the limits of any one discipline. Fackenthal approved the initiative.

Tannenbaum was an unlikely figure to start a pedagogical revolution. Born in 1893 in a shtetl in Galicia (in what is now western Ukraine), he immigrated to rural Massachusetts with his family and at age thirteen ran off to New York, where he worked menial jobs (busboy, elevator operator) and got involved in labor politics. In 1914, as a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, he was arrested for his role in leading protests on behalf of unemployed laborers and spent a year in prison. On the strength of recommendations from influential patrons who had followed his trial, Tannenbaum, who never finished high school, was admitted to Columbia College in 1916 at age twenty-three. He graduated with honors, and after writing a landmark book on penology, he worked as a journalist in Mexico and later got his PhD in Latin American history before returning to Columbia in 1934 as a professor.

In 1945, Tannenbaum launched the University Seminars with five broad subjects: The State, Rural Life, Studies in Religion, The Renaissance, and The Problem of Peace. Believing that academic specialization hindered the University’s potential as an incubator of solutions to multifaceted problems, Tannenbaum sought, as he once stated, “to reassemble specialists so that they can see the whole again.” This standard could only be achieved in a state of pure independence: “The group must feel completely free to follow its own bent, it must be responsible only to its own academic conscience, and it must be untrammelled in organization, method, and membership.”

“Tannenbaum’s extraordinary invention was to ensure that if you wanted to place the importance of ideas before your reputation, the University would create a forum for that to happen,” Pollack says. “That’s so important.”

By the 1950s, the program had taken off. The decade saw twenty new seminars, including American Studies, Medieval Studies, and Studies in Contemporary Africa, all of which are ongoing. (The lifespans of the seminars, like their styles and subject matter, vary.) The 1960s brought further expansion, with the addition of offerings like *The City* (1962), which presented such diverse speakers as architect Philip Johnson, psychologist Kenneth Clark ’40GSAS, ’70HON, and police captain Carl Ravens of the 26th Precinct. The seminar on *The Nature of Man* (1968), which was chaired by Mead, comprised an equally eclectic group that included mathematician Richard Courant, political scientist Hans Morgenthau, and Columbia historian Morton Smith. One session featured a rollicking, erudite address by Auden, who riffed on Darwinism, Carnival, and the hippies while dropping Latin phrases and pouring himself glass after glass of wine.

In 1982, the program inaugurated what is now the largest seminar, *Shakespeare*, which has fifty members. And in 1998, Chauncey G. Olinger Jr. ’71GSAS, who was Mead’s rapporteur while getting his master’s in philosophy, started a seminar with Barnard historian Robert McCaughey on the history of Columbia. That seminar has delved into the University Senate and the Core Curriculum and devoted a full year to discussion of the campus upheaval of 1968. For Olinger, who was a student and friend of Tannenbaum’s, the University Seminars “were an invention as significant as the Core Curriculum.”

More than fifty new seminars have emerged in the twenty-first century, and today the program involves some three thousand people. Anyone wishing to join a group must e-mail the chair (find more information at [universityseminars.columbia.edu](http://universityseminars.columbia.edu)) and may attend meetings as a guest with the option of applying for membership. “We’re always trying to bring in younger faculty,” says Alice Newton ’08SIPA, the longtime assistant director of the University Seminars who is currently the interim director. “One of the great advantages of joining a seminar is that you come with something you’re working on, a topic that everybody knows, and you get input.”

Newton calls the University Seminars “a holistic method of looking at problems,” leading to “new types of collaborations.” This ideal is well illustrated in the seminar on *Death*, which attracts philosophers, ethicists, nurses, psychologists, architects, and anthropologists who grap-



“The University Seminar is an independent universe. Its boundaries are limited only by its horizons.”

— FRANK TANNENBAUM,  
PROFESSOR OF LATIN  
AMERICAN HISTORY



ple with issues of aging and quality of life, cultural attitudes, suicide, and the disposal of corpses. The chair, Christina Staudt '01GSAS, earned her PhD in art history (she focused on images of death), was cofounder and president for fifteen years of the Westchester End-of-Life Coalition, and has been a hospice volunteer for over twenty years. "How we treat the dying and the dead has always been an indication of the values of the culture at large," she says. "One of the main intentions in the seminar is to make people more aware of their mortality and to live accordingly."

The seminars, of course, are more than ephemeral conversations. In 2005, Robert Belknap '57SIPA, '59GSAS, a renowned professor of Russian literature and director of the University Seminars from 2001 to 2011, started a project to digitize half a million pages of typed, carbon-copied, and sometimes handwritten transcripts, summaries, and notes in order to create an intellectual history of the seminars. The program also boasts more than four hundred books that were influenced by participation in a seminar. Among them are the Holocaust study *Desolation and Enlightenment*, by Columbia interim provost Ira Katznelson '66CC; *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, edited by history professor Kenneth T. Jackson; *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, by Sharon Marcus, professor of English and comparative literature; *Globalization Challenged*, by former University president George Rupp '93HON; and Pollack's *The Faith of Biology and the Biology of Faith*.

Upon his death in 1969, Tannenbaum, with his wife, Jane Belo, an anthropologist and daughter of a Dallas newspaper magnate, left \$1.5 million for the University Seminars, an endowment that has grown over the years to meet the program's needs. These funds cover administrative costs and events as well as travel and lodging for guest speakers, meals at Faculty House, salaries for graduate-student rapporteurs, and conference funding. And the Leonard Hastings Schoff and Suzanne Levick Schoff Memorial Fund supports seminar-based books published by Columbia University Press.

One of those books, *A Community of Scholars*, was released this past November in honor of the University Seminars' seventy-fifth anniversary. A volume of thirteen essays edited by Thomas Vinciguerra '85CC, '86JRN, '90GSAS, with prefaces by Newton and Pollack, the book examines individual seminars through the eyes

of their chairs and members, offering a rich sampling of the program's range.

"The University Seminars, in many respects, represent the very essence of Columbia's intellectual community," says University President Lee C. Bollinger. "I could not be more proud to share my regard and appreciation for this program, which offers the stability of tradition while providing ample space for the novel and inventive."

**T**he "novel and inventive" can arise at any moment, in any number of ways. As Pollack deftly steered the Science and Subjectivity cohort in a discussion of Buber's *I and Thou*, the participants on Zoom offered observations, interpretations, and questions. Published in 1923, *I and Thou* is all about subjectivity, or rather, *intersubjectivity*, a philosophical term denoting the shared experience of two minds. It argues that human relationships come in two categories: the I-It (transactional, exploitative, limited) and the I-Thou (intimate, transparent, boundless); and that only through the latter — person-to-person encounters that spark an ineffable connection — do we fully realize our humanity and glimpse the divine.

Pollack expected mixed reviews, and he got them. Some rebuked the book's opacity and stated unapologetically that they didn't understand a thing.

And then Ray Lee chimed in. Lee, a senior research scientist at the Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute at Columbia, developed the world's first dual brain scanner — an MRI for two — and studies what happens to the brains of two people who interact. Buber's notion that the I-Thou encounter creates a new spiritual sphere gave Lee a shock of recognition: his MRI experiments showed that when two people communicate, new neural pathways light up: a kind of physical affirmation of Buber's thesis. In his reading of *I and Thou*, Lee saw his data explained in mystical terms.

Lee's articulation of this thunderbolt sent a palpable charge through the faces arrayed on the Zoom screen. When asked about it afterward, Pollack gave perhaps the definitive summation of the University Seminars.

"That thunderbolt," he said, "struck a very fertile garden. But the real point here is not the thunderbolt; it's that the garden is there for it to strike." 🌱



"The seminars can be indestructible, as strong as the freedom and as flourishing as the play of intellect they encourage."

— MARGARET MEAD,  
PROFESSOR OF  
ANTHROPOLOGY



"The University Seminars at Columbia have had a powerful, if too often unacknowledged, impact on the intellectual life of the city and the nation."

— ERIC FONER '63CC, '69GSAS,  
DEWITT CLINTON PROFESSOR  
EMERITUS OF HISTORY

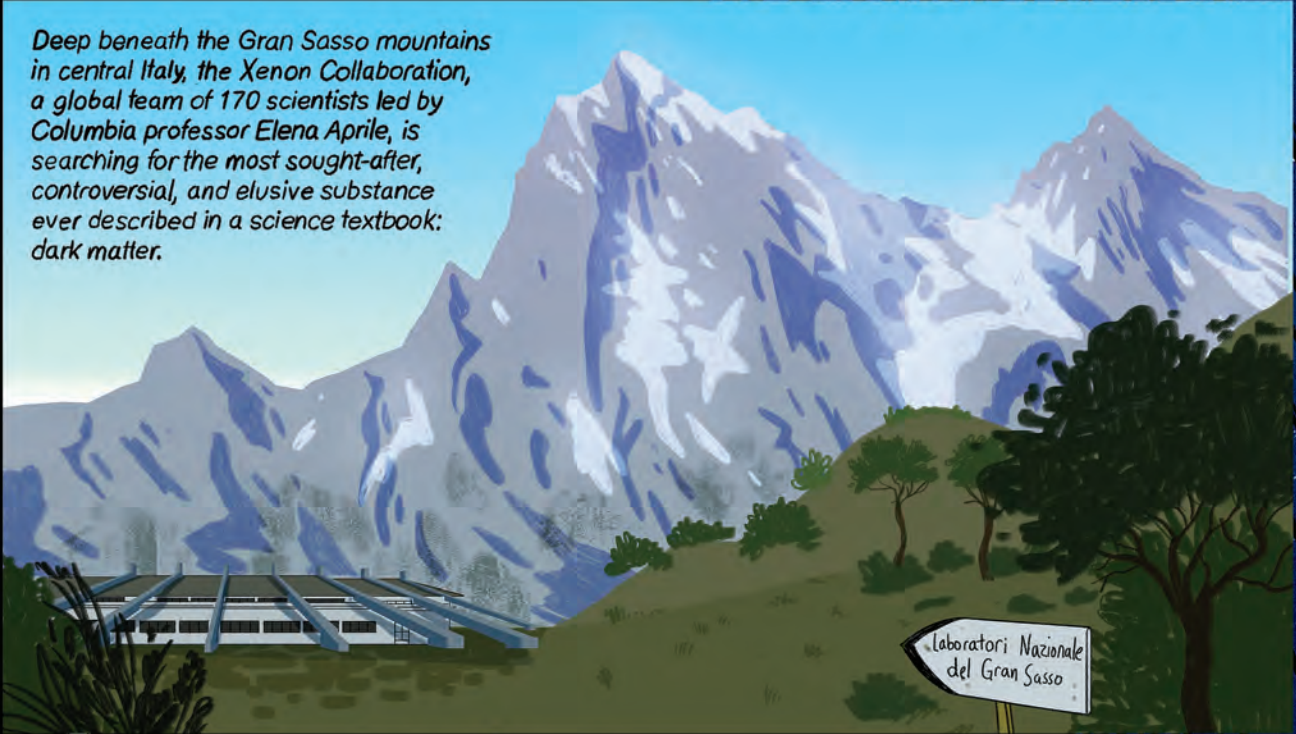


# IN PURSUIT OF DARK MATTER

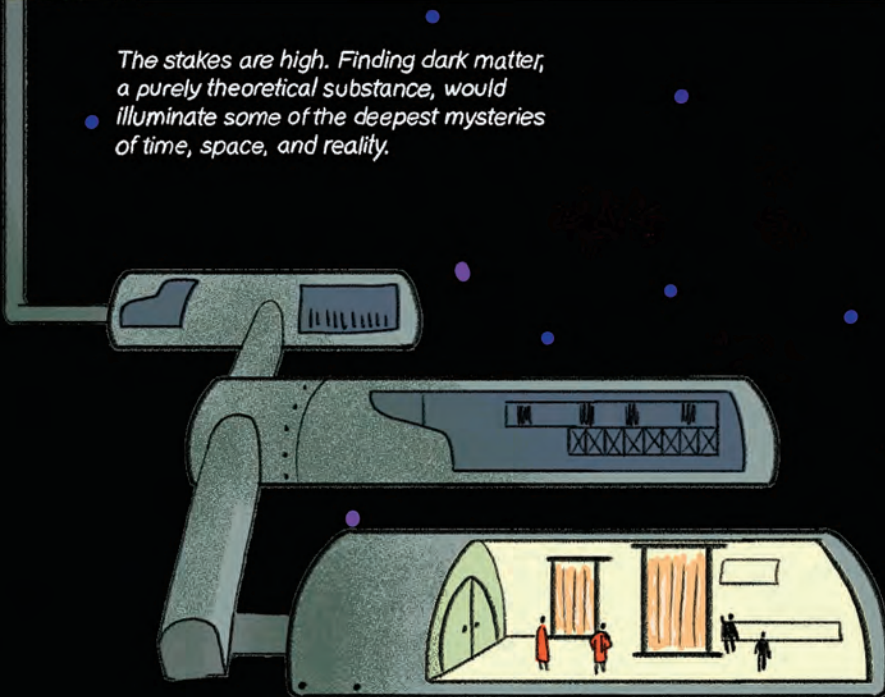
*Columbia physicists confront one of the most confounding mysteries in science*

*By David J. Craig Illustrations by Lily Padula*

Deep beneath the Gran Sasso mountains in central Italy, the Xenon Collaboration, a global team of 170 scientists led by Columbia professor Elena Aprile, is searching for the most sought-after, controversial, and elusive substance ever described in a science textbook: dark matter.



The stakes are high. Finding dark matter, a purely theoretical substance, would illuminate some of the deepest mysteries of time, space, and reality.



And if Aprile's team can't detect it soon, experts suspect, no one ever will.



*The theory of dark matter holds that the world is permeated by mysterious heavy particles that drift harmlessly through ordinary substances. The idea was proposed decades ago to explain a number of curiosities that scientists have observed in the cosmos.*

*Consider the spinning motion of a galaxy...*

*At its core, it contains too few stars, planets, and other masses to account for the gravity that keeps the celestial bodies on its perimeter from drifting off into space.*

*"If Einstein's theory of general relativity is correct, there is a huge discrepancy between the gravitational force we see at play in the cosmos and the total mass we're able to account for. By some estimates, we're missing 85 percent of all the physical stuff in the universe. 'Dark matter' is the name we've given to the material that seems to be missing."*

*— Elena Aprile*





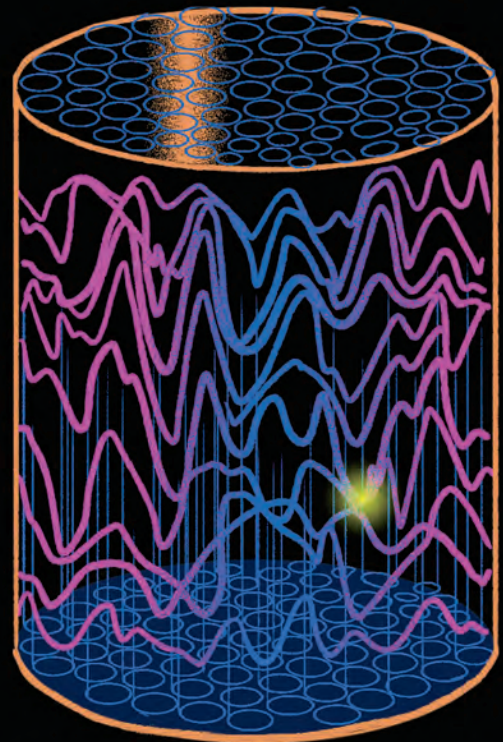
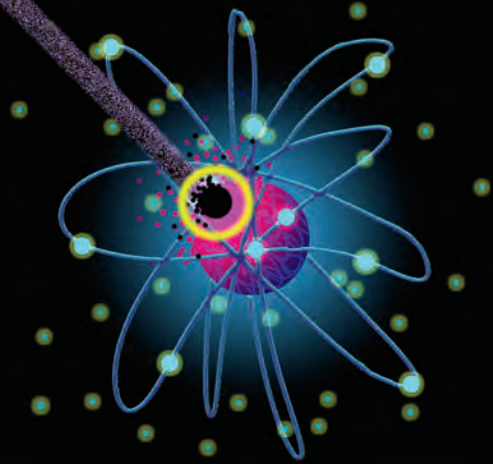
*How do you hunt for something that is ubiquitous yet invisible?*

*You set a trap that only it can enter.*

*Aprile's team works a mile underground to insulate their equipment from cosmic rays and other high-energy particles that continually pummel the earth.*

*In their laboratory is a stainless-steel drum filled with liquid xenon, which is three times denser than water. This syrupy liquid is their flypaper.*

