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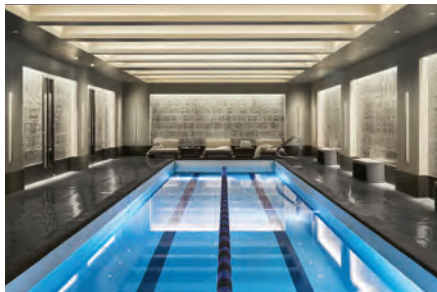
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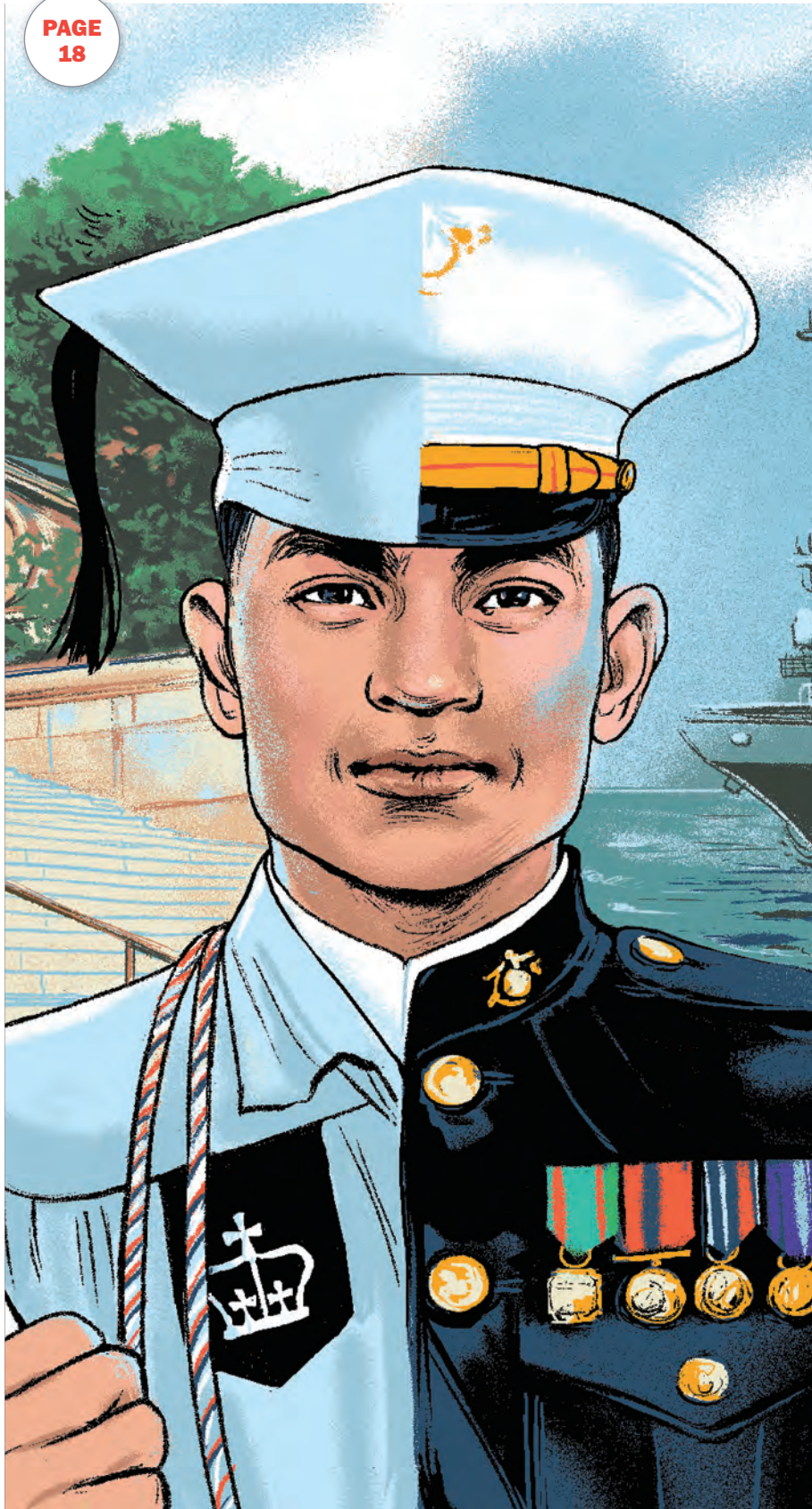
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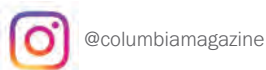
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## BEYOND SCHIZOPHRENIA

Thank you for David J. Craig’s important article “Learning to Live with the Voices in Your Head” (Winter 2022–23), which reports on the needs of young people with schizophrenia and the programs (such as Columbia’s OnTrackNY) that enable mental-health patients to lead lives of meaning and accomplishment.

Some years ago, I had the privilege of coauthoring *The Day the Voices Stopped*, a memoir of Ken Steele’s trials and triumphs as a schizophrenic — among which was his Mental Health Voter Empowerment Project, which brought twenty-eight thousand people with mental illness to the voting booths in New York alone. Ken would have been very pleased to see your article — as I was.

**Claire Berman ’57BC**  
New York, NY

## IS OBJECTIVITY POSSIBLE?

I was dismayed to read in the Winter 2022–23 issue

that the new dean of the Graduate School of Journalism appears open to doing away with objectivity as the bedrock principle of journalism, at least as taught at Columbia (“Objectivity and Its Discontents,” College Walk).

I have been writing for publication at least since 1949. I covered Washington from the time of Dwight Eisenhower to Bill Clinton, for newspapers from Chicago to New Mexico to Utah, so I am at least a thoroughly experienced reporter. And a reporter is what I was — expected to report accurately and objectively what I saw and heard.

Unfortunately, in recent years, I see journalists injecting their ideas of morality into their reporting. That may be acceptable for editorial writers and columnists, but not reporters.

I did not vote for Donald Trump — I consider him a menace to the republic — but it is sufficient to report accurately what he says or does. It is not for the reporter to label him a racist.

The reader in a democracy can be left to draw his or her own conclusions.

**Gordon Eliot White**  
’57JRN  
Hardyville, VA

I’d like to thank *Columbia Magazine* and author Paul Hond, as well as J-school dean Jelani Cobb and the participants in the panel discussion, for “Objectivity and Its Discontents” in the winter issue.

Since my earliest times practicing real journalism in the mid-1960s, it troubled me that “he said, she said” equivalencies and some unachievable notion of objectivity were standard precepts of the profession. Every reporter and editor makes many subjective judgments: which events and people to cover, whom to interview, which quotes to use, what the lede should be, even what headline to affix.

In these difficult days for traditional journalism, some news organizations are doing their greatest work. That includes calling a liar a liar, even on the

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## FEEDBACK

front page of the *New York Times*. The American people, and people everywhere, deserve to be presented with the truth as the truth, even if too many refuse to accept it.

**Carlton Carl '67CC,  
'68JRN**  
Martindale, TX

It was disheartening to read what was said at the panel discussion on journalistic objectivity. A news article on Trump's comments about the four congresswomen (that they should "go back" to the "crime infested [countries] from which they came") should report what they said, report what he said, and report the occasion

that elicited their remarks. Characterizing the comments as nativist and racist is an opinion and belongs in an editorial or opinion column, labeled as such. Putting them in a news article alienates those who disagree, arouses the suspicion that the reporting was slanted so as to support the opinion, and alienates those who don't like to be told what to think. This kind of news writing is exactly what has alienated so many Americans from the mainstream media.

**Carol Crystle '64GSAS,  
'71TC**  
Chicago, IL

The debate at Columbia reminded me of an import-

ant book by the late *New York Times* columnist James Reston, titled *The Artillery of the Press*, published in 1967 amid the furor of our country's ill-fated war in Vietnam.

Reston cogently explained the origins of objectivity as an ideal in good reporting. It did not, he said, come from any high-minded principle that shedding one's biases was the noble and honorable way to practice journalism. No, it was a matter of sheer economics. The architects of objectivity were the news services: the Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, and the like. These agencies had to write a single account of a

particular event and send it out to their vast clientele of newspapers and radio and TV outlets. The only way to please them all was to play the news straight.

**John Patrick Grace  
'65JRN**  
Huntington, WV

### THE LIVING EARTH

Your article "Sacred Trees, Holy Waters" (Winter 2022-23) truly centered me as a native of Colombia, South America — which as you know is named after Columbus, just like your magazine and university. I was born there but was stolen from my homeland at the age of six and sold onto the international market, ultimately to be



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raised by Christian Europeans here in Connecticut.

It has not been an easy ride for the thirty-five years since I came to this country. I have done a lot of soul-searching, unpacking, and unlearning to reconcile how I was raised with how I felt inside, since we Natives of the high Andes Mountains have an inner knowledge that the earth, our mother, is in fact, alive! But that is not at all how I was raised, which has caused a lot of fragmentation, confusion, and chaos throughout my life.



Over the years, I have researched my roots and learned from so many people, including Thomas Berry, whose work you discuss. He was the only true spirit who utterly encapsulated both worlds and thus helped me come to terms with how I felt as an Indigenous person who also represented the Christian Europeans who brought me up. Ever since, I have read basically all his work and taken related religion and ecology courses at Yale.

Your article is great for so many reasons, and I thank you so much for it. It has re-inspired me to continue to do the Great Work, as Thomas Berry called it, along with my fellow Native peoples of this great continent otherwise known to us as Turtle Island!

**Helena Maria Sasso**  
Woodbury, CT

## STATE SECRETS

Thank you for publishing your interview with history professor Matthew Connelly on the revelations found within previously hidden government documents, in particular about the “surprise” attack on Pearl Harbor, which Connelly calls “the original secret of the dark state” (“Uncovering America’s Dark Secrets,” *The Big Idea*, Winter 2022–23). But the story of President Roosevelt’s maneuverings to get us into the war, confirmed by Connelly’s deep archival research, is not new. There have been books and articles about this going back to the late 1940s, but they have mostly been suppressed or dismissed as the work of kooks and conspiracy-mongers. Better late than never.

**Martin Oppenheimer ’53GSAS**  
Franklin Township, NJ

## MARCHING PROUD

I greatly enjoyed your article about the Columbia marching band (“Marching to a Different Beat,” *College Walk*, Winter 2022–23). It reminded me of taking my youngest son and his friend up to the Yale Bowl in the early 1990s to see Columbia play Yale. At halftime this motley crew of misfits swarmed out on the field with their nontraditional instruments. It looked more like a rugby scrum than a band. The boys were delighted, and it was all they could talk about for the rest of the game.

I wish Brent Morden all the best as he makes over the band into something that all of us over the age of ten can be proud of.

**Gary Condon ’71BUS**  
Ridgefield, CT

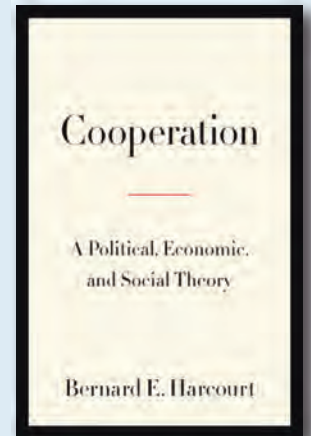
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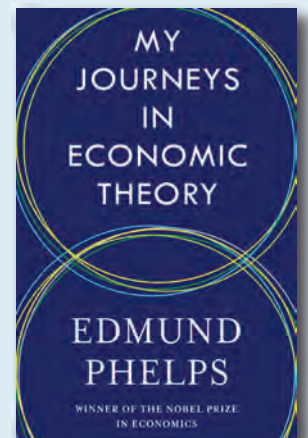
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—Cornel West



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—Eric Maskin, winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences



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# COLLEGE WALK

NOTES FROM  
116TH STREET  
AND BEYOND



## Welcoming Minouche Shafik

The University Trustees introduce Columbia's 20th president

Last spring, after Lee C. Bollinger announced that he would conclude his presidency at the end of the 2022–23 academic year, the twenty-four-member Board of Trustees formed a fifteen-member committee to find his successor. The committee, which included faculty, Trustees, and alumni, began its work in June of 2022, scouring the globe for six months in search of the ideal person to build on Bollinger's twenty-one-year legacy and lead Columbia into the future.

The results of that formidable endeavor were revealed earlier this year in a ceremony in the World Room in Pulitzer Hall, where the chair of the Trustees, Jonathan Lavine '88CC, described what had gone into the selection of Nemat “Minouche” Shafik as the twentieth president of Columbia University.

According to Lavine, the search committee, led by Trustees co-chair emerita Lisa Carnoy '89CC, spent four hundred hours researching, interviewing, and deliberating, aided by four advisory groups representing faculty, staff, students, and alumni and totaling more than eighty people. The committee performed four University-wide surveys that generated more than five thousand responses

about the qualities Columbians were looking for in their next president. It fielded some six hundred nominations and held in-depth interviews with the strongest candidates.

At the ceremony, Lavine recalled the moment last year when Claire Shipman '86CC, '94SIPA, a vice chair of the Board of Trustees, asked Lavine, whom she knew was traveling to London, if he could meet with a promising candidate who had popped up on an early list: Minouche Shafik, president of the London School of Economics and Political Science, an economist with degrees from the University of Massachusetts, the University of London, and the University of Oxford. Shafik had also been deputy governor at the Bank of England, where she led a review of misconduct in financial markets; a deputy managing director at the International Monetary Fund; and the youngest-ever vice president at the World Bank, where she worked on environmental issues.

A lunch in London was hastily arranged.

Lavine said that when he met with Shafik he was struck by her aura of leadership and was “blown away by how wildly prepared she was for a meeting she had found out about just three days

earlier.” She posed some of the most incisive questions about Columbia that Lavine had ever been asked and “appeared to know more in three days’ prep than I had accumulated in my thirty-five-year association with the University.” As Shafik and Lavine talked about science, politics, and economics, Lavine was impressed, he said, by her brilliance, empathy, curiosity, optimism, and sense of fairness. Further interviews, he added, revealed “a spectacular listener” who had “a fundamental understanding that universities exist to create, advance, and apply knowledge in the real world to solve pressing problems.”