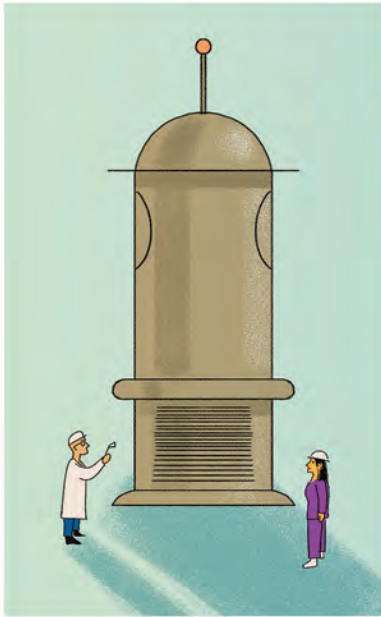
*Particles of dark matter, despite their ghostliness, should occasionally bump into the atomic nuclei of a heavy element like xenon.*



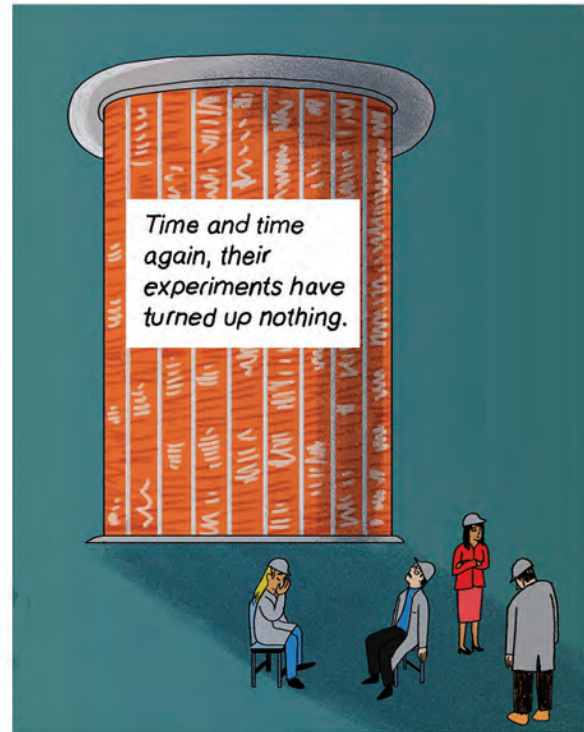
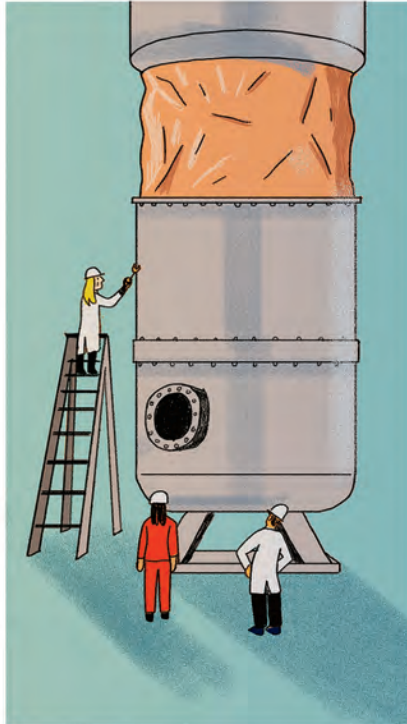
*This would produce a minuscule flash of light — a pulse of energy so infinitesimal that 500 ultrasensitive photomultiplier tubes must be positioned atop and below the drum to detect it.*

*The scientists could scrutinize its signature for clues about their unseen guest's identity.*





Since 2005, Aprile's team has designed, built, and operated a succession of increasingly powerful xenon-based particle detectors.



Which isn't to say their work hasn't been profoundly influential. As their detectors have become more sensitive, they have ruled out the existence of many types of dark matter that theorists had proposed.

In fact, the Xenon Collaboration has ruled out so many dark-matter particle candidates that theorists have gone back to the drawing board.

$$E=mc^2?$$

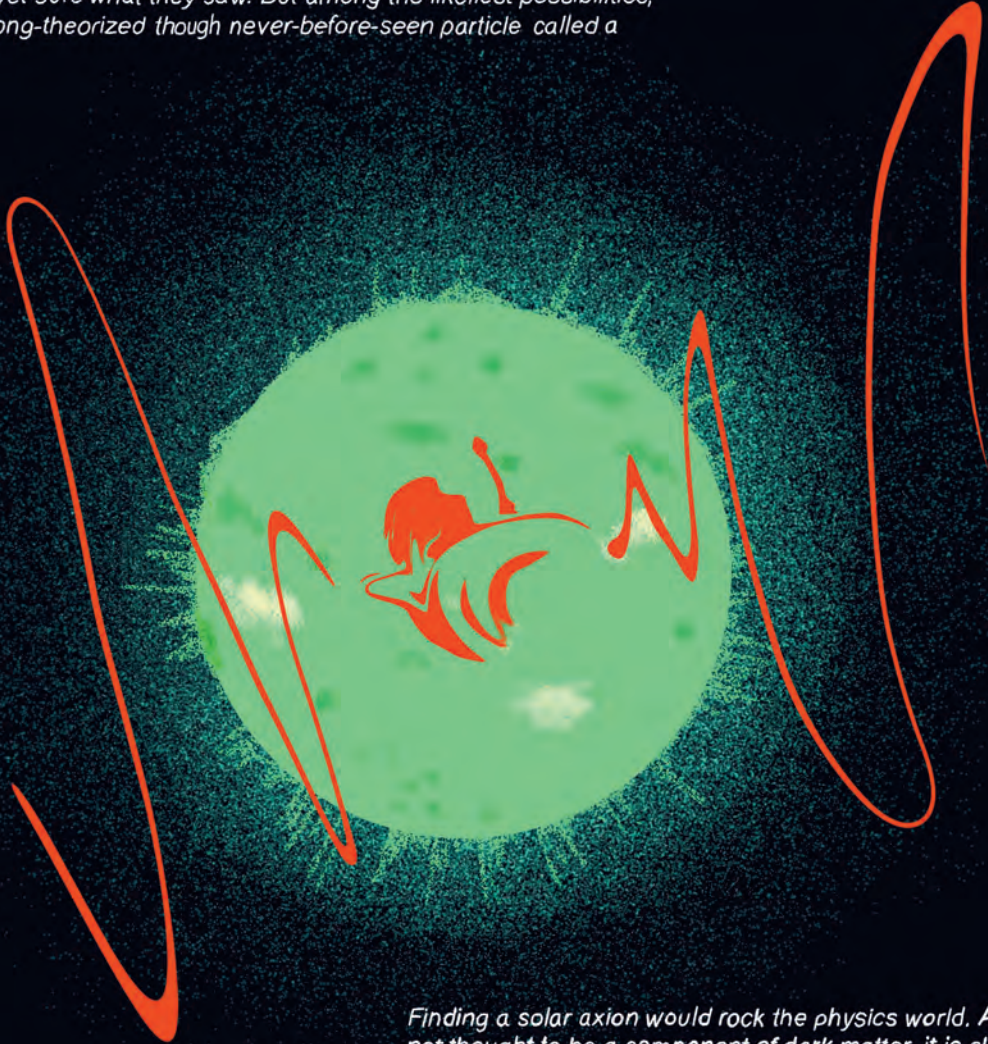
They wonder if maybe there isn't any missing mass in the universe at all! That maybe Einstein miscalculated how gravity works at large scales!



*But in 2020, Aprile and her colleagues finally saw something. A series of flickers that might be evidence of a previously undetectable particle!*



*The scientists aren't yet sure what they saw. But among the likeliest possibilities, Aprile believes, is a long-theorized though never-before-seen particle called a "solar axion."*



*Finding a solar axion would rock the physics world. Although it is not thought to be a component of dark matter, it is closely related to another theorized particle that is. Spotting one would provide indirect evidence for dark matter's existence.*



Today, a dozen young Columbia physicists in Aprile's lab are preparing to analyze data from a recently upgraded version of the detector. They hope to reveal the identity of their new particle — if it is a new particle — by the end of 2021. Will they find more bread crumbs on the path to dark matter? Or will they conclude that their recent finding was a mirage, thus casting further doubt on the theory of dark matter?



"When you're working at the outer limits of science, you never know what you're going to find. You may not find what you're looking for, or what you expect to see, and that's part of the adventure."

— Elena Aprile









# SOUL SURVIVOR

Forty years ago, Barry Rosen '74GSAS was one of fifty-two American hostages released from Iranian captivity. It's been a long road home.

**By Paul Hond**

Photography by Frankie Alduino

**W**hen COVID-19 hit New York and the city shut down, Barry Rosen '74GSAS took things in stride. People around him grew restless, anxious, and depressed, but Rosen, seventy-six, was unperturbed. "I'm inside a lot, but I can take a walk, I can see grass, I can enjoy the sunshine, I can read anything I want," says Rosen, who lives on the Upper West Side with his wife, Barbara. "I feel freer than most people who are constrained by COVID because of my experience in Iran. In my 444 days as a hostage, I spent maybe twenty minutes outdoors. I was in darkness most of the time. This is far better than captivity," he says with a faint chuckle. "Far, far better."

Rosen was one of sixty-six Americans seized inside the US embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979. Ultimately, he and fifty-one others would be held in appalling conditions for more than fourteen months. This winter marks the fortieth anniversary of the end of the hostage crisis, but for Rosen the memories are still fresh. Seated in his apartment on Riverside Drive a short walk from Teachers College, where he spent ten years as an administrator, Rosen talks about those horrific 444 days with the disarming openness of a person who has worked for years to make sense of his experience.

As the embassy's new press attaché, Rosen had arrived in Iran in 1978 full of enthusiasm. He had spent two years in

Iran as a Peace Corps volunteer in the 1960s, was fluent in Farsi, and had great affection for the people and culture of Iran. And then came the Iranian Revolution. Fueled by zealous anti-American sentiment, the uprising led directly to the Iran hostage crisis, which destroyed Iran-US relations, battered the American psyche, brought down an American president, and changed the lives of Rosen and the other embassy staff — attachés, officers, and military guards — who got caught in a geopolitical whirlwind.

During his confinement, Rosen suffered beatings, mock executions, and unbearably long, desolate stretches of isolation. He lived in anguish and acute fear, cut off from the world and from his wife and two small children, never knowing if he was going to live or die. When he was finally freed, on January 20, 1981, he had lost forty pounds and much of his spirit.

"Healing has been a very slow process," he says. "In the beginning I was trying to get my head around it all — especially coming home and trying to integrate into the family and restart my life. It was very hard." Rosen gradually discovered that what he needed more than anything was to be with people — his family, friends, and colleagues, whose support kept him afloat in rough mental seas. Only after years of therapy, meditation, and reading has Rosen come to understand what happened to him and how to live with it.

Rosen was born in East New York and raised in East Flatbush by his mother, a housewife, and his father, an electrician. Brooklyn was his whole world. Growing up blocks from Ebbets Field, Rosen loved the Dodgers and was heartbroken when they left. He attended Yeshiva Rabbi David Leibowitz in East Flatbush for nine years, graduated in 1961 from Tilden High School, went on to Brooklyn College, and entered a graduate program in public affairs at Syracuse University. His research was on a Pakistani mul-lah who had formulated a notion of an Islamic state — a kind of forerunner to Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini. Wanting to visit Pakistan, Rosen applied to the Peace Corps, a program started by President Kennedy in 1961 that sent young people abroad to assist in civic-minded projects.

appeal for Rosen. He spent three months learning Farsi before flying to Tehran in 1967. He was twenty-three, and it was his second trip on a plane. (The first was to Syracuse.) He loved his Peace Corps duties — teaching Iranian police cadets English, teaching kindergartners at a school near the Caspian Sea — and in his free time he'd leave his small apartment and wander into the bazaar. He reveled in the rhythms of conversation, the long meals, the ancient etiquette. "It was a place where you felt the guest was always paramount," he says. He made friends easily and felt a thrilling sense of belonging. On holidays he visited historical sites, marveled at the mosques, and lost himself in Persian poetry. When his two years were up and it was time to return to New York, he felt the sadness of leaving home.

tion," says Rosen. "But I had just gotten married and felt pressure to get a job."

Rosen worked for four years at VOA. Then, in 1978, his former boss there, who had become the public-affairs officer at the US embassy in Iran, asked Rosen to be the embassy's press attaché. Going from VOA to the Foreign Service was a huge leap, and Rosen, adventurous and service-minded, embraced the idea. He hadn't imagined that he'd ever go back to Iran. There was a hint of destiny in it.

Iran, however, was in turmoil: in 1977, Iranians calling for a liberal democracy began confronting the country's autocratic leader, the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi '55HON, over censorship and abuses of the judiciary. The shah had been installed with US support after the CIA backed the overthrow in 1953 of the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh ("a brilliant man," says Rosen), whose desire to nationalize Iran's oil supply did not sit well with Britain or the US. Now, after twenty-five years, anger against the shah erupted in mass demonstrations. The shah imposed martial law, and on September 8, 1978, known as Black Friday, the military fired on demonstrators, killing dozens.

That same month, the Rosens, living at Barbara's parents' house in Brooklyn, had their second child, a girl. They gave her a Persian name: Ariana. Two months later, Rosen left for Tehran. As press attaché, Rosen was spokesperson for the US ambassador to Iran, William Sullivan, and led a staff of Armenian-Iranian and ethnic Persian interpreters who translated articles from the Iranian press. Events were moving quickly. In January 1979, with protests mounting, the shah fled the country, and on February 1, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, spiritual leader of the opposition, returned to Iran after nearly fifteen years in exile. Rosen had never seen such adulation for a human being as he did among the millions of working-class people who greeted Khomeini's motorcade as it moved through Tehran.

Two weeks later, in the power vacuum of Iran, armed leftist militants stormed the embassy. Rosen was beaten and thrown up against a wall — he was



Demonstrators burn an American flag atop the wall of the US embassy in Tehran on November 9, 1979.

But Pakistan was under military rule, and there were no openings. There was, however, an opportunity in Iran.

"It was a chance to see the world," says Rosen. "The idea of being in the Peace Corps, of helping others, intrigued me, and I really wanted to get out of a more parochial life and the comforts that I had as an American." Few Americans ever gave Iran a thought, which heightened its

Though Rosen never planned to return to Iran, he wanted to pursue Farsi and enrolled in Columbia's Middle East Languages and Cultures program to study Farsi and Uzbek. One of his professors, Edward Allworth '59GSAS, a leading scholar of Central Asia, told him after his oral exams that Voice of America (VOA) was seeking a new head of its Uzbek desk. "I wanted to work on my disserta-



certain that he would be executed. But forces from Khomeini's provisional government intervened, the attackers abruptly withdrew, and Rosen escaped further harm. The embassy was closed, and personnel were sent back to the US. Officials reopened the embassy in March and gave the staff the option to return. Many chose not to. Rosen went. The plan was for his family to join him when things settled down.

But conditions grew worse. Rosen knew the embassy was vulnerable, yet through the Tehran spring and summer he pressed on, committed to performing his duties in a volatile environment. The crisis deepened on October 22, 1979, when President Jimmy Carter, bowing to domestic political pressure, allowed the cancer-stricken shah to enter the US for medical care. The reaction in Iran was intense. Outside the embassy, angry students, many of them from traditional middle-class families, burned US flags and effigies of Carter. Rosen, in his office, could hear shouts of *Marg bar Amrika!* — Death to America.

The morning of November 4 was gray and rainy, but the demonstrations continued. Then, from his window, Rosen noticed that the students were climbing over the embassy walls. The next thing he knew, there was pounding at his door. When Rosen's secretary opened it, the students, who looked more like boys than men to Rosen, poured into the room and accused him of being part of a "nest of spies."

"I stupidly said, 'This is the US embassy, and according to the Geneva Accords ...' They threw me down in my chair, tied my hands. Before they led me away I said goodbye to my staff. Everyone was crying. I told the students, 'Leave these people alone — they have nothing to do with us.'"

Bound and blindfolded, Rosen was detained at first in the kitchen of the ambassador's quarters. Like the other hostages being kept tied to chairs in dark rooms in the sprawling embassy and watched round the clock, he assumed the ordeal would be over in a few days. But the students had the "Great Satan,"

as Khomeini referred to the US, by the tail, and — fearful of American plots and reprisals — they could not let go. For Rosen, the situation was beyond terrifying. "There are no words for it," he says. The captors held guns to his head and ordered him to sign a confession that he was a spy: he had ten seconds or he'd be shot. Rosen resisted until the last two seconds. After that, he felt utterly broken.