In Pulitzer Hall, Lavine introduced the new president. The audience — which included, in the front row, Shafik’s husband, the climate scientist Raffael Jovine; President Bollinger and his wife, Jean Magnano Bollinger ’72TC; and J-school dean Jelani Cobb — rose in applause.

Shafik, sixty, opened her remarks by calling Bollinger “a legend in higher education” who “showed great respect for the traditions passed down over 268 years while simultaneously modernizing the institution and preparing it for what comes next.”

Then Shafik told the Columbia community about herself. She recounted how, when she was four, her family fled Egypt (their property had been seized in Nasser’s nationalization program) and spent the next decade moving around the American South, where she attended schools in Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina. “I was a child of the desegregation era, and when you’re always the new kid, in a new town, at a new school, books become your constant friends,” Shafik explained. “I read Jane

Goodall and wanted to become an anthropologist; now here I am just steps away from the oldest anthropology department in the US. I was fascinated by the Watergate scandal and read *All the President’s Men*, wanting to be a journalist and fight for truth and justice; and today I address you in the World Room of Pulitzer Hall, home to one of the world’s greatest journalism schools.”

Shafik emphasized how books and learning can surmount the most dislocating alienation. “For a family that was forced to start over, education was our salvation,” she said. So it is “for the many students at Columbia who come from parts of the world which are plagued by conflict or grinding poverty, who return home from Columbia with educations that enable them to plant seeds for democracy and opportunity.” She spoke from experience about the role of education in the lives of students “who are disadvantaged here in the US because of their race, faith, class, gender, or sexual orientation, who go on to overcome discrimination and thrive.”

With their enthusiastic applause, the World Room guests signaled accord with Lavine’s declaration that the search committee’s diligence had paid off. “We found the individual who will set Columbia on the course of a new transformative era,” Lavine said, validating an intensive search that he called “exhaustive and I daresay exhausting.”

But bringing Minouche Shafik to Columbia wasn’t Lavine’s only nugget of good news: after their arduous six-month, four-hundred-hour expedition, he said, the search-committee members were still speaking to each other.

— Paul Hond

## THE SHORT LIST



### REUNITE

If you graduated in a year ending in 3 or 8, this year’s reunions are for you! Alumni from select schools, including the College, engineering, business, and General Studies, can mingle with old friends around campus and enjoy planned activities. Most events take place the weekend of June 1–3, but check your school’s website for details.

### LISTEN

Miller Theatre closes its season with several free **pop-up concerts**, where audience members can sit directly onstage and sip a complimentary drink. Percussionist Sae Hashimoto and jazz pianist Brian Marsella take the stage on June 6, followed by a performance from chamber ensemble Loadbang on June 13. Composers Ann Cleare, Wang Lu ’12GSAS, and Miguel Zenón premiere new works on June 27. Concerts begin at 6:00 p.m. [millertheatre.com/events](http://millertheatre.com/events)



### SEE

Stop by the Rare Book and Manuscript Library to admire Columbia’s large collection of retro fanzines celebrating comic books and their creators. The exhibition, titled **Fanzines: Passion Made Personal**, was organized by Karen Green ’97GSAS and runs through June 30. [library.columbia.edu/libraries/rbml/exhibitions.html](http://library.columbia.edu/libraries/rbml/exhibitions.html)

### CONNECT

Entrepreneurs, leaders, and investors are encouraged to meet up and network at a **Columbia Venture Community happy hour**, held on the second Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m. Open to all at Linen Hall in the East Village. Register at [bit.ly/VentureHappyHour](http://bit.ly/VentureHappyHour)

# Talking Thor off the Ledge

How a B-school professor helped actor Chris Hemsworth stress-proof his life



Modupe Akinola and Chris Hemsworth

Thor, Norse god of thunder, could do worse with his trusty hammer than try to vanquish chronic stress. But no weapon, mythical or real, can strike down this silent killer, and so when Chris Hemsworth, the Australian actor who plays Thor in the Marvel movie franchise, decided to undertake a quest to live a longer, healthier life, he sought advice not from the mighty Odin but from a professor of management at Columbia Business School.

Modupe Akinola, an organizational psychologist who studies the mental and physiological effects of workplace stress, appears on the first episode of *Limitless with Chris Hemsworth* (streaming on Disney+), a six-part series co-created by Darren Aronofsky in which Hemsworth explores ways to realize the full potential of the human body. Akinola points out that everyday stressors — around work, money, relationships, health, societal issues — can increase the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, accelerated cellular aging, digestive problems, and

cancer. As Hemsworth's "stress coach," she encourages the thirty-nine-year-old father of three to confront the foe head-on.

Akinola puts Hemsworth through a harrowing series of high-stress trials, on the premise that if he can learn to control his stress in extreme conditions, he'll be better able to handle the quotidian stuff (fatherhood, Hollywood). The first test is a Special Forces drill in which Hemsworth must perform underwater tasks with his hands and feet bound. The next day, at a firefighter training facility, he must enter a burning building to rescue a dummy. All of this leads up to the ultimate test for Hemsworth, who has a fear of heights: walking out onto the arm of a crane projecting from the roof of a skyscraper, nine hundred feet above Sydney Harbor.

Months later and ten thousand miles away, Akinola, who joined the B-school in 2009, sits in her third-floor office in Kravis Hall on the Manhattanville campus and reflects on the experience, which she calls

"incredible and amazing." She notes that stress, which she defines as "a situation where the demands exceed your resources to cope," is, in itself, a good thing: "Our stress is designed to help us in life-threatening situations," she says. "The brain releases the hormones cortisol and adrenaline, preparing the body for fight or flight." But when the stress circuit doesn't shut down, and the cortisol continues to flow uncontrolled, our health takes the hit.

So what can we do, short of putting ourselves in extremely stressful situations and practicing staying calm? On *Limitless*, Akinola provides a toolkit of stress-reducing techniques, such as "box breathing" (inhale for four seconds; hold for four seconds; exhale for four seconds; hold for four seconds; repeat), which slows a runaway heartbeat. Then there is "positive self-talk": "If you take on a challenging situation and begin to regret it, tell yourself you're being courageous or building resilience." Akinola also recommends "mindful meditation": focusing on the moment and the sensations of your body. "We all face emotional stressors that we suppress," Akinola says. "To be mindful is to let these emotions come to the fore and acknowledge them. When we are present and aware of our stress, we create an opportunity to use it as it was designed to be used: to help us rise to the occasion."

Akinola, who was raised in East Harlem and has a BA, an MA in social psychology, an MBA, and a PhD in organizational behavior, all from Harvard, says she thrives in intense situations: "I've always liked competition and pressure." At the same time, she understands the need to unplug. She meditates every morning, and each December she does a ten-day silent meditation retreat. No phone,

no laptop, no work. Each time she goes, she is seized with doubt — *will I really be able to do this for ten days?* — but by the end, she says, “I feel I can’t imagine life without it.”