Each night, he tried to stay awake. *If you're up they can't kill you*, he told himself. *Stay alert, stay alert*. Students would barge into his room to scare him. "They'd point guns and then pull the trigger and there was nothing. It was a psychological game." Some hostages attempted suicide. One man banged his head repeatedly against a wall. Another tried to cut his wrists with glass. Rosen was not immune. "Every day," he says, "I wanted to die." The students controlled when the hostages ate and when they were allowed to use the bathroom, and as the days of hunger, humiliation, and terror dragged on and the unheated embassy got colder and colder, Rosen lapsed into a depression.

That first winter, a delegation of US clergy, including Reverend William Sloane Coffin Jr., senior minister of Riverside Church, traveled to Iran to check on the hostages. Before his departure, Coffin received a visitor at the church: it was Barbara, who handed him a letter and a family photograph. In Tehran, Coffin gave the picture to Rosen. Deeply moved, Rosen did his best to appear cheerful to Coffin. He did not want his family to worry — nothing was more important to him — and when Coffin returned to New York he told Barbara that Rosen was in good spirits.

That was balm for Barbara, but of course she still worried and had to push herself through the countless days. Fortunately, she had help: everyone — her parents, her grandmothers, her siblings, her in-laws — pitched in to care for the kids. "They say it takes a village," she says, "and I was lucky to have a village."

In April 1980, Barbara traveled to Europe to rally support for international sanctions on Iran. While she was in Germany meeting with Chancellor Helmut Schmidt,



TOP: Blindfolded Americans are paraded before the media on the first day of the US embassy takeover.

CENTER: Rosen (bottom) and other former hostages disembark from a US Air Force plane in West Germany after their release.

BOTTOM: Barry and Barbara Rosen ride in a parade for the former hostages in Lower Manhattan.

the US staged a rescue mission, but it was aborted when a sandstorm in the Iranian desert disabled the rescue helicopters. One of the grounded helicopters backed up and struck a refueling plane, causing an explosion that killed eight service members.

News of the failed attempt prompted the captors to divide the hostages into groups and send them to different locations around the country. Rosen landed in a windowless cell in what he believes was the city of Isfahan, 250 miles south of Tehran (he saw “Isfahan” written in Farsi on a bottle of milk). His

he and the others would walk in a line around the tiny cell for miles and miles.

On January 20, 1981, president-elect Ronald Reagan was inaugurated in Washington. In Tehran, the hostages were told to pack their things. Cut off from the outside world, Rosen and the others had no idea that the United States, with Algeria as the intermediary, had agreed to unfreeze \$8 billion in Iranian assets as part of a deal to release the hostages. They had spent 444 days in captivity.

“The students blindfolded us, marched us out, put us on buses,” says Rosen.

now two, and with Alexander, now four; after meetings with Carter and Reagan; after the standing ovation in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the prayers at Temple Emanu-El on Fifth Avenue, and the ticker-tape parade in Lower Manhattan — Rosen had to readjust. He was home, but at the same time he was far, far away.

“I came back to a situation where my family was different in certain ways,” Rosen says. “My integration back into the family was slow. I wanted to be very gentle with the kids, especially with Ariana, who was just a baby when I left. I wanted to make sure that she wasn’t seeing me as a stranger.”

Major League Baseball played an unexpected role. It was the only organization that reached out to the former hostages, offering them free tickets to games. Though the kids were very young, Rosen would take them to Shea Stadium. “Barbara would urge them to go out with me, because in the very beginning they wouldn’t go out with me at all,” Rosen says. “The ball games played a very important role in strengthening our relationship.”

There is a slight catch in his voice when he talks about this. “It was so good to be with the kids. They made it easier on me. They were there for me in so many ways, even though they were just little ones. It was great to just spend time with them and to be more of the father that I wasn’t during that period.”

Shortly after Rosen returned, Columbia president Michael Sovern ’53CC, ’55LAW, ’80HON offered him a fellowship to do research on Iranian novelists and Central Asian history. Rosen accepted, and the family moved to Riverside Drive. “It was a daunting period, because I was undergoing treatment for depression,” says Rosen. After the fellowship, “there was the question of going back into the Foreign Service. I had a great opportunity to go to Italy or India, but Barbara could not agree to this for fear of something happening again.”

Instead, Rosen became assistant to the president of Brooklyn College, where he organized the first academic conference on post-revolution Iran. He gave press



Barry and Barbara Rosen at home in Morningside Heights.

cellmate was Dave Roeder, the embassy’s Air Force attaché. The reading material supplied by the captors was limited to the boating classifieds of the *Washington Post*, and it happened that Roeder knew boats. So Rosen and Roeder would pick out boats from the listings and then lie back and close their eyes, and Roeder would narrate a boat trip on the Chesapeake Bay. They did that every night.

One day, without notice, the hostages were led outside, packed into a truck, and transferred to the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran. The site of torture and executions of dissidents, the prison was an improvement in that it was warmer and the hostages were four to a cell, so Rosen had people to talk to. For exercise,

“We didn’t know where we were. We’re screaming at them, they’re screaming at us. The bus stopped, and as we got out they tore off our blindfolds, and there was a gauntlet of students, and they spat at us. We were at the airport. I saw a light pointing toward us — an Algerian Airlines plane. We got onboard and waited.” The plane did not move until after Reagan was sworn in. Over Turkish airspace someone uncorked champagne, but Rosen was too dazed to celebrate. “I was jubilant in one way and fearful in another. I thought: Am I ready for this? Am I really ready for freedom? Am I really ready to see Barbara and the kids? Am I sane enough?”

After the homecoming — after the reunion with Barbara and with Ariana,



interviews, and he and Barbara wrote a book, *The Destined Hour*, about how the hostage crisis affected the family. “Working on the book helped me process what had happened,” he says. In 1995, he was named executive director of external affairs at Teachers College, where he became a beloved staff member. Still, he suffered recurring bouts of PTSD — what he describes as “an overwhelming sense of a loss of self.”

Yet for all the trauma, Rosen never lost his perspective. “When it was over, I could at least say that as bitter as I was toward those who held me, I kept a sense of ‘There’s Iran, and there’s the revolution.’ I still feel that way. I was a victim of the revolution, but that doesn’t change my basic attitude about Iran and Iranians. Many are suffering under this regime, and I feel bad for them as much as I felt bad for myself during that hostage crisis. I’m not going to destroy my own worldview. I don’t want to live in hate.”

Rosen has backed up that philosophy with action. In 1998, he accepted an invitation to a conference in Paris to appear with Abbas Abdi, the mastermind of the embassy takeover, in a symbolic gesture of conciliation. Knowing that Abdi had had run-ins with the Iranian regime, Rosen figured that their meeting might show hard-liners on both sides that there was room in the middle to build trust. So he, Barbara, and Ariana went to Paris. Rosen remembers entering the hotel lobby days before the conference and he and Abdi spotting each other. “He called me over, and we sat and started talking as if nothing had happened,” Rosen says. “It was wild. We discussed US–Iran relations and our families, then we said goodbye until the meeting a few days later.

“The next morning he knocked at our door and held out a book on Iranian art and architecture and said, ‘This is a gift from me to you and your family.’ And every day, whenever we met, he gave me something from Iran.” Rosen read in Abdi’s gestures more than a twinge of

remorse. “He saw my family, saw who we were, saw that I really cared about Iran and wanted it to be a free and open state.”

At the conference, however, they both stiffened their stances, with Rosen condemning the takeover. The state-run Iranian press vilified both Rosen and Abdi. “When we said goodbye, I told him, ‘I hope I haven’t caused you any problems.’ And in fact he did go to jail. The first indictment against him was as a pollster

## “I’M NOT GOING TO DESTROY MY OWN WORLDVIEW. I DON’T WANT TO LIVE IN HATE.”

— he had polled Iranians about how they felt about the US, and the results showed that despite everything, many Iranians had a positive feeling. The second indictment was for meeting with me.”

Rosen has always been a teacher. He taught English in Iran for the Peace Corps and afterward taught high-school science in New York. And months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, he embarked on an educational mission as demanding as anything he’s ever done. The job was in Afghanistan.

In the 1950s, Teachers College began working with the ministry of education in Afghanistan on creating textbooks and curricula for high-school students, a project that ended abruptly with the 1978 Soviet-backed coup. But in 2002, with the Taliban government ousted, UNICEF approached TC president Arthur Levine about reviving the program. Levine asked Rosen to lead it. “I didn’t want to give up my position, which I loved, but this was an amazing opportunity,” Rosen says.

Rosen and Margaret Jo Shepherd, a professor emerita of education at TC, were tasked with creating new textbooks from scratch, assisted by TC students and Afghanis. They flew to Kabul and soon found that doing the job in such a chaotic, depleted country was nearly impossible. Aside from safety concerns, Rosen and Shepherd dealt with spotty electricity, poorly educated teachers, inexperienced

writers, and quarrels over the role of religion in the books. They worked seven days a week for two and a half years to produce the country’s first illustrated textbooks, written in Dari, Tajik, Pashto, and Uzbek. “It took a lot out of us,” says Rosen. “But no matter what, we forged on.”

That level of commitment is typical of Rosen. “Barry is such a positive person,” says Shepherd. “He’s thoughtful, open, authentic, and gregarious and has a natural feel for diplomacy. When he goes into a country, he becomes a part of it to the extent that he can. He believes in public service

not only because he thinks it’s important for people to help each other but also because it can be helpful to the person providing the service.”

Rosen remains engaged with human-rights issues in Iran and is involved with Hostage Aid Worldwide, a nascent organization of survivors of hostage ordeals that uses data, including recently unclassified State Department documents, to better understand the issue of hostage-taking. And he has maintained contact with some former Iran hostages, mostly in their ongoing, frustrating effort to get compensation from the US government. “A group of us are working with lawyers, so we’re always in touch in some way,” he says. “But many people don’t communicate anymore. Some are in their late eighties. It gets harder as time goes on.”

Retired since 2016, Rosen has arrived at a place of security and self-knowledge. His kids have children of their own, and he and Barbara are busy grandparents. Rosen still thinks every day about Iran, and his heart is with the Iranian human-rights activists who are being detained in the same prison that had held him and his fellow hostages. And if he can’t heal Iran–US relations, he has managed, through love and hard work, to heal himself.

“It’s been a long process, but it’s also taught me a lot, and I think it’s made me a better person,” he says. There could hardly be a greater journey than that. 🍷

# The Lost Art of Dying Well

A physician and medical ethicist argues that modern society has lost sight of the cultural, spiritual, and practical resources we need to confront our mortality

**Lydia Dugdale is the director of the Center for Clinical Medical Ethics and the Dorothy L. and Daniel H. Silberberg Associate Professor of Medicine at Columbia's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons. Her book *The Lost Art of Dying* looks to the Middle Ages for wisdom on how to prepare for the end of life.**



**You've said that your passion is the ethical practice of medicine. How does that inform your daily work?**

Ethics imbues everything I do. At the ethics center, I teach, write, fundraise, research, and consult on ethical issues in the hospital. I weigh in on very complex challenges in health care and research and help stakeholders — including doctors, patients, and families — make the best decisions. The discipline of ethics asks, “What is good or right in this particular situation?” When applied to medical practice, the stakes can be high

— life or death. My colleagues and I seek to resolve quandaries in a manner that prioritizes the good of the patient.

Our ethics team might be called to the bedside when a patient refuses a lifesaving intervention, for example. The doctors want to know whether it's OK to treat over the patient's objection. Or we might be asked to consult when a patient wants to be discharged to a setting that is not optimal for healing. Or we might be called when families insist on aggressive therapies for actively dying patients. Usually the cases are not straightforward, emotions run high, and there is a lot of nuance. Some can be readily resolved by clarifying what's legal. Others require a much lengthier investigative approach.

When I teach, I try to engage medical students on medicine's moral questions and get them to think about its aims and philosophy. A friend of mine calls medical training a doctor factory: it's soulless, and you grind through. My strategy is to offer avenues that go beyond the formal curric-

ulum and incorporate philosophy, humanities, and art. I want students to take a more thoughtful and deliberate approach to medicine. I suppose you could say I'm an advocate of “slow medicine.”

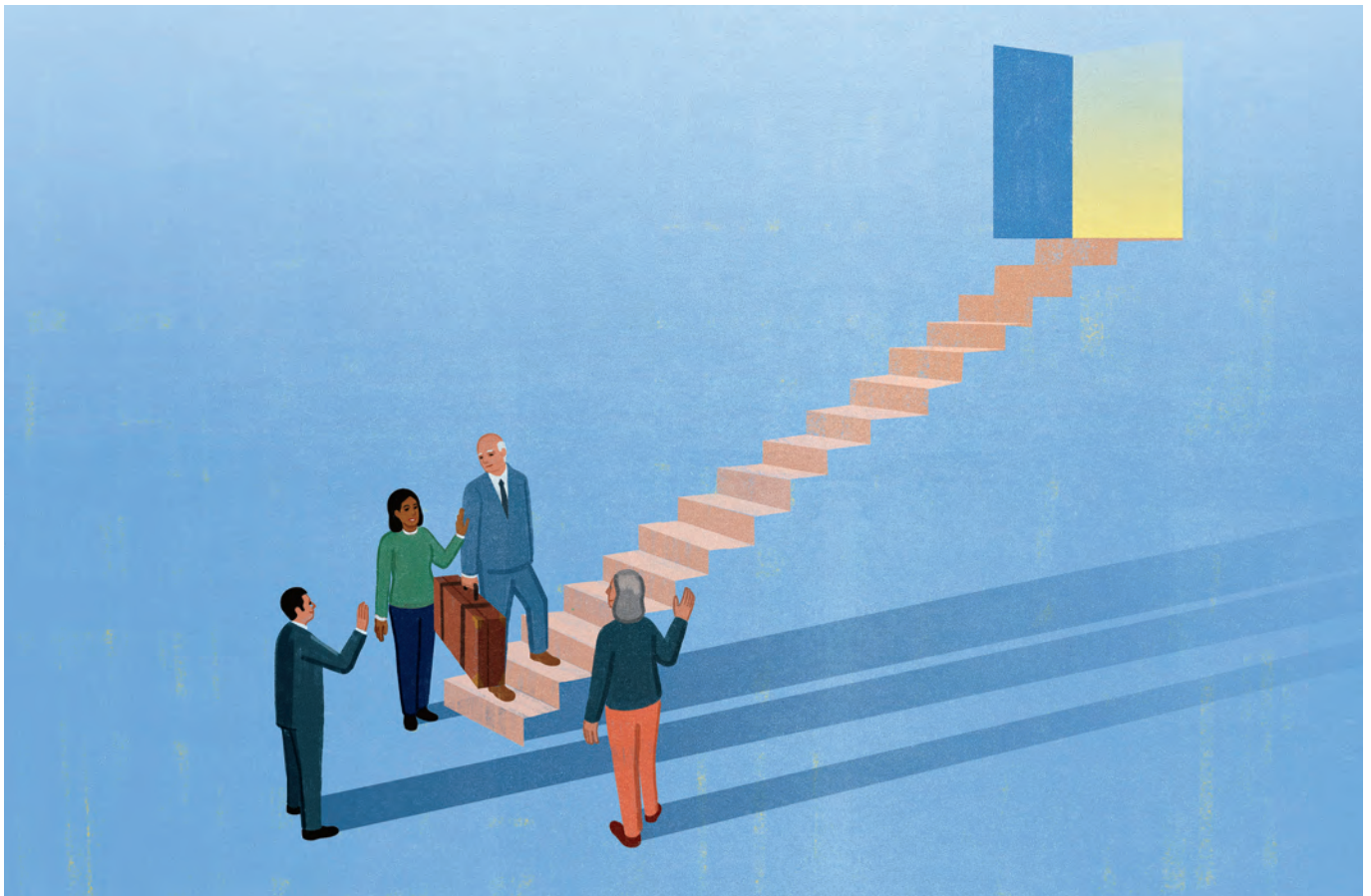
**What do you mean by “slow medicine”?**

The physician and writer Victoria Sweet has a book on this. Just as slow food is healthier than fast food, slow medicine is healthier than fast medicine. Too often patients find themselves on medical conveyor belts that move swiftly and efficiently through treatments and procedures. If no one presses pause, the medical machine keeps moving and patients become passive recipients of procedures or medical techniques, including aggressive interventions at the end of life.

**Your book *The Lost Art of Dying* centers on the question of how we might die better. What prompted you to write it?**

I have taken care of so many patients who arrived at their life's end completely





unprepared. They haven't considered the many decisions they might be asked to make about end-of-life medical interventions. They aren't familiar with the benefits and harms of things like CPR or mechanical ventilation. They haven't thought about what sort of memorial or funeral they'd like. They haven't invested in the relationships that matter most to them. And they've not thought about the bigger questions of life and death. They're suddenly asking, What do I believe? How do I make sense of my life? I talk in the book about the great writer Susan Sontag '93HON, who thought deeply about so many things. Yet she never wanted to talk about death, even when she was actively dying. Her son was at her bedside, but he felt he could not even say goodbye, because that would require admitting to her that she was dying.

As doctors we can and should help people die better and die wisely. We have an incredible toolkit of resources to help ease suffering at the end of life. There is

almost no pain we can't treat, yet there are fewer opportunities to reflect on mortality and what it takes to die well. And even when patients ask us doctors to help them make sense of death, many doctors are unwilling to engage those questions.

**The book takes inspiration from the *ars moriendi*, a form of writing that emerged in the 1400s to help people prepare for their own deaths.**

Yes, *ars moriendi* is Latin for "art of dying." The *ars moriendi* refers to a literary genre that asks us to think about the way we live and die. Its earliest iterations developed during the aftermath of the bubonic plague that decimated Western Europe in the mid-1300s.

Historians estimate that up to two-thirds of Europe's population died during that plague, including priests and other spiritual authorities. With so much death, there weren't enough religious leaders to attend to the dying and bury the dead. Although we aren't

sure who wrote the first version of these how-to-die-well handbooks, it was likely someone connected to the church. The books empowered the laity so they could prepare for death themselves without needing a priest.

After the printing press developed, illustrated versions of the *ars moriendi* began circulating to meet the needs of the illiterate and semiliterate. Over time, other religious and even non-religious groups picked up the idea and developed their own versions. These handbooks were in widespread use all over the West for more than five hundred years.

**What was the main theme of the *ars moriendi*?**

To die well, you have to live well. That means recognizing your finitude and wrestling with related questions of meaning and purpose within the context of a community.

The earliest iterations of the *ars moriendi* were particularly interested in



Lydia Dugdale

five temptations commonly faced by the dying: lack of faith, despair, impatience, pride, and greed. The texts offered a consolation for each temptation: faith, hope, patience, humility, and generosity. It's interesting to me that they did not suggest that people were tempted to fear death. My sense is that our modern reaction to death is probably best characterized as fear.

The *ars moriendi* was sometimes described in theatrical terms. Each death represents a drama. The dying person is the lead actor, and community members all play supporting roles. But at some point every supporting actor is going to become the lead — the dying person — so they spend their lives as understudies for that role. The practices of the *ars moriendi* were rehearsed over and over again.

### **In updating the *ars moriendi* for the twenty-first century, what advice did you find that we can still use today?**

There's a lot. For one thing, make sure you're cultivating your relationships. People live and die much better if they are a part of a meaningful community. I had somebody say to me, "I'm a loner.

I have a couple of good friends, but I don't really have a community." But a couple of friends is fine. It doesn't have to be the medieval conception of community, with the whole village parading past the deathbed.

Someone once asked me, "I know whom I want to be with when I die, but I'm not ready to reconcile with them now. Why can't I just wait a while?" My response was that we don't know when we're going to die. And if we choose to reconcile today, while we are healthy, those relationships are going to be so much richer when we're at the end of life.

We must also acknowledge that we will eventually die. We can't wait until the last minute to think through what our life means and what we believe happens when we die. In the ancient world, a victorious Roman general had a servant whose only job was to whisper in his ear, "Remember that you are but human!" And in medieval Europe, *memento mori* — such as locks of hair, skulls, or hourglasses — served as visual reminders that death is inevitable.

We need to live with the knowledge of our finitude constantly present — not in a macabre way, but in a way that helps us value our time and our relationships and that which is good in life.

### **The *ars moriendi* and the idea of lifelong preparation for death was still around during the Civil War and even into the twentieth century. What happened?**

In World War I, there was a massive loss of life, and it was immediately followed by the 1918 flu pandemic, which also decimated the population. After the pandemic, death was the last thing people wanted to think about. Everybody had suffered loss. Traditional mourning rituals and deliberate attention to *ars moriendi* practices lost their appeal.

And then, in the US at least, we went into a period of enormous economic prosperity: the Roaring Twenties. The idea of living well as an end in itself took root. People did not want to concern themselves with dying well.

### **How did the changing role of hospitals affect our relationship with death?**

In the late nineteenth century, we had about two hundred or so hospitals nationwide. That grew to more than six thousand by 1920, contributing to major advances in medicine and science. By the 1950s and '60s, we were attempting artificial resuscitation and organ transplantation, and by the 1960s and '70s, offering combination chemotherapy to stave off death. The hospital became the preferred site for taking care of the sick and dying. Hidden from view, death replaced sex as the ultimate unmentionable. The English anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer called this phenomenon "the pornography of death."

We have to rethink dying in a hospital, which is chaotic and expensive and a place where both patients and doctors can be tempted into overtreatment. We have fantastic hospice facilities for those who want to focus on maximizing quality — not quantity — of life, but many people, particularly those outside urban centers, don't have access to them. What's more, most patients say they want to die at home. Home hospice is one option, but logistically it requires a lot of family support, so it's not for everyone. There's also an enormous toll on unpaid caregivers, who are often family members — usually women — who sacrifice their careers to care for the dying. This is good, noble work, but it comes at a high and un-reimbursable cost.

### **How do we get over the denial of death?**

It takes time. We have to walk with those we love toward the fear and sadness. Walking toward fear of death — slowly, deliberately — does much to mitigate denial.

### **Has the pandemic changed anything?**

I had hoped it would make people more aware of their need to engage with death, and I've seen an uptick in interest in the subject, but not as much as I had thought I would. And now with the good news of an effective vaccine, people may be tempted to think they



don't have to face their mortality. But mortality is still 100 percent. We need to begin the conversation and circle back to it again and again. I liken it to trying to talk to my adolescent daughter about the birds and the bees. The first time I tried to explain it, she was awkward and I was awkward. We put a little bit out there, circled back, had a second conversation, and it was a little better. By the third conversation, it was getting more natural.

### **Whose role is it to get these conversations started?**

As a primary-care doctor, I'm required by Medicare to ask about end-of-life care decisions during the annual wellness visit. But all physicians who have long-term relationships with patients who are chronically and progressively ill should be having these conversations. And family members need to have these conversations with aging loved ones.

**“Make sure you're cultivating your relationships. People live and die much better if they are a part of a meaningful community.”**

It's easy to start the conversation by discussing advance directives. If your heart stops, would you want CPR? Would you want to be on a breathing machine? There are advance-directive forms online, and there's a program called Five Wishes that literally scripts this conversation for you. And you move from there to: Have you thought about your apartment? Have you thought about your will? Have you thought about where you'd want to be buried, if you want to be buried? Do you want a funeral? If so, what music or readings matter to you and why?

### **How can people raise the odds that they die well?**

Start now. How are you thinking about your finitude? How are you discussing this within the context of your family, your community? My goal is to get people to think and to engage, and if we do that — even if we don't resolve all the questions — we'll be much further along the path of being prepared for death. If we live deliberately, with gratitude and with attention to what matters most, our lives will be richer and our dying better.

— Cherie Henderson '14SPS

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# EXPLORATIONS

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DISCOVERY



## Diagnostic test for gluten sensitivity could be on horizon

**T**here are an estimated three million people in the US today with celiac disease, an autoimmune condition that is triggered by the wheat protein gluten. But millions more who test negative for celiac say that they, too, become ill after consuming wheat, which has led physicians to wonder: is there another form of gluten intolerance that they have failed to recognize?

Armin Alaedini, an assistant professor of medicine at Columbia University Irving Medical Center and a leading immunologist, has spent the better part of the past decade trying to answer this question. His team has produced a number of influential studies that suggest that many people do suffer from “non-celiac gluten sensitivity,” or NCGS, a condition that is physiologically distinct from celiac disease.

Now Alaedini and his colleagues say they have achieved another big breakthrough: they have identified a group of specific antibodies that are prevalent in people who test negative for celiac disease but who experience frequent abdominal pain, bloating, and other celiac-like symptoms after eating gluten.

They believe their discovery could lead to the first diagnostic test for NCGS. “We’ve been pretty convinced for a few years that NCGS is its own condition, but until now we haven’t had any good biomarkers for the disorder,” says Alaedini.

The Columbia scientists’ past work has shown that people with NCGS, like those with celiac, have an immune response to gluten, with the small intestine mistaking the unusually long and sticky protein for a toxin and attacking it in order to protect the rest of the body from the threat. However, Alaedini’s team has identified crucial differences between the conditions. For example, the researchers have found that people with NCGS are likelier to experience a sudden onset of gastrointestinal symptoms and to endure mood swings, anxiety, headaches, and mental foggy — symptoms that are less common in celiac disease.

Physicians diagnose celiac disease by looking for a particular antibody in the blood and a distinct form of intestinal damage that is caused by chronic inflammation. No such tests are available for NCGS, and



experts suspect that large numbers of cases go undetected, with many people enduring health problems that neither they nor their doctors realize are caused by gluten. “We don’t yet have a firm handle on the long-term health consequences of NCGS, but there is evidence that the condition heightens a person’s risk for certain autoimmune disorders, most notably hypothyroidism.”

Alaedini and his colleagues are now planning follow-up studies that aim to further identify the characteristics of the antibodies that are indicative of the condition. They anticipate creating a blood test capable of detecting NCGS within the next three to five years.

“When you’re dealing with a condition that’s treatable with dietary modifications, providing a patient an accurate diagnosis can be tantamount to delivering a cure,” Alaedini says. “At the same time, a diagnostic test that rules out NCGS could provide clarity for those who are considering removing gluten from their diet on the false hope that it will address unrelated health problems.”

## LAB IN A BOX

What happens when a pandemic keeps engineering students away from campus, working in their homes instead of their laboratories? For professors at Columbia Engineering, the solution was obvious: you send the labs to them.



### 1. The Prep

At the start of the fall semester, faculty from across the engineering school prepared boxes of tools and materials to be delivered to students working remotely, so that they could conduct experiments and design projects at home. The contents differed depending on the student’s year and major.



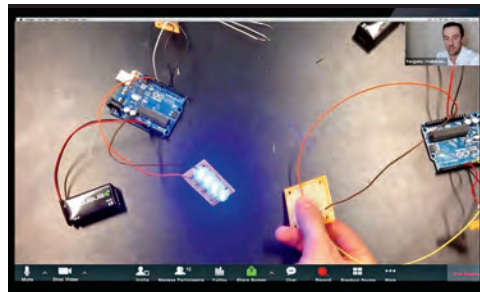
### 2. The Kit

The package mailed to seniors in the mechanical-engineering program contained motors, electrical components, remote sensors, moldable plastics and clay, a variety of metals, a soldering iron, clamps, adhesives, and protective gear.



### 3. The Home Lab

Many students also received a 3D printer, which they could use to produce any additional tools or parts their projects called for.



### 4. The Results

Working in teams over Zoom, the students transformed the raw materials into inventions, ranging from water-testing systems to highly efficient rocket engines to medical devices.

## Columbia, Amazon to launch new AI research center

Columbia Engineering and Amazon have formed a partnership to create a new center for artificial-intelligence research and education at the University, with Amazon providing \$5 million in funding over the next five years.

The new Columbia Center of Artificial Intelligence Technology in Collaboration with Amazon will support a broad range of programs, including fellowships for engineering PhD students; faculty-led research projects with students, post-doctoral fellows, and research staff; and public events that promote AI ventures in and around New York City.

“Artificial intelligence will have an enormous impact on every aspect of our lives, fundamentally changing how we work, learn, access resources and services, and connect to one another,” says engineering dean Mary C. Boyce. “We are thrilled to be partnering with Amazon to leverage our collective expertise and advance AI in a way that is responsible, effective, and beneficial to society.”

Shih-Fu Chang, a Columbia computer scientist known for his research on computer vision and multimedia information retrieval, will serve as the center’s inaugural director.

# What you need to know about COVID-19 now

**A**s excitement builds about the release of a COVID-19 vaccine, many are now wondering: could the end of the pandemic finally be in sight? But while the rapid progress made by Pfizer, Moderna, and other companies on COVID-19 vaccines is unequivocally good news, top scientists are cautioning that the virus could be with us for years to come. Pandemics rarely end abruptly and

decisively, they say, but rather wind down gradually, with incremental advances in vaccines, treatments, and social-distancing measures eventually bringing them under control. And so, at Columbia and other major universities, the quest to better understand the SARS-CoV-2 virus and develop new clinical interventions continues. Here are just a few of the most recent research developments.



## We're in it for the long haul

Jeffrey Shaman '03GSAS and Marta Galanti, Columbia public-health researchers who use mathematical modeling to predict the spread of infections, recently published an article in the journal *Science* that explores how prevalent COVID-19 could remain in the years ahead. A key factor influencing the disease's future threat, they say, will be the length of time people remain immune to COVID-19 after either contracting the disease or being vaccinated. Widespread testing will help answer this question, but the researchers predict that if immunity lasts less than twelve months, COVID-19 will be a constant public-health threat for years to come, possibly recurring seasonally, like the flu. If immunity lasts significantly longer, COVID-19 could be nearly eradicated by well-organized vaccine programs but then return with a vengeance a few years down the road.

How deadly COVID-19 will prove to be in the future will depend on many factors, such as the pace at which treatments improve and whether the virus evolves to become more aggressive or less so. But the bottom line, Shaman and Galanti suggest, is that the disease isn't going anywhere soon. "Holding out hope that a vaccine will be enough to save us isn't the level of preparation we need," Shaman says. "We have to regard COVID-19 as a disease that we could be contending with for a very long time."

## Simple new treatments could protect us

Imagine if a daily spritz of nasal spray could protect you against COVID-19.

A team of Columbia microbiologists led by Anne Moscona '82PS and Matteo Porotto has developed such a spray — one that, when inhaled, permeates the respiratory tract and shields it from any SARS-CoV-2 viral particles that may subsequently enter the body. If it encounters the virus, the medication will latch onto and dismantle the spike protein that SARS-CoV-2 uses to pry open its host's cells, thus neutralizing its attack.

In a study in ferrets, the Columbia researchers have found the spray to be safe and effective, completely preventing the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 among animals in close quarters. The scientists, who hope to soon launch human trials, say the therapy begins working immediately and offers protection for at least twenty-four hours.

According to Moscona, the medication would be especially beneficial to the



elderly, people with immune disorders, cancer patients, and others for whom vaccines are problematic. She says that it could also be distributed in developing countries where vaccines may not quickly become available. "If it works as well in humans as it does in animals, you could sleep in a bed with someone who has COVID-19 or be with your infected children and still be safe," she says.

## Keeping your baby healthy doesn't have to interfere with bonding

A team of researchers at Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC) has found that mothers with COVID-19 have little risk of transmitting the disease to their newborns so long as they follow basic infection-control practices, such as wearing a mask, washing their hands frequently, and cleaning their breasts before breastfeeding.

The study, which represents the most detailed investigation yet on the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission between moms and infants, finds that more aggressive measures like separating sick mothers from their babies and avoiding breastfeeding — which some





health-care experts had previously recommended — are not typically warranted.

Led by obstetrician-gynecologist Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman '14PH, the study is based on observations of more than one hundred COVID-19-positive mothers and their newborns at CUIMC in the spring of 2020.

“During the pandemic, we continued to do what we normally do to promote bonding and development in healthy newborns, while taking a few extra precautions to minimize the risk of exposure to the virus,” says Gyamfi-Bannerman. “We think it’s particularly important that mothers with SARS-CoV-2 have the opportunity to directly breastfeed their newborns, as breast milk is known to protect newborns against numerous pathogens, and it may help protect newborns against infection with SARS-CoV-2.”

### The virus is a clever mimic

Viruses are remarkably adept at evading the body’s natural defenses, often hiding among the very immune cells that hunt them by mimicking their chemical and physical structures. And coronaviruses, including SARS-CoV-2, are among the world’s most creative and successful practitioners of “viral mimicry,” as this survival strategy is known, according to research by Columbia systems biologist Sagi Shapira.

Shapira made this discovery while conducting the largest survey of viral mimicry to date — he used big-data analytic techniques to identify more than six million examples of mimicry

by seven thousand viruses — and he believes that his analysis holds clues for fighting COVID-19. For example, Shapira has found that SARS-CoV-2 has a particular talent for disguising itself as immune cells that constitute one of the body’s first lines of defense against invaders, and that its mimicking of these cells plays a crucial role in pushing the immune system into a dangerously hyperactive state that can prove fatal to some COVID-19 patients.