When Hemsworth was finally teetering high above Sydney, secured by cables but scared witless, Akinola’s methods helped get him across the beam and back. Later, in New York, for a promotional event in which the *Limitless* team invited reporters to scale the upper



Akinola prepares Hemsworth for a nine-hundred-foot-high crane walk.

incline of the 1,300-foot skyscraper at 30 Hudson Yards, Akinola was there to offer support.

“One thing I reminded them,” she says, “is that when your heart starts racing, that’s your body telling you there’s something life-threatening that’s about to happen. But sometimes your mind needs to say: ‘Thank you for letting me know there’s some danger here. I’ve got this.’”

— Paul Hond



## Secrets of the Treasure Room

Tales (and heads) from the law library’s special collections

On a recent Monday, Irina Kandarasheva, the special-collections librarian for the law library, in Jerome L. Greene Hall, met some visitors in the third-floor lobby, brought them up on the elevator to the sixth floor, and led them down a hallway to an unmarked door. With a jingle of keys she turned the lock; the door opened, and her guests entered a chamber of antiquarian wonders: eleven rows of packed bookcases, suffused with the musty, pulpy, vanilla-tinged perfume of decaying fiber and glue. “Smells like rare books,” one visitor said. For a moment, everyone stopped to breathe in the soothing fragrance, which wafted sweetly from hoary volumes whose spines of faded reds and browns encompassed centuries of legal literature dating back to the Middle Ages.

Many libraries and museums have a “treasure room” — a depository for the most valuable items in a collection — and the one at Columbia Law School is the jewel of the law library, one of the largest academic law libraries in the US. Here, in this hidden vault, by way

of donations and purchases, are the personal libraries of Founding Father John Jay 1764KC and legal scholar James Kent, the first professor of law at Columbia College; the bound lectures of Theodore William Dwight, the first dean of the law school; transcripts of the Nuremberg trials; notebooks of nineteenth-century Columbia law students, including Theodore Roosevelt 1899HON, handwritten with a calligraphic precision now mostly extinct; student notes from Litchfield Law School, the first independent law school in the US; and an edition, one of about forty in the world, of the Bracton manuscript, a thirteenth-century compendium of English law originally compiled by the cleric and jurist Henry de Bracton, written in Latin on parchment with filigreed flourishes of red and blue.

Not all the treasures were between covers. Kandarasheva showed off the diploma of Ruth Bader Ginsburg ’59LAW, ’94HON, as well as a lace collar that Columbia Law School had given the associate justice in 2018, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of her investiture to the Supreme Court. The librarian then passed a pedestal bearing the name Paul Robeson 1923LAW, with a screw sticking out from the top where a bust should be. “Where’s the rest of him?” said a visitor.

Kandarasheva explained that the bronze head of the acclaimed singer, actor, and human-rights activist, fashioned by the American sculptor Bo Walker, was being spruced up for events this year honoring the hundredth anniversary of Robeson’s law-school graduation.

It’s been a notable year all around for the law school, which recently received a \$17.5 million gift from Alia Tutor ’01LAW — the largest single commitment in the school’s history. The gift will help fund a complete renovation of the law library, and — to Kandarasheva’s delight — provide more display space for the books, manuscripts, and bound transcripts of the treasure room.

— Paul Hond





# GIFTS FROM THE EARTH

**Indigikitchen founder Mariah Gladstone  
'15SEAS wants to put Native ingredients  
back into Native diets**

By Nicole Estvanik Taylor **Photos by Whitney Snow**



It's a rainy day in Babb, Montana, and as a pot of cedar tea simmers on the stove, Mariah Gladstone '15SEAS looks into the camera and explains the medicinal purposes of the traditional brew. She discusses the tradeoff between using tender new sprigs (better, sweeter flavor) and older growth (higher in vitamin C). She reassures viewers that other conifers, including pine and juniper, also make excellent teas and then offers a quick lesson in harvesting branches without damaging the trees. To accompany the beverage, she crisps up some sunflower maple cookies in a frying pan, noting the dough balls can also be eaten raw or, "if you want to get really fancy," topped with berries.

classes, speaking engagements, and consulting gigs.

"I started with the recipes in the kitchen, but I've branched out into a larger context of food-systems knowledge, really looking at the process of seed to plate," she says. That includes helping to build gardens and supporting Native food producers, as well as teaching the history of how colonization disrupted Indigenous foodways.

"Every day I get to do something different. But it all serves the same purpose," she says. "Ultimately, I want people to eat more Indigenous foods."

In particular, Gladstone wants Indigenous people to eat more Indigenous foods. In her videos, she extols the nutri-

privileged compared to a lot of folks." She spent summers on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, where she saw the effects of this public-health crisis but didn't know much about its causes until her college years. Her mother, Linda Howard, was working at that time as a marketing officer for the Montana Department of Agriculture while writing a thesis for her master's degree in public relations. Howard told Gladstone about her research, part of which evaluated awareness within reservation communities of the term "food sovereignty" and of programs created to foster it. Today, Gladstone can readily recite a widely adopted definition of the term put forth by the international farmers' organization La Via Campesina: "the right of peoples to healthy, affordable food that is culturally appropriate and harvested through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the right to govern those food systems."

Her mother's thesis got Gladstone wondering exactly how achieving food sovereignty had become such a struggle within Indigenous nations. As she read more about the topic, she found "a lot of evidence of intentional disruption in food systems that was caused by both the US and Canadian governments." For example, she says, the US government's deliberate near-eradication of the buffalo population in the nineteenth century destroyed a major resource for her ancestors, "not just for food but also clothing, shelter, tools, everything. We Blackfeet were starved into selling the lands that are currently the eastern half of Glacier National Park." She says many tribes became dependent on government rations, which included things they weren't accustomed to eating, such as wheat flour and sugar. "There was also a law passed by Congress which said that they could cut off our rations if we didn't send our kids to boarding school," Gladstone says, referring to federal schools established to forcibly separate Native children from their families and strip them of their identities and culture.

Confronting this painful history and its part in dismantling the Native

## When Indigenous people were disconnected from their traditional foods, the transmission of ancestral knowledge about those foods was also disrupted.



In segments for her online cooking show *Indigikitchen*, Gladstone, the daughter of a Cherokee mother and a Blackfeet father, demonstrates how to make a variety of dishes featuring traditional Native foods: amaranth crackers, white-bean coffee cake, sweet-potato hash browns, pumpkin soup, chokecherry-braised rabbit, blue-corn-crusted whitefish, and more. Just like cedar, sunflowers, and maple syrup, the main ingredients in these recipes have been consumed for thousands of years by inhabitants of the lands now called the Americas.