Shapira recently teamed up with Nicholas Tatonetti, a Columbia data scientist and bioinformatics expert, to turn this observation into insights that could improve patient care; together they have since identified several genes that increase the likelihood of a patient’s immune system going haywire in the presence of SARS-CoV-2, leading to severe disease.



“One of the things we really need moving forward in the fight against COVID-19 is a way to quickly identify patients who will benefit from immune-suppressing drugs and other aggressive treatments,” says Shapira. “Our research shows that studying the basic biology of the virus can help guide those discoveries.”

### Children are often better equipped to conquer COVID-19

One of the striking things about COVID-19 is that children tend to cope with it much better than older people do. To understand why, a team of Columbia researchers led by immunologist

Donna Farber and Matteo Porotto (the microbiologist who also helped develop the nasal spray) recently conducted an in-depth comparison of children’s and adults’ physiological responses to the disease. The scientists found a “stark



contrast” in the types and amounts of immune cells they produce. For example, they discovered that children generate fewer antibodies, which are among the last, heaviest weapons the immune system deploys against pathogens. The researchers say this suggests that children do a better job of fighting off the disease in its earliest stages.

“In kids, the infectious course is much shorter,” Porotto says. “They may clear this virus more efficiently than adults and may not need a strong antibody immune response to get rid of it.”

The Columbia researchers are now pursuing follow-up studies to learn how children’s immune systems are able to dispense with SARS-CoV-2 so quickly; one popular hypothesis they are testing is whether children’s propensity to catch seasonal colds, many of which are caused by other coronaviruses, may help prepare their bodies to recognize and fight off SARS-CoV-2.

“There are so many aspects of COVID-19 that we still have very little information about,” Porotto says. “The interaction between the virus and the individual host is the reason why we see so much diversity in clinical responses, but we don’t understand enough about this virus yet to really determine what leads to severe disease or what leads to mild disease.”



## Researchers call for clean-energy push

A team of researchers from Columbia's Center on Global Energy Policy, together with collaborators at the nonprofit Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF), have issued a report calling for the US government to launch an ambitious effort to spearhead the development of new climate-friendly energy technologies.

The book-length report, titled *Energizing America*, provides a comprehensive roadmap for how the US can assert itself as an international leader in clean-energy systems and help stave

off the most catastrophic consequences of global warming. It calls for a tripling of federal investments in clean-energy research and development over the next five years and for the creation of a new interagency authority to coordinate such spending.

Currently, the US devotes about \$9 billion a year to clean-energy R&D — just one-quarter of what it spends on medical research and less than one-tenth of what it spends on defense innovation. A three-fold increase in funding for new energy technologies would bring the country's investments in this area roughly in line with China's as a share of GDP and would deliver "economic returns that far outstrip investments," according to the report.

*Energizing America* was written by Varun Sivaram, a visiting senior fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy, which is housed within the School of International and Public Affairs; Julio Friedmann and David Sandalow, both former Obama-administration energy officials and now senior research scholars at the center; and ITIF's Colin Cunliff and David Hart.

The scholars argue that the rapid deployment of existing renewable-energy systems — wind, solar, geothermal — will not be enough for the US to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by mid-century, which president-elect Joseph Biden

has already proposed as a goal, echoing commitments made by dozens of other nations in recent years. The authors say entirely new technologies will be needed to improve energy efficiency in areas like agriculture, shipping, aviation, and steel and cement manufacturing. To this end, the researchers provide detailed recommendations for how an expanded R&D budget could be distributed across numerous federal agencies and programs.

Regarding their plan's political feasibility, the authors note that bipartisan support for clean-energy R&D has been growing in recent years; they point out that although the Trump administration proposed slashing funding for such research in every one of its annual budgets, congressional Republicans and Democrats both refused to make the cuts.

"There's a consensus emerging that the development of new energy technologies is going to be essential not only for fighting climate change but also for advancing America's international economic competitiveness in the coming decades," says Sivaram. "Leaders on both sides of the aisle are recognizing that if the US establishes itself as an innovator in this area, creating the next generation of energy systems that eventually get adopted throughout the world, we'll benefit economically and in terms of our global influence."

## Scientists decipher the hidden past of the 'Blue-Ring Nebula'

For years, astronomers have been puzzled by a massive gas cloud, or nebula, that encircles a star some six thousand light-years away in the constellation Hercules.

Now Columbia astronomer Brian Metzger and colleagues at the California Institute of Technology say they can finally explain the origins of the "Blue-Ring Nebula," so called because of its striking appearance when viewed through an ultraviolet telescope. In a

paper in the journal *Nature*, the scientists posit that the nebula is the result of a collision between two stars, the larger of which engulfed its neighbor and remains visible amid the cataclysmic event's gassy aftereffects.

"This finding not only explains a single mystery," says Metzger. "It sheds new light on how such mergers occur, the impact they have on their large-scale environments, and the detailed properties of the final merged star."



TOP: PEDROSALA / SHUTTERSTOCK; BOTTOM: NASA / JPL-CALTECH / M. SIEBERT



# Genetic study reveals causes of many stillbirths

Every year some twenty-four thousand expectant mothers in the US lose their babies in the final stages of pregnancy. For most of these women, the pain of the loss is compounded by a lack of explanations, since more than 60 percent of stillbirths have no known cause.

“Not only are they devastated, but they’re left to wonder if they did something wrong or if it might happen again,” says Ronald Wapner, the director of reproductive genetics at Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC) and the vice chairman for research in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

In a quest to further understand the causes of stillbirths, Wapner recently joined forces with Columbia geneticist David Goldstein, the founding director of the Institute for Genomic Medicine at CUIMC, to genetically analyze tissue from 246 stillborn fetuses. Advanced analytic methods developed in Goldstein’s lab enabled the scientists to inspect the fetuses’ genomes in unusual detail and identify tiny abnormalities in thirteen genes. Together, these genetic mutations accounted for about 9 percent of the stillbirths that couldn’t be explained by infections, preeclampsia, and other common pregnancy complications.

The scientists say their findings, which appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, could improve clinical care in multiple ways. “First, this knowledge will help us facilitate closure and bereavement,” Wapner says. In addition, he says, it may help women who have experienced stillbirths think through future family planning. “Often parents who’ve gone through this are apprehensive about conceiving again, for fear of repeating the trauma,” Wapner says. “But if we can determine that a fetus didn’t die because of a genetic variation that was passed down from the parents but rather because of a mutation that occurred within the fetus by chance as it was developing, as often seems to be the case, then we can assure them it probably won’t happen again.”

It will likely be years before such information is widely available to families, because only major academic medical centers currently possess the technology needed to detect the types of subtle genetic variations the new Columbia study identifies. (Simpler genetic tests capable of spotting large chromosomal abnormalities linked to 10 to 20 percent of stillbirths are available in many hospitals and health centers.) But Wapner and Goldstein anticipate that as future research projects identify more and more genetic mutations capable of disrupting fetal development, genomic sequencing will come to be used more routinely to explain stillbirths and miscarriages.

“Eventually, we may get to the point where we’re able to intervene and help save some of these fetuses in the womb, based on what our genetic discoveries teach us about the earliest stages of human development,” Wapner says.

## STUDY HALL RESEARCH BRIEFS

**A crowded universe, full of simpletons?** Based on how quickly life emerged on Earth (within a few hundred million years of the planet’s formation) and

how long it took for intelligence to subsequently evolve (another four billion years), Columbia astronomer David Kipping has calculated that the universe is likely teeming with life but short on conscious beings.

**Designer babies still a no-go** Columbia geneticist Dieter Egli has demonstrated that the powerful gene-editing tool CRISPR-Cas9 is still not safe for use in human embryos. In a series of experiments on early-stage embryos, he has shown that fixing a common blindness-causing gene with CRISPR-Cas9 often destroys neighboring genes.

**Keep it real on Facebook** People who resist the temptation to exaggerate their accomplishments on social media in favor of presenting authentic versions of themselves benefit psychologically and are happier overall, according to a study by psychologists Sheena Iyengar and Sandra Matz of Columbia Business School.



**The bone makers** Researchers in the laboratory of Columbia biomedical engineer Gordana Vunjak-Novakovic have successfully synthesized bone and cartilage from stem cells and will soon launch a clinical trial in which people with severe facial injuries will receive replacement jawbones grown in the lab.

**Making sense of schizophrenia** A team of Columbia neuroscientists led by Steven Siegelbaum has identified a group of brain cells that are responsible for forming social memories. The scientists say the discovery could lead to new treatments for schizophrenia, whose symptoms include extreme social difficulties.

**False promises** A widely publicized 2019 pledge by more than one hundred US corporations to adopt socially responsible business practices has turned out to be mere window dressing, according to a study coauthored by Shivaram Rajgopal of Columbia Business School. Rajgopal determined that companies that signed the “Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation” have since committed more labor and environmental violations, on average, than have their competitors.

**Ice sheet reveals surprise** Columbia earth scientists Jacqueline Austermann, Guy J. G. Paxman, and Kirsty J. Tinto have discovered a huge ancient lakebed sealed beneath more than a mile of ice in northwest Greenland. The researchers suspect that the lakebed, which is the first such subglacial basin found anywhere in the world, may contain fossil evidence of past climatic conditions and thus provide important clues about how Greenland’s ice sheet will respond to global warming.

# NETWORK

## YOUR ALUMNI CONNECTION



## Early Riser

*Morning Edition* host Rachel Martin '04SIPA on radio's subtle power

At about 3:30 a.m. most weekday mornings, Rachel Martin '04SIPA heads to the guest bedroom in the basement of her Washington, DC, home, where the windows are stuffed with pillows for soundproofing and an assortment of tech equipment links her makeshift studio to National Public Radio's nearby headquarters. Martin has been cohosting *Morning Edition* — the nation's most-listened-to radio news program — from home since the coronavirus pandemic started. And like many other parents, once Martin signs off, she has to transition seamlessly into her second job: tag-teaming with her husband to homeschool their first- and third-grade boys. "It's like living in an endless loop," Martin says. "There is no sense of place, so distinctions like 'work' and 'home' don't matter."

In the fourteen years that she has spent on air at NPR, Martin has become known for her incisive interviews, especially with world leaders, from Hillary Clinton to Hamid Karzai. "I like the challenge of drawing someone out

and holding them accountable in real time," she says. Martin credits studying international affairs at SIPA, with an independent concentration in media and democracy, with preparing her for these conversations, and she says that she still refers to an international-law book from graduate school when she needs to distill legal frameworks, such as those related to the targeted killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in 2020. "It has had a very practical influence on my job: understanding the laws of war, just wars, unjust wars, details of the Geneva Conventions," Martin says.

Broadcast journalism was an early ambition for the Idaho native, who started her career as an intern at San Francisco's KQED-FM. But when Martin applied to SIPA shortly after 9/11, she planned to eventually work for the US State Department or United Nations. "I felt very called to foreign policy ... how different nations and cultures interact to hopefully build a more peaceful world," Martin says. She interned at the UN while studying at Columbia but ultimately



decided that working for a monolithic institution felt limiting. “I wanted to be out in the world more, more connected to foreign policy,” she says.

After a class on Afghanistan sparked her interest in the region, Martin decided to travel to Kabul. She spent the summer between her first and second years at SIPA reporting for Public Radio International on children living under the Taliban. “My parents were totally freaked out. It was an active war zone,” she recalls. “But I’d met and befriended people at Columbia who had lived and worked there. It made it seem possible to go.” The stint sealed her commitment to journalism.

Within months of graduating, Martin returned to Afghanistan as a stringer for NPR. That led to her long career with the storied nonprofit media organization, including roles as a religion correspondent, foreign correspondent, and national-security correspondent. Before becoming a host of *Morning Edition*, in December 2016, she spent four years anchoring *Weekend Edition Sunday*.

For Martin, the focus on COVID-19 has been a departure but also an opportunity to explore. Hoping to capture this moment, she conceived of “Learning Curve,” a series that dissects the daily struggles of parents and teachers during the pandemic. Martin interviews mothers of varied economic and racial backgrounds across the country, checking in with them periodically throughout the school year: a Tennessee mother who resigned from her teaching job to keep her nine-year-old immunocompromised son safe, a California teacher with five school-age children of her own, a North Carolina grocery-store clerk who is also a single mother of four.

Radio has always been Martin’s favored news medium. “I like the performative aspect of it. I like using my voice,” she says. Plus, Martin says that radio cultivates connection in a unique way. “There’s a trust in conversation, I think, and an intimacy on radio,” she says. “I brandish a microphone, and people tell me their innermost thoughts and views, even if they’re controversial. People stop thinking about the mic and say what they mean.”

— *Mitra Malek ’01SIPA*

## The Memory Makers

When Spencer Bailey ’10JRN was three years old, in 1989, he was in a plane crash that killed his mother and 111 other people. The next day, a photograph of a National Guard officer carrying the young Bailey to safety appeared in newspapers and on televisions across the country. Four years later, that image was further immortalized — in the form of a six-foot-tall bronze statue outside of Sioux City, Iowa, the site of the crash.



Top left: Author Spencer Bailey being carried to safety after a 1989 plane crash.  
Top right: A bronze statue based on the same photograph, Sioux City, Iowa.  
Bottom: National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, Alabama.

Now a journalist who writes about architecture, art, and design, Bailey lends a unique perspective to the purpose and power of contemporary memorials in his new book *In Memory Of*. He shares striking images of iconic monuments, from Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial to the much newer National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, and writes thoughtfully about our “physical acts of memory,” acknowledging that each structure has personal grief, loss, and hope attached to it.

“Seeing myself in a statue remains a strange, out-of-body feeling,” he writes, “despite my being able to look at — and think about — that memorial and every memorial within a much larger context.”

## ASK AN ALUM: **HOW TO BEAT WORK-FROM-HOME BURNOUT**

**Liz Wilkes '13BUS** is the founder and CEO of Exubrancy, a startup that offers virtual and in-person wellness programs to more than six hundred corporate clients worldwide.

### What led you to start Exubrancy?

I founded my first company, a Christmas-light design and installation business, when I was twenty-two. It was an amazing experience, but I ran myself ragged. I put aside good nutrition. I was energetically depleted. I couldn't sleep well. I didn't feel like my best self. When I started business school, I realized that I wasn't alone. Many of my classmates had also come from work environments that weren't supportive of their well-being. I started Exubrancy in 2013 to help companies encourage their employees to lead healthy lives by offering ongoing wellness programming like fitness and yoga classes, meditation sessions, and, until the pandemic, chair massages.

### Has the pandemic changed your work in other ways?

Before, there was a lot of focus on how wellness can increase employee productivity. Now the focus has really shifted to reducing stress and building resiliency, community, and empathy. Those are some of the most important tools for getting through this time.

As Exubrancy has moved most of our offerings online, we've been encouraging people to leave their cameras on during live fitness classes. It's a way for them to visually connect with their coworkers in an informal way and strengthen social bonds at a time when it's hard to do so.



Liz Wilkes

### What advice do you have for people feeling pent-up and restless?

For me, taking a moment to roll back my shoulders and breathe deeply makes a world of difference. There has been so much research supporting the benefits of meditation and yoga. For example, one study from Aetna and Duke University found that Aetna employees reduced stress levels by a third after the company introduced weekly yoga classes.

Plan your time strategically. Those natural gaps in our workday — the commute, lunch break, etc. — have kind of evaporated, so establish new breaks that allow you to regroup. It might be helpful to move some video calls to phone calls to give your eyes a rest. If possible, take walks during phone meetings to get some fresh air. Strive to have moments of casual conversation with your colleagues throughout the day. It might be less natural to chitchat over Zoom than next to the coffee machine, but it's still important to maintain some level of connection.

### Do you have advice for parents?

Know your limitations. Have clear communication with your manager about the constraints you're facing during work. Noise-canceling headphones can be a godsend if you need to work near a child. My general advice for everyone working at home, both parents and non-parents, is to realize that other people are also struggling. We need to give each other flexibility and be kind to ourselves and everyone else. — *Julia Joy*



**AWARD-WINNING COMPOSER** Nico Muhly '03CC conducts *Throughline*, a piece written specifically with COVID-19 safety restrictions in mind. Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony, Muhly's new work features performances by eight soloists who filmed their parts separately in locations around the world. The components were then digitally spliced together into a single nineteen-minute video, a feat the *New York Times* called a "bellwether" for music-making during the pandemic. *Throughline* is currently streaming at [sfsymphony.org](https://sfsymphony.org).



# Dunking on COVID

**B**enedict Nwachukwu '08CC knows how to keep professional athletes healthy.

In addition to working as a sports-medicine surgeon and codirector of research for the Sports Medicine Institute at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, he has been a team physician for the New York Red Bulls, the Chicago Bulls, and the Chicago White Sox. But this past fall, Nwachukwu masked up for a different kind of challenge — serving as an onsite physician for the National Basketball Association's experimental "bubble" season.

"It meant putting the rest of my life and work on pause for several weeks," Nwachukwu says. "But it also felt like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help bring the sport back for players and fans."

In August, after quarantining for two weeks, Nwachukwu moved into the now-legendary NBA bubble — a campus within Walt Disney World, just outside Orlando, Florida, where 341 players and around a thousand staff members lived communally while playing a truncated season. Nwachukwu started every day with a rapid COVID-19 test and was then allowed to move freely around the bubble. After meeting with players and monitoring both injuries and any potential COVID-19 infections, Nwachukwu would spend the rest of the day on duty at games — sometimes for up to ten hours at a time.

"Usually as a team physician, I'd be covering a few games a week," Nwachukwu says. "In the bubble, it was a few games a day. The level of intensity presented different challenges for the players and made it more interesting for me as a doctor."

living together, so not only was I seeing them play every day, but I could check in with them over dinner," he says.

But though Nwachukwu caught some exciting action on the court, he says that the most memorable experience had nothing to do with jump

shots or buzzer beaters. In late August, as a new wave of protests raged across the country following the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Nwachukwu was assigned to cover an afternoon game between the Orlando Magic and the Milwaukee Bucks. Because he had been particularly busy for the previous few days, Nwachukwu

hadn't yet heard about the shooting and was shocked when instead of starting the game, the Bucks remained in the locker room in protest. "The players were clearly communicating to the world that there are more important things than basketball," Nwachukwu says. "Before that game, the atmosphere inside the bubble was jubilant. After that, it took on a more somber tone. People had to refocus their energy on the bigger picture, which felt entirely appropriate."

For Nwachukwu, a Black man working in a field in which he is a clear minority, the protests were especially moving. "Aside from the players themselves, the bubble was not diverse. I felt tremendous solidarity and pride when I saw the players use their platforms for change," Nwachukwu says. "I remember at one of the early games, a fellow physician asked me what I would write on my jersey if I was a player. My response was simple: 'Stop Killing Us.'"

Many have heralded the NBA bubble as an example of how sports teams can safely resume play during the pandemic. But Nwachukwu says that he hopes the season will have a bigger impact on the world of professional sports. "I hope that people look to the NBA not only for how to behave during a health crisis, but also a social one," he says. "It should be a model for how to bring people together to work for justice."

— Rebecca Shapiro



Nwachukwu at work in New York (top) and in the NBA bubble (bottom).

Nwachukwu, who played varsity basketball at Columbia, says that he went into sports medicine because he relishes the job of helping people get back to what they do best. A bonus to working in the bubble was getting more time with his patients and being able to see how his work impacted their performance. "We were all

shots or buzzer beaters. In late August, as a new wave of protests raged across the country following the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Nwachukwu was assigned to cover an afternoon game between the Orlando Magic and the Milwaukee Bucks. Because he had been particularly busy for the previous few days, Nwachukwu



## You Glow, Girl

**C**hristine Chang '10GSAS remembers how, when she was growing up, her Korean grandmother used to rub chilled watermelon rinds on her skin to heal rashes and other irritations. “It was a DIY anti-inflammatory treatment, rich with antioxidants and amino acids,” says Chang, who explains that Koreans have a long tradition of using natural, everyday ingredients — from rice water to green tea to snail slime — to soothe and hydrate their skin.

Today, Chang is the cofounder and co-CEO of Glow Recipe, a cosmetics brand that is harnessing the power of fruit (not snails) and bringing Korean beauty rituals to a global audience. Since launching in 2014, the New York-based startup has earned the attention of skin-care enthusiasts and influencers for its face masks, moisturizers, serums, cleansers, toners, and lip balms. Designed to achieve a youthful, dewy “glow,” each product is concocted from a fruit extract like

watermelon, plum, or avocado and infused with ingredients such as retinol, hyaluronic acid, and gentle chemical exfoliators.

Chang, who was born in Korea and spent her childhood in Louisiana and teenage years in Australia, considers herself a lifelong translator of culture and consumer habits. After attending college in the US, she started a career in marketing at L'Oréal Korea's Seoul headquarters. There she helped turn Kiehl's, an American brand owned by L'Oréal, into a top player in Korea's hyper-competitive beauty market.

In 2008, Chang moved to New York and began a master's program in East Asian studies at Columbia with plans to become a translator of Korean novels. But she missed the cosmetics industry and after graduating decided to join the global-marketing team at Kiehl's in New York. She says her education was a huge asset: “Columbia taught me how to really look at cultural nuances and translate them

between different cultures, and I felt like I could apply that knowledge.”

At the time, “K-beauty” was on the cusp of exploding into an international phenomenon. “Global companies were starting to look to Korea for the latest skin-care trends and innovations,” says Chang. Sensing a business opportunity, she connected with her friend and L'Oréal colleague Sarah Lee, who is also Korean (and whose grandmother also used watermelon as a skin salve). Over sheet masks and wine one evening, they came up with the idea for Glow Recipe. “We were both bicultural, bilingual, and uniquely positioned to translate Korean trends for the US market,” says Chang.

Glow Recipe started out as an e-commerce company for existing Korean cosmetics. Chang and Lee would scout out the best cruelty-free products and sell them on their website. In 2015, they appeared on the ABC reality show *Shark Tank* and landed — but ultimately turned down — a \$425,000 investment.

In the spring of 2017, Glow Recipe introduced its own product line. The first offerings, a blueberry cleanser and watermelon sleeping

were instant hits at Sephora. “The mask comes in a jar that's shaped like a melting ice cube, an homage to our grandmothers and the chilled watermelon,” says Chang. The product, which initially generated a waitlist of more than five thousand people, is still a bestseller.

Chang attributes much of Glow Recipe's success to the strong community it has built online. “People are increasingly enjoying skin care on social-media platforms,” she says. The company produces a wide range of content for YouTube and Instagram on everything from dealing with breakouts to the magic of enzymes to the secrets of hydrated, “bouncy” skin.

Though K-beauty is in the midst of a viral moment, Chang doesn't believe it's a passing fad. She sees it as more of an ongoing movement. “If a brand as established as Neutrogena is launching a water-boost gel cream, or Burt's Bees is selling sheet masks, you know that Korean influence has trickled down throughout the industry,” she says.

Through Glow Recipe, Chang hopes to educate people about skin-care techniques and convey to the world that there's more

to K-beauty than cutesy packaging and exotic-sounding ingredients. “K-beauty is a philosophy,” she says. “It's about having a self-care routine that you look forward to. It's about skin care being joyful and fun.”

— Julia Joy





# Intoxicating Mocktails

**J**ohn deBary '05CC has spent his career behind the bar — first at Manhattan's legendary speak-easy PDT, then as the director of the beverage program for the Momofuku group, where he worked for nearly a decade creating cocktail menus for dozens of restaurants.

But while deBary certainly knows — and loves — his spirits, he also firmly believes that you don't need alcohol to make a great cocktail. After leaving Momofuku in 2018, he launched Proteau, a line of non-alcoholic botanical beverages, and published *Drink What You Want*, a recipe book with a full booze-free chapter. And deBary is practicing



what he preaches — he decided not to drink alcohol in 2020, a pledge that he kept despite the challenges of quarantine. “I actually found that I rarely missed it,” he said. “There are so many ways to create unique and exciting drinks without relying on the traditional tools.”

Here he shares one of his signature mocktails, a toned-down take on the classic mai tai that is perfect for Dry January and beyond.

## Morning(side) Mai Tai *Makes 1 drink*



1½ ounces chilled apple cider  
½ ounce apple-cider vinegar  
½ ounce ginger syrup (recipe follows)  
½ ounce orgeat\*  
Garnishes: apple slices and fresh mint leaves

In a shaking tin, combine the drink ingredients. Add ice and shake for fifteen seconds. Strain into an ice-filled old-fashioned glass. Garnish with a few slices of apple and a couple of mint leaves.

\*A Middle Eastern almond syrup, available for sale on Amazon.

### GINGER SYRUP

*Makes about 1 cup*

1 pound fresh ginger, thoroughly scrubbed

About 1 cup granulated sugar (depending on juice yield)

Using a juice extractor, juice the ginger. Pass the liquid through a gold coffee filter to remove all solids. You should have about half a cup. Combine the ginger juice and sugar in a small saucepan. Cook, stirring occasionally, over medium heat until all the sugar has dissolved. Remove the pan from the heat and allow the syrup to cool for a few minutes. Place the pan in an ice bath and stir every few minutes until the mixture is below room temperature. Use immediately or store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to two weeks or in the freezer for up to six months.

## NEWSMAKERS

● **Ayad Akhtar '02SOA** was named the next president of PEN America, the nonprofit organization dedicated to championing freedom of expression in literature. Akhtar is the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright of *Junk*, as well as a filmmaker and novelist.

● Several Columbians have been named or will be nominated to positions in president-elect Joe Biden's administration. **Antony Blinken '88LAW**, a former deputy secretary of state, is expected to be nominated as Biden's secretary of state. **Karine Jean-Pierre '03SIPA**, who served as vice president-elect Kamala Harris's chief of staff during the campaign, will be Biden's deputy press secretary. **Julissa Reynoso Pantaleón '01LAW**, a Columbia trustee, was named chief of staff to soon-to-be First Lady Jill Biden. Reynoso served in President Obama's state department and later as the ambassador to Uruguay.

● *Interior Chinatown*, a novel by **Charles Yu '01LAW**, won the 2020 National Book Award for fiction. Additionally, the National Book Foundation named **Naima Coster '15SOA** to its 2020 “5 Under 35” cohort. Coster is the author of the 2018 novel *Halsey Street* and the forthcoming novel *What's Mine and Yours*.

● Former Democratic presidential candidate **Andrew Yang '99LAW** won the Vilcek Prize for Excellence in Public Service. Yang is the founder of two nonprofits — Venture for America, a fellowship program in entrepreneurship, and Humanity Forward, an organization dedicated to the ideas that Yang espoused during his presidential run, such as a universal basic income.

# BULLETIN

UNIVERSITY  
NEWS AND  
VIEWS



## MARY C. BOYCE APPOINTED UNIVERSITY PROVOST

**M**ary C. Boyce, the dean of Columbia Engineering, has been appointed University provost, effective July 1, 2021. She will be the first woman ever to serve in that position at Columbia.

As provost, Boyce will be the University's chief academic officer, overseeing all faculty appointments and tenure decisions, as well as the development of the University's annual academic budget. Ira Katznelson '66CC, a professor of political science and history, has served as interim provost since John Coatsworth stepped down in 2019.

Boyce, who is an expert in nanotechnology and materials research, taught at MIT for twenty-five years before coming to Columbia to lead its engineering school in 2013. The first female dean of Columbia Engineering, she has since helped to establish the school as a leading center of multidisciplinary and translational research, encouraging faculty to collaborate with colleagues in other fields to find creative solutions to pressing global problems.

"The school has thrived, buoyed by her celebration of intellectual creativity in all its

forms," said President Lee C. Bollinger in announcing Boyce's new appointment. "Propelled by a firm belief in the value of interdisciplinary work, Mary has led in establishing connections between Columbia Engineering and other parts of the University. Due to her determined efforts, we now have more faculty working together in areas such as data science, nanoscience, sensing and imaging, sustainability, and engineering in medicine."

Under Boyce, the engineering school has also significantly expanded its faculty, increased financial aid for students, and added a wealth of new research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students.

"Mary has also been influential in her contributions to the University at large," Bollinger wrote. "She has been an important advisor on virtually every one of the many new initiatives we have set forth over the past several years. In short, Mary is an accomplished scholar, an effective leader, and a consummate University citizen. I am delighted she has agreed to serve as Provost and look forward to working even more closely with her in the years to come."



## SAIDIYA HARTMAN NAMED UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

**S**aidiya Hartman, a prominent author and scholar of African-American literature and history, has been named a University Professor, which is the highest rank that Columbia bestows on its faculty.

A Columbia professor of English and comparative literature since 2007, Hartman writes genre-bending books that combine elements of historical scholarship, biography, and fiction to vividly portray the experiences of African-American enslaved people and their descendants. In works like *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, Hartman uses historical data about real individuals — often culled from slave owners’ diaries, captains’ logs, bills of sale, and other commercial records — as a jumping-off point to create rich, semi-fictional narratives that immerse readers in slaves’ emotional lives. Her methodology, which she calls “critical fabulation,” has proven to be highly influential in academia, prompting other scholars of African-American studies to



reconsider the value of traditional historical scholarship that relies primarily on materials produced by slavery-era whites to understand past Black lives.

“Hartman is a sleuth of the archive; she draws extensively from plantation documents, missionary tracts, whatever traces she can find — but she is

vocal about the challenge of using such troubling documents, the risk one runs of reinscribing their authority,” wrote the *New York Times* in a review of Hartman’s most recent book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*, in 2019. “Similarly, she is keen to identify moments of defiance and joy in the lives of her subjects.”

Raised in Brooklyn, Hartman received her PhD from Yale and taught at the University of California, Berkeley, for more than a decade before coming to Columbia. She is a former director of the University’s Institute for Research on Women, Gender, and Sexuality and remains part of its core faculty. In 2019, she won a MacArthur “genius” grant.

“She is also a person of expansive warmth and caring,” said President Lee C. Bollinger in announcing Hartman’s new appointment, “and, not surprisingly, she is beloved by her undergraduate and graduate students and revered as a committed, incisive, and encouraging teacher and mentor.”



## KEEPING CAMPUS HEALTHY

With cases of COVID-19 rising throughout the US, Columbia has announced that it will continue to hold many of its classes online and to limit gatherings on its campuses this spring. For the latest information about course delivery, safety and health protocols, student life, and more, visit [COVID19.columbia.edu](https://COVID19.columbia.edu).

## KIM LEW LEADS COLUMBIA INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT COMPANY

**K**im Lew, an investment professional with decades of experience in asset management, was recently named president and chief executive officer of the Columbia Investment Management Company, with responsibility for overseeing the University’s endowment.

Lew comes to Columbia after thirteen years at the Carnegie Corporation of New York, where she served as vice president and chief investment officer and managed an endowment that supports a wide range of education programs.

A native of New York City and a product of its public schools, Lew graduated from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard Business School. She began her career as a credit analyst at Chemical Bank, later joining the Prudential Group and then the Ford Foundation, where she spent more than a decade handling technology and private-equity investments. She joined the Carnegie Corporation to direct its private-equity stakes in 2007, becoming its chief investment officer in 2016.



As the head of Columbia Investment Management Company, Lew is responsible for the management of an \$11 billion endowment whose income provides a perpetual source of support for University programs.

## SHIRLEY WANG ELECTED TO COLUMBIA'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES



sales positions at Citicorp and J. Walter Thompson advertising before becoming an entrepreneur. In 1994, she founded Plastpro, which has won numerous awards for its streamlined manufacture of environmentally friendly fiberglass doors, door frames, and related products.

An active philanthropist, Wang has supported a wide array of housing, educational, and public-health organizations, through both her company and a foundation she runs with her husband, Walter. The Walter and Shirley Wang Foundation also funded the PBS documentary *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* and sponsored the Academy Award-winning AIDS documentary *The Blood of Yingzhou District*. At Columbia, Wang and her husband are supporting the construction of the business school's new home in Manhattanville.

**S**hirley Wang '93BUS, the founder and CEO of the Los Angeles-based building-materials company Plastpro, has been elected to Columbia's Board of Trustees.

Wang, who earned her MBA at Columbia Business School, held executive and



## CHANGING MINDS ABOUT MASKS

**A** Columbia-led online PR campaign to promote the use of face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic has achieved a major milestone, reaching more than one million people.

Wearing is Caring, which was launched by a dozen postdoctoral researchers and undergraduate students last summer, produces playful infographics, slide shows, and true-false quizzes on topics such as how to properly wear a mask and the pros and cons of various types of personal protective equipment (PPE). The group's content, which can easily be downloaded and shared via social media, also addresses common myths about mask-wearing — such as that a mask can make a wearer sick — with links to relevant scientific publications.

"Shifting public-health guidelines and misleading claims have caused confusion over whether face coverings are effective," says Tiffany Chen, a research staff assistant at Columbia's Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute who oversees the group's PPE guidelines. "Our goal is to present scientific evidence, in a way that is credible and easy to understand, that will help persuade the undecided that face masks really do save lives."