A portmanteau of the words Indigenous, digital, and kitchen, *Indigikitchen*, which began in 2016 as a collection of cooking videos that Gladstone produced in her free time, has grown into a thriving one-woman business of the same name. Gladstone has more than twenty-four thousand total followers on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, and she reaches many more people via demonstrations,

traditional benefits of game meat and fish, berries and seeds, root vegetables and legumes, and numerous other seasonal foods on which Native American diets were based before contact with Europeans. "Those diets transitioned rapidly from high-protein, high-fat, high-fiber, and very few grains to a lot of empty carbohydrates — and now a lot of preservatives or processed foods," she says. Re-embracing traditional foods, she believes, will not only reconnect people with their ancestral culture but will also help to counteract the diet-related health crisis in Indigenous communities.

"Native people face sky-high rates of diabetes, obesity, malnutrition, and heart disease," she says. "We also have higher mortality rates from those diet-related illnesses than non-Native populations. In Montana, we have life expectancies of twenty years less than the non-Native population."

Gladstone, who was raised in the city of Kalispell, in northwestern Montana, says her own upbringing "was relatively



American diet is part of Indigikitchen's mission. "I talk about issues that a lot of people wouldn't touch," she says. "But because it's through food as the vehicle, it's a lot more approachable — it becomes storytelling."

When Indigenous people were disconnected from their traditional foods, the transmission of ancestral knowledge about those foods was also disrupted. Growing up, Gladstone had absorbed some wisdom from family and community elders: where to forage for serviceberries, for example, or the many household uses of peppermint. During summers home from college, she began to research the subject in earnest.

"I was at my dad's house on the reservation — without running water, about thirty-five miles away from the nearest grocery store," she recalls. "I started thinking about where I could get food. I realized that there were a ton of foods right outside the front door. I ended up, of course, picking gallons of berries but also learning about fireweed." The shoots of the fuchsia-blossomed stalks, which grow throughout much of the Northern Hemisphere, can be steamed like asparagus, and the leaves and flowers are edible as well. She wondered what other food sources she might have overlooked. "I was working as a park ranger, too, so I spent a lot of time in a booth at our entrance gate reading plant-identification books. I started getting a lot more interested in the botany of the landscape."

The Native ingredients that interest Gladstone come from landscapes all over Turtle Island (a name used by some Indigenous peoples to refer to North and Central America). She often cooks them using tools her forebears didn't have; she's particularly fond of her Instant Pot. She also takes inspiration from around the world, concocting her own versions of pad thai with zucchini noodles and of lasagna layered with butternut squash and bison. "We can keep blending and sharing and recreating," she says. "Our culinary traditions are not stuck in the past, and neither are we."

Gladstone sometimes jokes that Indigikitchen, with its emphasis on living off the land, is preparing people to survive the zombie apocalypse. "Part of the reason I picked Columbia," she says with a relatively straight face, "is because it's zombie-proof: you can just seal the gates and walk around in the tunnels under the campus."

If the walking dead had invaded Morningside Heights during Gladstone's college years, sheltering in her dorm might not have been such a bad option. In the basement kitchen of Manhattan House (the Native residential community in River Hall, since relocated and renamed Indigehouse), she turned out elaborate late-night desserts for her suitemates to distract herself from exams. Food figured prominently in the community-building she participated in as a member of Columbia's Native American Council and as president of the group that organizes

the University's Native American Heritage Month.

At school she yearned for the foods she'd grown up eating. Like bison: ubiquitous in her home state, elusive in New York City beyond upscale burger menus. Or wild rice, which her father, the musician Jack Gladstone, received as payment for performances in the Great Lakes region and used in everything from soups to omelets. More than once, she flew back to Columbia after winter break with frozen moose or elk meat packed in her carry-on bag ("I remember thinking, If they lose my luggage, I do not want this to thaw").

Gladstone had applied early-decision to Columbia because she liked its approach to environmental engineering "as a proactive solution rather than a reactive solution." She recalls being disturbed during high school by seeing the flares of natural-gas wells as she drove across the Blackfeet Reservation

## THREE SISTERS SOUP

### INGREDIENTS

1 winter squash (choose your favorite! e.g., butternut, acorn, kabocha)  
1 tablespoon avocado oil  
1 yellow onion, diced  
4 cloves garlic, minced  
2 quarts vegetable stock or water  
1 teaspoon dried thyme  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 pound fresh, frozen, or canned corn kernels  
1 15 oz. can cannellini beans, drained  
¼ cup green onions, sliced  
Salt to taste

### INSTRUCTIONS

Halve the squash and scoop out the seeds. Peel the squash and cube into 1-inch pieces.

In a large stockpot, heat the oil, garlic, onions, and squash over medium heat and sauté until the onions are translucent. Add spices and stir for 60 seconds.



Add the stock or water, corn, and beans and simmer for 20 minutes or until the squash is fork-tender.

Taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Garnish with green onions. Enjoy!

and hearing worried discussions about the effect of hydraulic fracturing on the soil. “I wanted to get in and find a different solution rather than being the person who says no.” Given her region’s powerful winds and plentiful sunshine, she figured studying renewable-energy technologies was a proactive way to join the conversation.

She returned to Montana after graduation to settle in Babb, a small town on the reservation surrounded by lakes, mountains, prairies, and aspens. She had her degree in environmental engineering, but her career didn’t proceed as she expected. “By the time I got back home, my community had already shut down a lot of that natural-gas development. The wells had been filled with cement, the roads were back to prairies,” she says.

She took a management job in the engineering department of BNSF Railway but during her time off pursued her growing interest in traditional food. In 2016, she attended a Native nutrition

conference in Minneapolis, and after making a spontaneous comment that “someone” should start an Indigenous cooking show, she decided to be that someone. She bought a camera on eBay, secured it to a tripod with a headband, and filmed her first recipe: a berry-studded Potawatomi wild-rice dish that her classmate Lakota Pochedley ’13CC had often brought to potlucks on campus.

“Like most millennials — like most everybody — when I want to learn something, whether that’s how to snake a drain or how to cook a recipe, I go to YouTube,” she says. “I wanted to make our traditional recipes Googleable in that way.”

Indigikitchen has been Gladstone’s full-time job since 2018. Over the years, her videos have evolved. That first clip about berry rice used neither her face nor her voice; it was optimized for social media (and the reservation’s limited Internet bandwidth), with captions and a brisk forty-five-second runtime. She still primarily shoots videos

focused entirely on her hands as they chop and stir, though she’s upgraded her overhead filming setup with a sturdier ring light / tripod combo. She’s also started shooting some longer-form videos, like the one about cedar tea, that are more in a classic cooking-show style. But, as she adds with a laugh, “it takes me so long to do those because I have to actually put makeup on.” Sometimes she steps away from the stove to produce tutorials on traditional growing and harvesting skills: starting a compost pile, cleaning and filleting trout, or leaching the bitter tannins from freshly ground acorn flour.

For someone who headed off to college with wind turbines and solar panels in mind, Indigikitchen might seem like a digression, but not to Gladstone. “For me it was all about that foundation in sustainability,” she says. It was important to her to “look at our Indigenous communities as places of abundance rather than places of scarcity.”

To further her work with Indigikitchen, Gladstone completed a master’s degree in 2021 at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in coupled natural and human systems. Her adviser was botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and the author of the best-selling essay collection *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Kimmerer has written extensively on the reciprocity between humans and nature, and Gladstone admires how Kimmerer discusses the concept, which is important to many Indigenous cultures, in a way broader audiences can embrace. “A lot of foods were traditionally thought of as gifts,” Gladstone explains. “They were gifts from the earth, gifts from different plants and animals. And when you’re given a gift, it is often with the responsibility to return a gift.” She hopes Indigikitchen will encourage ecological responsibility, including among non-Indigenous people who might find her content through curiosity about diverse cuisines or healthful eating.

“People want to be connected to the land,” she says. “Anyone who knows



about where their food comes from — whether it’s from a local farmer down the street or through berry-picking in their backyard — is immediately instilled with a greater desire to care for those places.”

When Gladstone was a child, her dad and grandfather tilled a garden for her. She grew corn, beans, and squash, dubbed the “three sisters” by the Cherokee and other peoples because they can be planted in a mutually beneficial arrangement: corn scaffolding the beans, which enrich the soil, which is sheltered by the squash’s broad leaves. “I got to see the magic of seeds transforming into plants that I could bring into the house and then watch turn into food on my plate,” says Gladstone. “I was lucky to have a really good understanding of where food comes from.”

She knew many other Native kids didn’t grow up with that advantage. Last year, one of Indigikitchen’s projects was to create a toolkit to make it easier for Montana public schools to include Indigenous foods in their meals. The document helps food-service directors identify and procure such foods, match them up with USDA nutrition requirements, and incorporate them into their breakfast and lunch programs. Gladstone also created several videos to educate students about these foods. The project was a collaboration with four reservation school districts and the Montana chapter of the nonprofit No Kid Hungry. According to KayAnn Miller, the organization’s communications and engagement specialist, “the response to the toolkit has been incredible, and it really couldn’t have been created without Mariah.”

Gladstone also serves on the board of FAST (Food Access and Sustainability Team) Blackfeet. The nonprofit’s activities include a food bank, a “food pharmacy” that offers nutrition counseling and cooking classes, and a gardening-education program. “We’re looking at how we build a community that doesn’t need an emergency food supply because we can feed ourselves,” she says.

Gladstone has been recognized as a Champion for Change by the Aspen

Institute’s Center for Native American Youth; has delivered a talk on the significance of Indigenous foods at her state’s longest-running TEDx conference; and has advocated before a US Senate committee for legislation allowing tribes to tailor federal food-assistance programs to their local needs and traditions. In 2020 she was selected as an MIT Solve Indigenous Communities fellow, and in 2021

“A lot of foods were traditionally thought of as gifts. They were gifts from the earth, gifts from different plants and animals. And when you’re given a gift, it is often with the responsibility to return a gift.”



she was featured on the *Today* show. This series of achievements has raised her profile to the point that she spends more time fielding requests for media appearances than pitching her services. Her job requires frequent travel. Last year she gave demonstrations at the World Food Forum in Rome and planned the menu for a thousand-person banquet at the Intertribal Agriculture Council’s annual conference in Las Vegas. In November — Native American Heritage Month — she slept a total of three nights at home.

While some figures in the growing movement for the revitalization of Native cuisine have gained visibility through their culinary bona fides, Gladstone has never aspired to be a professional chef. She recalls her bemusement when the hotel catering staff for the Las Vegas banquet asked how she wanted the salad cut: “It never occurred to me to cut salad in some particular way!”

Miller sees Gladstone’s down-to-earth approach as a plus. “She’s very straightforward and easy to engage with,” she says. “Mariah’s lessons don’t require special equipment or anything fancy. I can actually cook along with her videos using what’s already on hand in my kitchen, and I can learn about nutrition and health while I’m doing it.”

On social media, Gladstone intersperses food-related posts with glimpses of her hobbies, which include hiking and kayaking, beading earrings, making soap, and performing the occasional acrobatic feat. During college, she tried out an aerial fitness class; she stuck with it when she returned to Montana and now teaches it at a Kalispell studio called Levitation Nation. One video she posted

on Twitter shows her suspended high above the floor in a length of twisted fabric. Suddenly she allows herself to unravel and tumble, the silks catching her just before she hits the floor.

“Drops are almost always terrifying the first time,” she says. “But I’m lucky I have folks there that lift me up and support me. And they get less scary the more I do them.”

Gladstone keeps expanding Indigikitchen’s outreach. This year she’s writing an Indigenous cookbook for kids — “It’s super important that kids have a resource that is really their own” — and producing a new video series called *Indigikitchen: On the Road*, featuring the stories behind recipes crowdsourced from Native contributors across the Americas.

Several of those she interviewed shared anecdotes about the health benefits they’ve experienced from eating more Indigenous ingredients in place of white flour, refined sugar, and other processed foods. “One woman told me, ‘I switched my diet completely. I totally turned things around and reversed my diabetes,’” Gladstone says. “I heard stories like that from people all over who were contributing recipes. That in itself is really cool, and justification for the work I get to do.”

# SOLDIER, SAILOR, SCHOLAR, GRAD

With some 700 student veterans on campus, Columbia has become the center of veteran life in the Ivies. Here's how it happened.

By Paul Hond Illustrations by Agata Nowicka

Grayson Noyes adjusted the bow tie of his black tuxedo and approached the microphone. It was Veterans Day 2022, and Noyes, a senior at the School of General Studies and president of Military Veterans of Columbia (MilVets), looked out with pride on the five hundred students, faculty, administrators, alumni, and civic leaders who had gathered at Chelsea Piers for the Columbia Military Ball. The crowd, many in brass-buttoned dress uniforms, had come to salute Columbia's student veterans and to honor President Lee C. Bollinger for his two decades of commitment to veteran education. Noyes, who joined the Marine Corps out of high school, flexed his Core muscles and dropped some Latin: "Here at MilVets we have a motto: *Hic sunt leones*. Here are lions. The first Roman cartographers wrote the words onto maps to mark uncharted, unknown territories. For most it was a warning; it was a sign of danger. But for everyone here tonight in this room, *Hic sunt leones* is an invitation, a challenge, and a call to action."