## PRESIDENT BOLLINGER'S TERM EXTENDED TO 2023

**T**he co-chairs of Columbia's Board of Trustees, Lisa Carnoy '89CC and Jonathan Lavine '88CC, recently announced that President Lee C. Bollinger has agreed to extend his term through the 2022–23 academic year.

The board's decision to ask Bollinger to stay on as president, Carnoy and Lavine wrote in a statement, reflects "both a recognition of his success in steering the University for nearly two decades, as well as a determination that his steady hand and wealth of experience will continue to provide critical leadership and stability" for Columbia during a time of "undeniable uncertainty here in the United States and around the world."

Since becoming president in 2002, Bollinger has led the University through a

remarkable period of growth, overseeing the development of the Manhattanville campus in West Harlem and the construction of several new buildings elsewhere, including the Northwest Corner Building for multidisciplinary science in Morningside Heights, a new home for Columbia Nursing School, and the Roy and Diana Vagelos Education Center on the medical campus. He also established nine Columbia Global Centers on four continents and championed the launch of ambitious new research programs in areas like neuroscience, data science, and climate change. On Bollinger's watch, the University has also created one of the most diverse communities in higher education, driven in part by new investments in student financial aid and the recruitment of minority scholars.



"The fiscal management, fundraising success, and active alumni engagement needed to sustain this trajectory of growth are firmly in place, and are bolstered by the launch of two major capital campaigns, including the completion of one of the largest capital campaigns in the Ivy League," wrote Carnoy and Lavine. "This fundraising success is more critical than ever now to help sustain students in need of assistance and to keep the campus healthy."





## HUGH HAYDEN '18SOA FUNDS ART FELLOWSHIPS

The sculptor Hugh Hayden '18SOA, in partnership with Columbia and two prominent New York galleries, has created a scholarship program for students of visual art and art history who have demonstrated leadership in the African-American and African diaspora communities.

The Solomon B. Hayden Fellowships, named for Hayden's father, will support MFA students focused on sculpture and MA students in the Modern and Contemporary Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies (MODA) program. The fellowships

will be funded partially by the Clearing Gallery and the Lisson Gallery.

Hayden, whose work was featured in the Summer 2019 issue of *Columbia Magazine*, credits the Black Lives Matter movement with inspiring the new fellowship program. He hopes the program will address racial inequities in the art world by providing recipients mentorship and networking opportunities through the participating galleries, in addition to financial support. "These fellowships can give artists access to things that money can't buy," he says.

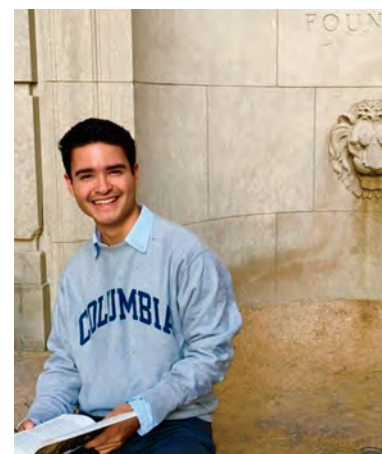
## GIVING DAY 2020 BREAKS RECORDS

The ninth annual Columbia Giving Day raised a record-breaking \$24 million on October 28, with thousands of alumni, students, parents, friends, neighbors, faculty, and staff members contributing a total of 19,173 gifts. The twenty-four-hour University-wide fundraising drive, in which schools and programs compete for matching gifts, raised \$2 million more than the previous year's event. Among the programs rewarded for improving their gift counts compared to last year were the Earth Institute, the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, and the Women Creating Change initiative at the Center for the Study of Social Difference. The top five schools for alumni participation were Columbia College, Barnard College, the College of Dental Medicine, Columbia Law School, and Columbia Business School.

## RECENT GRAD NAMED RHODES SCHOLAR

Santiago Tobar Potes '20CC, who graduated cum laude from Columbia College last year, has received a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship. He plans to pursue a master's degree in global and imperial history at the University of Oxford.

Potes, who was born in Colombia and raised in Miami, was a John W. Kluge Scholar, a King's Crown Leadership and Excellence Award winner, and a Holder Initiative Student Advisory Board member at Columbia College. He is also an accomplished violinist and an outspoken advocate for



undocumented immigrants in the US who have received quasi-legal status under the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy.

"Santi's irrepressible love of learning, commitment to advocating for immigration reform, and work with vulnerable youth make him a wonderfully deserving recipient of the Rhodes Scholarship," says Ariella Lang '03GSAS, associate dean of academic affairs and director of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships. "I'm delighted to see his successes acknowledged in this way."

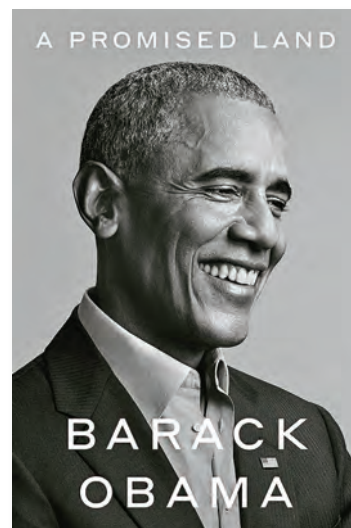
# BOOKS

## A Promised Land

By Barack Obama '83CC (Crown)

Anyone who has read the earlier books of Barack Obama '83CC — particularly *Dreams from My Father* — already knows that he's a wonderful writer, with an eye for telling detail and a voice that is by turns introspective, witty, self-deprecating, uplifting, elegiac, and laugh-out-loud funny. Those qualities are showcased once again in *A Promised Land*, the first of the forty-fourth president's projected two-volume memoir, which focuses on Obama's role as a husband and father and his pursuit of a political career up to and including his first term in the White House.

Reading *A Promised Land* resembles nothing so much as the heady, pulse-quickening experience of taking an honors seminar with the hands-down best professor on campus (who also happens to be the former leader of the free world). The Obama we encounter here is dazzling — a master educator at the top of his game who entertains, informs, clarifies, enlightens, inspires, and often soars to near-poetry in his thoughtful explorations of thorny topics. In *A Promised Land*, Obama's uncanny knack for synthesizing and condensing difficult concepts and complex histories produces a rolling montage of one "aha" moment after another. Check out his analysis of why fundamentalist Islam has become so dominant in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; it is a marvel of compression and clarity. (He traces the movement to Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, who founded modern Saudi Arabia in 1932 on the principles of an "uncorrupted" form of Islam promulgated by an eighteenth-century cleric.) Want a précis of how health care became such a hot mess in the USA — a mess that, in 2009, desperately cried out for a cure? Read his lead-in to the riveting tale of how he and his team (David Axelrod, David Plouffe, Robert Gibbs, Rahm Emanuel, and a host of other vividly drawn characters) — with the help of a not-so-secret weapon named Nancy Pelosi — manage to pass the Affordable Care Act (ACA) without a single Republican vote.



An account of the Deepwater Horizon disaster of April 2010 — one of a series of crises that beset his new administration — gives rise to some of Obama's most virtuosic feats of illumination. He describes the proliferation of offshore drilling ("by 2010 more than three thousand rigs and production platforms sat off the coasts of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, dotting the horizon like castles on stilts") and explains in elegant, lucid prose the improbable technology underlying it. Along the way he underscores the sheer arrogance, addiction to risk, and near-insanity of petrochemical companies that spend upward of a million dollars a day to operate a single rig dedicated to "siphoning up the remains of the ancient plants and animals converted by nature into the viscous black gold pooled beneath the ocean floor" at depths exceeding "the height of Mount Everest." When one of these rigs, the thirty-story-high Deepwater Horizon, explodes in a huge ball of fire in an American section of the Gulf of Mexico, injuring seventeen of the 126 people onboard and leaving eleven platform workers permanently unaccounted for, it results in a catastrophic oil spill that dwarfs all others in US history. And none of this, Obama fumes, will ever change, "because at the end of the day we Americans loved our cheap gas and big cars more than we cared about the environment."



That last rant notwithstanding, Obama is no firebrand (though he's often accused of being one by critics on the right and expected to be one by hopeful backers on the left); by his own reckoning, he's "a reformer, conservative in temperament if not in vision." As such he enters the White House intent on forging some sort of bipartisan consensus (he even asks Robert Gates, George W. Bush's secretary of defense, to stay on in that position — though his efforts at bipartisan compromise ultimately prove fruitless). Yet he is equally determined, as he recently told the *Atlantic's* Jeffrey Goldberg, "to hang on to who I am — my soul, my sense of right and wrong, my character — while operating at the highest level of politics."

This idealism, while challenged, never flags — but it nearly always makes room for a clear-eyed realism. ("What is it about sixty votes these folks don't understand?" Obama snaps, understandably irked, when Howard Dean and others rail at him for not including a public option in the ACA that would surely have doomed it.) Still, in passages like those dealing



President-elect Barack Obama prepares to take the oath of office in January 2009.

with the *Deepwater Horizon*, his depictions of his family (rendered throughout with palpable tenderness and love), and his deliberations over whether to save the lives of some teenage Somali terrorists, Barack Obama

leaves readers with little doubt that after eight bruising years in the White House, his soul remains very much intact.

Volume Two cannot arrive fast enough.  
— Lorraine Glennon

## What Are You Going Through

By Sigrid Nunez '72BC, '75SOA (Riverhead)



"I went to hear a man give a talk," writes Sigrid Nunez '72BC, '75SOA in the opening sentence of her new novel, *What Are You Going Through*. Like much of her prose, the line is simple and direct. But readers should not be fooled by the straightforward tone; Nunez's seventh novel is stunningly complex, a nuanced, layered look at aging, friendship, love, and death.

Fans of Nunez will find both the themes and the voice familiar. She first earned acclaim with her 1995 debut, the autobiographical novel *A Feather on the Breath of God*, narrated by an unnamed mixed-race immigrant girl growing up in a Brooklyn housing project in the 1950s and '60s. After experimenting with literary forms over the next two decades (the novel *Mitz* was a mock biography of Virginia

Woolf's pet marmoset; she also wrote a memoir of her 1970s friendship with Susan Sontag '93HON), Nunez returned to the unnamed narrator in *The Friend*, a touching examination of grief that won the 2018 National Book Award. *What Are You Going Through* appears to be the next chapter in the character's life.

The man in the novel's first sentence is not some random stranger: he's the narrator's ex

— though theirs is not the relationship that drives the narrative. The protagonist went to the talk while on a trip to visit a sick friend, and she uses the visit to explore the ideas of aging and love, empathy and the necessity of connecting with others. Nunez shows how easy it is to let the bonds of friendship fray.

The narrator's tone is intimate not just as she describes encounters with her close friends but also as she reports on conversations and incidents in the lives of others. For much of the book, we are



in her head, gaining insight into her character from seemingly mundane events. She recounts, for example, a conversation with a woman at her gym who strives to maintain her figure. “She knew it sounded crazy, the woman in the locker room said, but when her sister got cancer and lost thirty pounds she couldn’t help wishing it would happen to her. And was it so crazy? After all, always hating the way she looked, always fighting against her own body and always, always losing the battle meant that she was depressed all the time.”

Through these encounters and reflections, Nunez gives us tender and fraught glimpses into people’s complicated lives.

It takes some time for Nunez to introduce the central plot point: the narrator’s sick friend is dying of cancer and wants her to stay by her side as she prepares to kill herself. “I will not go out in mortifying anguish,” the friend says. “I can’t be completely alone. I mean, this is a new adventure — who can say what it will really be like. What if something goes wrong? What if *everything* goes wrong? I need to know there’s someone in the next room.”

“Epic struggle to keep my composure, to choose my words,” Nunez’s narrator notes grimly, before asking if there is anyone else who can take on this role. But *What Are You Going Through* is not a sad book, despite the tears shed or fought back. When the narrator finally agrees to aid her dying friend, the friend texts back, “I promise to make it as much fun as possible.” And indeed, there is a life-affirming quality and even humor in the evolving companionship as the two women prepare for one’s death. The book may not quite have the narrative engine or emotional engagement of some of Nunez’s previous work, but the novel has much to recommend it. The writer’s willingness to examine the power of compassion for a friend and the human fear of dying alone of a terminal illness has never felt more potent or more relevant.

— Stuart Miller '90JRN

## Well-Versed

These three new collections, all by Columbia alumni, are a testament to poetry’s power to comfort, to inspire, and to encourage reflection on the world around us

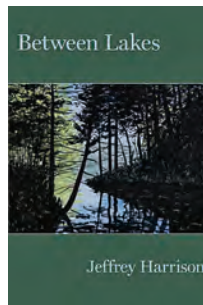


### A TREATISE ON STARS

By Mei-mei Berssenbrugge '73SOA

Like her previous twelve collections, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge’s *A Treatise on Stars* — a finalist for the

National Book Award — is a deep meditation on the natural world. As the title suggests, this time she focuses on the cosmos, seeking connections between society and celestial bodies above.



### BETWEEN LAKES

By Jeffrey Harrison '80CC

Many of the poems in Jeffrey Harrison’s sixth collection grapple with his father’s death and the unique grief and introspection that come after losing a parent. In “Higher Education,” also included in a volume of the Best

American Poetry series, Harrison recalls choosing to attend Columbia against his father’s wishes. At Columbia, Harrison studied the Beat poets and the core values of Western civilization. “I can’t remember,” he writes now, thinking of his father, “is forgiveness one of them?”



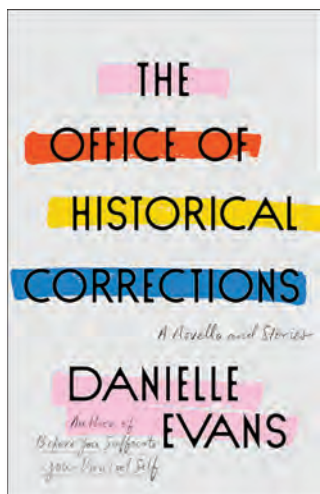
### BLIZZARD

By Henri Cole '82SOA

Henri Cole is known for sonnets that focus on a single moment, encounter, or experience — distilling it into perfect lyrical sound bites. In Cole’s tenth collection, he turns the quotidian acts of peeling a potato and swatting away

an unwelcome bee into profound observations about daily life.





# The Office of Historical Corrections

By Danielle Evans '04CC (Riverhead)

For many young writers, short fiction is a mere launching pad, a way to hone their skills before moving on to the more popular (and lucrative) novel. Thankfully, that isn't the case for Danielle Evans '04CC. Her first story collection, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*, earned her a slew of awards and a place in the National Book Foundation's 2011 "5 Under 35" cohort. Now, with *The Office of Historical Corrections* — a selection of stories plus a standout novella — Evans proves herself not just committed to the genre but also a modern master of the form.

To suggest that the seven stories fall under a single theme would do a disservice to Evans's creativity. It's fair to say that nearly all of them tackle grief, race, and romantic relationships — and often the complicated intersection of the three.

Loss is prevalent in many of the stories, and Evans, whose own mother recently died of cancer, writes viscerally and specifically about experiencing grief as a person of color. In the first story, "Happily Ever After," a young woman realizes that she has to present herself in a certain way at her mother's hospital bed to get the information she needs. "Tell me what you would tell a white woman, her face said. A white woman with money, her clothes said." The woman's boyfriend, "several shades

darker," can't even fake it; he's considered suspicious and is thrown out of CVS Pharmacy when he tries to pick up the mother's prescription.

Claire, the narrator of "Boys Go to Jupiter," is white but also reeling from her mother's illness and death, which sets in motion a tense series of events. Hoping to get a rise out of her new stepmother, Claire posts a picture of herself posing in a skimpy Confederate-flag bikini. The picture goes viral, making her a pariah at her liberal-arts college. But Claire — full of rage, youthful pig-headedness, and trauma stemming from an incident with a Black ex-boyfriend — stubbornly doubles down. Claire isn't a sympathetic character, but Evans is an empathetic writer and seems to accept if not forgive Claire's actions as a consequence of her profound grief.



Despite the emphasis on heavy topics, this is not a dour book. Evans is very funny and puts her characters in absurd situations that are just realistic enough to be entirely believable. Lyssa, the narrator of "Happily Ever After," watches her own life tank while she's working in the gift shop of a replica of the *Titanic*. Her supervisor, "who mumbled something about historical accuracy," tells her she isn't allowed to attend the birthday parties held there because she is Black.

In another story, "Richard of York Gave Battle in Vain," a very unlikely wedding guest — dealing with her own personal demons — takes a jilted bride on a road trip that ends up at a cheesy water park. "This is going to be hilarious someday," says the bride. She's right. It is.