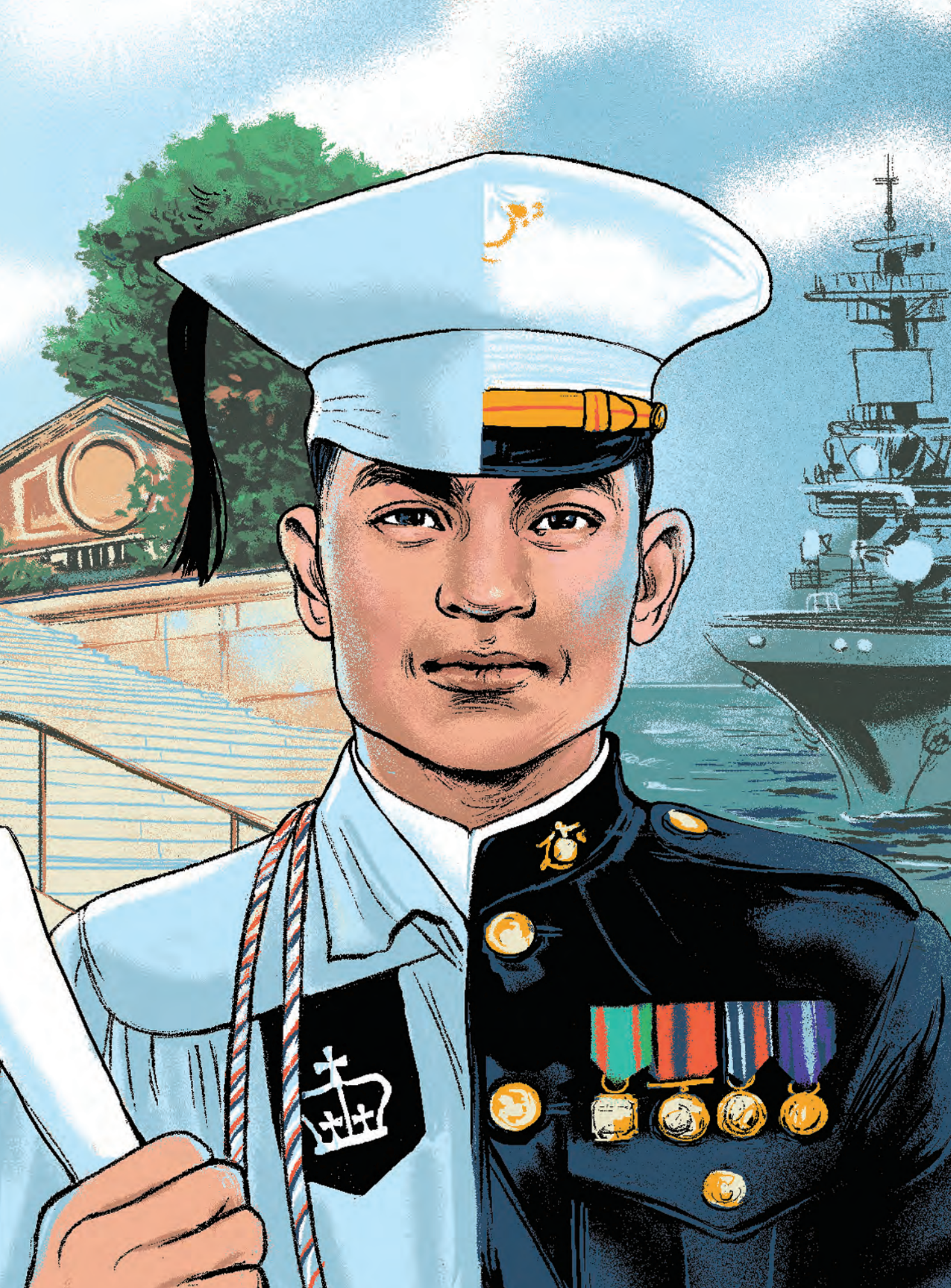
A few weeks later, in Low Library, Noyes introduced a talk by Carlos Del Toro, the secretary of the Navy. Del Toro, a New York-raised retired Navy officer responsible for nearly a million sailors, Marines, reservists, and civilian personnel, had come to campus to visit the Columbia University Center for Veteran Transition and Integration (CVTI) in its new space in Kent Hall and to present Bollinger with the Navy's highest civilian honor, the Distinguished Public Service Award. *President Bollinger's leadership was key in bridging the civilian-military divide on campus and bringing a diversity of views to the classroom*, the citation read.

In Low, Del Toro argued that a strong Navy is indispensable to national security. He praised

Columbia's Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps program (NROTC) and its midshipmen's school (1940-45), which during World War II sent twenty-one thousand officers to the Pacific Fleet, and quoted Theodore Roosevelt 1899HON from his days as assistant secretary of the Navy: "We ask for a great Navy; we ask for an armament fit for the nation's needs, not primarily to fight but to avert fighting." Del Toro repeated: "To avert fighting."

A military ball and a warm visit from the seventy-eighth secretary of the Navy might not be the first things people associate with Columbia, a university with a well-known history of antiwar sentiment and skepticism toward the military among students and faculty. Yet today Columbia is considered a model for veteran education and support. There are some seven hundred US veterans enrolled at Columbia — more than at all the other Ivies combined. Around four hundred are undergraduates in the School of General Studies, with another three hundred spread across the graduate schools, mostly at SIPA, the law school, and the business school. The undergrads tend to be enlisted people who have finished their service; the grad students are largely officers (active-duty officers often head to SIPA for two-year graduate degrees on their way to teach at West Point). They come from every branch of the military, from varied backgrounds and viewpoints. They are first-generation college students. They are the children and grandchildren of veterans. They are immigrants. They have flown helicopters, maintained warships, assisted in peacekeeping missions. They have worked as electricians, programmers, translators. Some have seen combat. But for all their differences, these Columbians share an exceptional quality: a deep-seated desire to serve.





For Noyes, as for many student veterans, education is a means to expand his ability to fulfill what he calls “a lifelong need for altruistic and selfless service.” As a Marine in Japan, the Philippines, Mongolia, and South Korea, “I felt I was a force for good in the world,” Noyes says. “But I also recognized that as an enlisted member I could only effect a certain amount of change. I see my Columbia education as a means to effect greater change on a grander scale.”

How the cultural climate at Columbia tipped from antiwar to pro-veteran — from University President Grayson Kirk and the administration’s botched response to the 1968 student protests against racism and campus-based weapons research to MilVets president Grayson Noyes and Columbia’s reputation as an exemplary veteran-friendly institution — is a story decades in the making, driven by time, history, and a confluence of far-sighted Columbians. First among them is Peter Awn, dean of the School of General Studies from

gay people known as Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell — which paved the way for the return, after a thirty-year absence, of military-officer training at Columbia.

**P**eter Awn needed a good marketer. It was 1998, and Awn, a year into his deanship, was eager to recruit a diverse body of students to the School of General Studies. So he asked Curtis Rodgers, a marketing manager at AT&T with a background in higher education, to come to GS and reshape the student population. Rodgers, who is now vice dean of GS, became dean of admissions, and he and Awn began talking about veteran recruitment. Those conversations became more urgent after al-Qaeda militants attacked the US on September 11, 2001. The subsequent military mobilization, first in Afghanistan and eventually in Iraq, portended a large number of returning veterans. “These are folks who decide service is the path to take immediately after high school, or who go to college and find it isn’t the

figure out how to make connections.” Rodgers cold-called military bases, then visited them. He went to Camp Pendleton in California and Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. He met commanding officers who invited him onto installations to host information sessions and meet exiting service members. The veteran numbers at GS began to rise: twenty, thirty, fifty.

Paul Yates ’05GS, ’08BUS, a cofounder of MilVets who served in the Navy on special boat teams, was one of a handful of veterans on campus when he entered GS in 2002. “The war on terror made us more interesting,” he says. “I’d been in the Navy for fourteen years, been to the Middle East. Students and a lot of professors really appreciated my perspective.”