The crown jewel of Evans's collection is the titular novella, about a professor, Cassie, who takes a job as a field agent for the "Institute for Public History," a new government body made up of fact-checkers and historians tasked with confronting the "contemporary crisis of truth," by correcting "decades of bad information" let loose in the real world.

For her first few years on the job, Cassie's work is low-stakes. She ducks into souvenir shops to change incorrect dates and, in a particularly amusing scene, educates the cashier at a bakery about why the history behind its promotional Juneteenth dessert is wrong.

But then Cassie is sent on a more important mission, which turns into a thought-provoking historical mystery. A former colleague has caused havoc in a rural Wisconsin town by questioning a long-believed story — that in the 1930s, the town's sole Black resident was burned to death inside his leather-goods store by a racist mob. As a new mob gathers, unnerved by this interloper digging into the town's past, Cassie begins to uncover secrets and truths — ones that resonate far beyond the town's limits.

In a year defined by both racial discord and the spread of disinformation, *The Office of Historical Corrections* feels particularly timely, and Evans's voice stands out as one to watch. She's doing important work here; but with riveting storytelling and wit to spare, it doesn't feel like work at all.

— Rebecca Shapiro

# The Last Million

By David Nasaw '72GSAS (Penguin Press)

In *The Last Million*, a tour de force of historical reckoning, historian David Nasaw '72GSAS rubs the sepia off the gauzy images of triumph, liberation, and joy that live in our collective imagination of the Allied victory in Europe. In their place, Nasaw leaves us with a grim reality: the estimated seven million displaced persons (DPs) who were left stranded, malnourished, and utterly bereft in the wreckage that had been Nazi Germany. While most of this number eventually repatriated to their home countries, Nasaw, whose previous books include Pulitzer Prize-nominated biographies of Joseph P. Kennedy and Andrew Carnegie, zeroes in on the “last million” DPs who languished for up to five years in refugee camps, waiting to be resettled because they no longer had countries to return to. Among these were Poles, Ukrainians, and Balts who'd worked for the Nazis and now refused to return to Soviet-dominated homelands, as well as — most tragically — the quarter million Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, whose homes in Europe had vanished and who could not remain in the place where their families had been murdered.

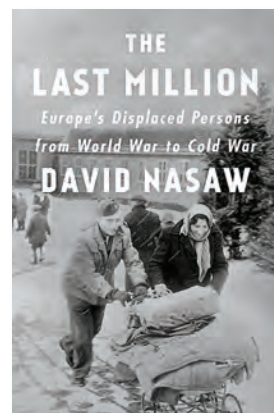
One reads this prodigiously researched, multilayered story with ever-more-horrified fascination as the victorious Allies, having prevailed over the great evil of Nazism, proceeded to play politics and pass the buck — amid a global frenzy of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and Cold War saber-rattling — while desperate people suffered. No country on earth seemed willing to open its borders to these stateless casualties of war. President Harry Truman tried to persuade Prime Minister Clement Attlee to open Palestine, then under a British mandate, to the Jewish survivors, but Attlee refused, fearful of arousing the ire of the UK's allies in the Arab world. And Attlee, along with the

leaders of Canada, Australia, and other Allied nations, posed a logical question: why should they accept these refugees when the US would not? (Truman was sympathetic to their plight, but Congress stood fast.)

Faced with severe postwar labor shortages, many of these countries came to recognize that the camps represented a rich source of workers and began recruiting DPs to work in agriculture, mines, and factories, and as nurses and domestic servants. Yet these laborers were rarely Jewish, in part because the job descriptions, with thinly veiled anti-Semitism, deliberately omitted work that Jews were thought suited for. In 1948, after years of dithering, the US Congress finally passed the Displaced Persons Act, though it too was designed to keep Jews out: the bill stipulated that only DPs who had entered Germany before December 22, 1945, were eligible for visas, thereby excluding 90 percent of the Jews in the DP camps. It also blocked anyone suspected of harboring Soviet sympathies — a charge leveled at Jews because many who'd survived had done so only because they'd escaped to the USSR during the war.

Meanwhile, reflecting the anti-Soviet fervor in postwar America, the 1948 bill eased visa restrictions for DPs from western Ukraine and the Baltic nations, whose homelands had been “annexed by a foreign power” (namely the USSR). As a result, thousands of Nazi collaborators and even war criminals immigrated to the US, a shocking number of whom went to work for the CIA, the US military, and other anti-communist organizations.

As for the Jews, their fate was inextricably bound up with the story of Palestine and its transformation into the modern state of Israel. Thousands of displaced Jews in Europe had undertaken the harrowing illegal journey



to Palestine after the war, but Israel's emergence as a nation — via the UN's 1948 decision to partition Palestine and Truman's immediate endorsement of that decision — hastened their exodus to a place they considered their historical homeland. (In the 1950s, nearly 57,000 of Europe's displaced Jews also emigrated to the US.)

Yet Nasaw underscores the irony that the resettlement in Israel brought about the displacement of 750,000 Palestinians, who have been forced to live as refugees for generations. Indeed, the Allied victors, in their gross mishandling of World War II's DP crisis, “paved a path the developed world would follow when confronted by similar refugee crises in the second half of the twentieth and the first quarter of the twenty-first centuries,” Nasaw asserts.

As this book so powerfully illustrates, the war in Europe did not end when the fighting stopped: the casualties mounted for years. Today we inhabit a world of endless war, where the fighting never stops. (Consider that an American college freshman in 2020 has not lived a single day when her country was not at war, and the same situation applies much more brutally to millions of other young people around the globe.) The terrible upshot is that there are currently nearly eighty million displaced people worldwide, or 1 percent of the world's population. It's safe to say that the dismal legacy of the last million is in no danger of fading.

— Lorraine Glennon



## READING LIST

### New and noteworthy releases

#### **SHE COME BY IT NATURAL**

*By Sarah Smarsh '05SOA*

For decades, Dolly Parton was for many people more of a punch line than an icon. But for Sarah Smarsh, who grew up in rural Kansas, country music was “how we talked to each other in a place where feelings aren’t discussed.” And Dolly Parton reigned supreme — particularly among the tough, hard-working women in Smarsh’s life. Smarsh was a National Book Award finalist for her first book, *Heartland*, an incisive look into the rural working class. With her new book, she takes a deep dive into Parton’s cultural contributions to communities like her own, paying homage to the ways the singer gave a voice to so many women otherwise overlooked.

#### **THE GLORIOUS AMERICAN ESSAY**

*By Phillip Lopate '64CC*

With the country deeply divided and new questions about the future of democracy arising every day, there has never been a better time for an anthology that looks at the American experiment through some of its greatest thinkers and writers, from the Founding Fathers to the present day. For this new collection, editor Phillip Lopate — a prominent essayist and professor of writing at Columbia’s School of the Arts — sifted through

three centuries of American essays beginning in the Colonial period, seeking a diverse selection to represent the complicated history of a nation. The result is an eclectic and engaging mix, with authors as wide-ranging as George Washington and Zadie Smith, Frederick Douglass and Dorothy Parker.

#### **CRITIQUE AND PRAXIS**

*By Bernard E. Harcourt*

With the overlapping tensions of a global pandemic, a national reckoning on race and policing, and a fraught presidential election, 2020 was a year of unparalleled turmoil. In his new book, Columbia Law School professor Bernard E. Harcourt — a longtime social-justice activist — uses critical theory to help readers strategize about becoming more engaged citizens during this unique time. The most important shift in mindset, Harcourt argues, is thinking specifically about what each of us can do as individuals rather than what broad changes need to be made in society.

#### **LOVED AND WANTED**

*By Christa Parravani '03SOA*

Christa Parravani was forty years old when she found herself unexpectedly pregnant with her third child. The news was not welcome — Parravani’s marriage and finances were both shaky, and she was about to start a new job as a creative-writing instructor at West Virginia University. Parravani wanted to end the pregnancy, but there was little access to abortion in West Virginia,



and by the time she found an alternative — hours away in Pittsburgh — it was too late. Parravani’s memoir about her pregnancy and the choices that she was forced to make is candid, eye-opening, and heartbreaking. In addition to telling her own story, she paints a broad picture of how decreased access to abortion correlates directly with problems like infant mortality and child hunger.

#### **TINY NIGHTMARES**

*Coedited by Lincoln Michel '09SOA*

A story doesn’t have to be long to have staying power, especially if it’s as terrifying as the selections in this horror anthology, coedited by Lincoln Michel, a writing instructor at Columbia’s School of the Arts. None of the forty-two “flash fiction” entries are more than a few pages long, but all are inventive, surprising, and often downright blood-curdling. Michel includes original work

from fellow Columbia alums Selena Gambrell Anderson ’10SOA, Theresa Hottel ’18SOA, and Hilary Leichter ’12SOA (also a Columbia writing instructor), whose story about a witch casting a spell on an unsuspecting hipster couple is a standout.

#### **THE STORY OF EVOLUTION IN 25 DISCOVERIES**

*By Donald R. Prothero '82GSAS*

Geologist and paleontologist Donald R. Prothero is an expert at explaining complex scientific breakthroughs in easily digestible forms. In the previous three volumes of his “25 discoveries” series, Prothero tackled rocks, fossils, and dinosaurs. Now he turns his attention to evolution, chronicling twenty-five major moments that advanced our understanding of our place in the history of the universe. As always, Prothero is an entertaining, informative guide.

# A High-Minded Argument

Carl L. Hart, the Ziff Professor of Psychology at Columbia, studies the effects of drugs on the mind and body. In *Drug Use for Grown-Ups*, he critiques current drug laws and argues that recreational drugs can enrich the lives of responsible adults.



**Columbia Magazine:** What is your book's fundamental argument?

**Carl L. Hart:** The most vital argument focuses on the concept of liberty as guaranteed by our Declaration of Independence. The Declaration states that each of us is endowed with certain rights, including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," and that governments are created for the purpose of protecting these rights. I use the topic of drug use to show how we, as a society, are failing to live up to the country's noble promise to all citizens. Hundreds of thousands of Americans are arrested each year for pursuing pleasure and happiness by using drugs. The book also demonstrates that US drug laws and their enforcement are racist. Black people are four times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession as their white counterparts, even though the two groups use and sell drugs at similar rates.

**CM:** You used to believe that drug use was a major cause of violence in urban neighborhoods, like the one where you grew up. How has your thinking changed?

**CLH:** I believed, like many Americans, that drug addiction — crack addiction, specifically — was the cause of high

unemployment rates and that it made people violent. I no longer believe in this harmful fantasy. The problems that plagued my community had everything to do with poverty, inadequate access to affordable health care, lack of economic opportunities, racism, and police brutality, among other instances of long-standing governmental neglect and abuse. In other words, drugs didn't cause the problems, they exposed them.

**CM:** What role did your research play in altering your views?

**CLH:** It played a huge role, of course. My research entails giving drugs to people and carefully studying their immediate and delayed responses. The data did not support my preconceived notion that drugs were bad, period. For example, research participants consistently reported feelings of magnanimity, joy, empathy, euphoria, and other positive moods after taking drugs such as MDMA (a.k.a. Molly, Ecstasy), methamphetamine, and even crack cocaine. I have given thousands of doses to research participants and have never observed anything remotely resembling violence or aggression following the administration of crack or any other drug.

These data are ignored and distorted in order to keep the public fearful and outraged about drug use, and Black and brown bodies continue to pile up behind bars. This is dead wrong.

**CM:** With drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine, you say that 10 to 30 percent of users become addicts. Isn't that still a considerable risk?

**CLH:** It's not a tiny number. But what I wanted the reader to know is that the vast majority don't become addicted.

So we have to take the focus off the drug and look at other issues in people's lives to understand why they become addicted. The effects produced by drugs depend upon multiple factors, including dose, the method used to take the drug, and the setting in which drug use occurs.

**CM:** You have sampled many controlled substances, including heroin, which seems like the scariest of drugs.

**CLH:** Heroin is just another opioid, no more or less scary than other drugs.

**CM:** Would you like to see all these drugs legalized and regulated?

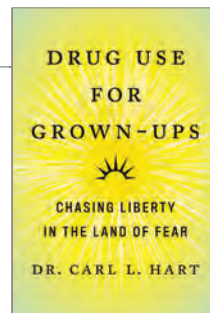
**CLH:** Yes. They should be regulated and legally available for adult consumption. This would create numerous jobs and generate hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue. Legal drug regulation would markedly reduce drug-related deaths caused by accidental overdoses.

A large proportion of these deaths are caused by adulterated substances purchased on the illicit market. A regulated market, with uniform quality standards, would virtually put an end to contaminated drug consumption and greatly reduce fatal accidental drug overdoses.

**CM:** Are you hoping other professionals come out about their drug use?

**CLH:** I hope people see that current laws violate the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. I hope readers also see that our drug laws are ruthlessly unjust, especially because of how they are weaponized against Black people and the poor. Martin Luther King Jr. aptly noted that "one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." I take this responsibility seriously.

— Julia M. Klein





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# Lorenzo Da Ponte's Second Act

How Mozart's librettist became the father of Italian studies at Columbia

One day in 1807, a fifty-eight-year-old man with hollow cheeks and deep-set eyes walked into the Isaac Riley & Co. bookstore at 123 Broadway. He was Lorenzo Da Ponte, a defrocked Italian priest who twenty years earlier had written the libretti to three Mozart operas — *Don Giovanni*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *Così fan tutte*. But gambling debts, love affairs, and politics had chased him from Europe, and in 1805 Da Ponte arrived in America, where he tried to support his family by opening a grocery in New Jersey. The store failed, and he opened another. It also failed.

Da Ponte had a special genius for doomed business ventures. He brought dozens of Italian books with him from overseas and ordered more in hopes of reselling them in his new country. This led him to Riley's, "a famous importer of European books and a pillar of culture," says Barbara Faedda, executive director of Columbia's Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America and author of *From Da Ponte to the Casa Italiana*. When Da Ponte asked Riley if he had any Italian books, another customer, Clement Clarke Moore 1798CC, 1829HON, interjected that he could count the great Italian writers on one hand. "Lorenzo was offended," says Faedda. "He said, 'I could spend a month naming eminent Italian writers and poets.'"

The twenty-eight-year-old Moore, a biblical scholar who later gained fame for the poem known as "The Night Before Christmas," was impressed by Da Ponte and introduced him to his father, the Right Reverend Benjamin Moore 1768KC, 1789HON, who was the president of Columbia College. Through the Moores, Da Ponte became a private Italian tutor for the offspring of elite New York families.

"He made friends with writers, painters, intellectuals," says Faedda. "Everyone was aware that he had worked with the great Mozart and spent years in the best courts and opera houses in Europe. Lorenzo was a star."

Da Ponte was born Emanuele Conegliano in a Jewish ghetto near Venice in 1749. His widowed father converted to Catholicism



to remarry, and Emanuele, as was the custom, took the name of the converting bishop. To further his education, he became a priest, and after writing polemical poems against the ruling class — and fathering two children with his mistress — he was banished from Venice. Through the connections of a poet friend, Da Ponte, the witty, scholarly sensualist, became the librettist for the Italian theater company in Vienna. There he worked with Mozart as well as with Mozart's archrival, Antonio Salieri. After Mozart died in 1791, Da Ponte's chronic mishaps in *amore* and finance would send him fleeing across the sea.

In 1825, long after his European triumphs and travails, and after years of tutoring, Da Ponte, at seventy-six, became the first professor of Italian at Columbia. He was not salaried: students paid him directly, and registra-

tion fluctuated. It was another perceived slight for a man forever bemoaning the perfidies of an ungrateful world. But he never stopped promoting Italian culture, and he produced *Don Giovanni* in New York in 1826. "Lorenzo's students were the only ones able to understand the Italian libretto," says Faedda.

Desperate as always for cash, Da Ponte sold 264 books to Columbia. Seven of them, including works by Machiavelli, historian Angelo di Costanzo, and painter-poet Lorenzo Lippi, survive in Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. And Da Ponte himself, who died in 1838 just shy of ninety, remains a Columbia presence. His portrait (by an unknown artist) hangs in the Casa Italiana, and in 1929 the Italian department created a Lorenzo Da Ponte chair, currently held by Dante scholar Teodolinda Barolini '78GSAS.

This winter, the Mozart Week festival in Salzburg, Austria — Mozart's birthplace — features a performance of *Don Giovanni*. Da Ponte may have based his tragic philanderer in part on his friend Casanova, but the character's Act 2 utterance could be Da Ponte's epitaph: *Long live the women! Long live good wine! Forever may they sustain and exalt humanity!*

— Paul Hond





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Grace Frisone '76SIPA, '77BUS  
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Grace at Columbia in 1977

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