Then, in 2008, Congress passed the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and President George W. Bush signed it. “That changed everything,” Rodgers says, “because it eliminated the barrier of tuition cost for the first time since the 1944 GI Bill.” Rodgers knew it would have a huge impact on enrollment, and he told Awn that they should participate in a provision of the bill called the Yellow Ribbon Program, through which the US Department of Veterans Affairs (the VA) would match every dollar that Columbia put in, allowing students to cover their tuition and other fees. “Peter said absolutely, and we started to work with the central University folks.”

Columbia’s administration was faced with a decision. Participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program would mean committing money to enrolling student veterans on an activist campus that four decades earlier had voted to eliminate NROTC, citing its inappropriate influence on Columbia’s academic mission, and where the present-day war in Iraq was highly unpopular. “What we knew,” says Rodgers, “was that these were incredibly talented students.” The MilVets president at the time, Peter Kim ’09GS, rallied support from deans and veterans from across the University. “The question became, how can we as community members change the dialogue about the intellectual value that

“The war on terror made us more interesting. I’d been in the Navy for fourteen years, been to the Middle East. Students and a lot of professors really appreciated my perspective.”

1997 to 2017. Awn believed that veterans enriched the Columbia classroom and that higher education was vital to cultivating healthy civil-military relations in a democracy. And he often reminded people that many of the school’s first students were World War II veterans coming to Columbia on the GI Bill.

The University has a long tradition of engagement with the military: born from the ashes of the American Revolution (the original King’s College in Lower Manhattan was used as a military hospital during the conflict), Columbia has been represented in every war in the nation’s history. A five-star general and future commander in chief, Dwight D. Eisenhower ’47HON, served as its president, and it graduated another future commander in chief, Barack Obama ’83CC, who ended the military’s discriminatory policy toward

right path at that time,” Rodgers says. “There’s enormous talent and capability in the veteran population, and sometimes military service gives the student the discipline to achieve that potential.”

Awn and Rodgers thought about the role GS ought to play as an undergraduate college created for nontraditional students — ballet dancers, actors, entrepreneurs, and others who take a different road out of high school — and how military skills like teamwork and accomplishing a mission applied naturally to the classroom or the lab. And so they decided to do something radical, especially for the Ivy League: they would engage veterans directly and launch an all-out recruitment effort.

“It’s funny to think back now, but we didn’t know what we were doing,” says Rodgers. “We just knew we needed to

we bring as veterans to the classroom?” says Kim. “It shifted my mindset about how I interacted with fellow veterans on campus, and our role in the Columbia community.” Led by President Bollinger, the administration signed on to the Yellow Ribbon Program, and the veteran population swelled. Says Rodgers, “Peter Awn and I used to remind ourselves that the first time some of our undergraduates would ever meet a veteran might be in a Columbia classroom.”

In Awn’s estimation, there could be no more unlikely advocate for veteran enrollment or the return of NROTC than himself: a gay former Jesuit priest and a professor of religion. “He’d say, ‘If you’d put me out there and said, this is the person who’s going to champion this idea, people would have been shocked,’” Rodgers remembers. “That gave him a lot of credibility. Peter believed society made a mistake in the 1960s and ’70s in how we treated service members, blaming them for policy. Veterans were treated horribly.”

Bringing in veterans was one thing; bringing back NROTC was another. For the Columbia community at large, Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell made it a nonstarter. Then, in 2010, in the lead-up to the termination of the policy, President Obama dispatched the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mike Mullen, to Columbia to talk about re-engaging with the military. Columbians grappled again with the fundamental question of whether a military training program like NROTC was compatible with a college campus. Some held that the top-down, ask-no-questions military model was antithetical to academic precepts of free inquiry, while others, like sociology professor emeritus Allan Silver, articulated a vision of mutually flowing benefits between the military and the University, resulting in better military leaders and a stronger civil society. In 2011, after years of upholding the NROTC ban, the University Senate voted again on reinstatement. This time it passed, 55–10.

That decision gave even more momentum to recruitment, and the number of veterans on campus surged into the hundreds. Over the next few years, as the needs of veterans evolved and Columbia

learned how to meet them, Awn and Rodgers considered how Columbia could share its lessons with the wider veteran community. Working with the administration, they developed a plan, and in 2017, the University established the Center for Veteran Transition and Integration, which offers free online courses and counseling services to veterans nationwide as they move from the military to college. Run through GS and led by Jason Dempsey ’08GSAS, a former infantry officer in Iraq and Afghanistan and an expert on military demographics, CVTI helps veterans figure out the path to higher education and shares tools with community colleges — a frequent first stop for college-bound veterans.

CVTI’s resources are also available to Columbia students, faculty, and staff, bolstering student-veteran services on campus. “When I got to Columbia eight years ago, I’d hear stories of veterans feeling as if they didn’t belong,” says David Keefe ’20SPS, an artist who served as a reconnaissance scout in Iraq and who today is senior assistant dean of student-veteran initiatives at GS. “But now they feel they belong in the classroom and at activities or events, and nonveteran students almost expect that veterans will be there. The campus culture really has changed over time.”

Something else has happened over time — what Keefe calls “a distancing of the student-veteran experience from what the military is primarily designed to do, which is fight wars.

“In peacetime, a lot of people sign up for four to eight years, learn their skills, then transition to the workforce, and it becomes almost a career-building stepping stone,” he says. “So it’s important for us as older veterans to help them understand the destructive capabilities of the military and what it can do, so that we can make better decisions on where the military goes and how it’s deployed, and how we think about and care for vet-

erans. The more we can talk about it, the better the civilian–military relationship.”

That relationship is at the heart of Jason Dempsey’s work. For him, CVTI is a site for reflection on veterans’ place in society and the meaning of citizenship itself. “This isn’t about helping a subpopulation,” he says. “This is about asking, how do we integrate service into all aspects of our lives? How do we deal with those who serve and help them be better citizens? And how do we in turn interact with them so we’re all better citizens?”



In January 2019, Peter Awn was crossing Claremont Avenue at 116th Street when he was struck by an SUV. He later died from his injuries — a wrenching loss to the University community. But his work went on. Lisa Rosen-Metsch ’90GS, a renowned AIDS researcher at Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health, who succeeded Awn as GS dean in 2017, took up his mantle, strengthening the academic infrastructure for veterans. One of her first acts was to create a leadership roundtable for women veterans, in which successful women from different industries meet with students over lunch for candid discussions. She has watched veterans go on to major companies and pursue advanced degrees in Ivy graduate programs and at Oxford and Cambridge.

At the 2022 Military Ball, it was Rosen-Metsch who presented Bollinger with the Peter J. Awn Lifetime Service Award, commending him for “recognizing that our nation is better served when

our very best academic institutions are working to educate the future leaders of our all-volunteer armed forces.”

Amid the tuxes and gowns and dress blues, Bollinger stepped forth to receive the award named for the leading light of the veteran resurgence at Columbia.

“Peter Awn was an incredible being,” Bollinger said. “I never met anyone more enthusiastic about his school and about wanting everybody in the school to succeed. He loved you. He really did. You could feel it every single time you met him.”

Bollinger talked about his own father, a proud World War II veteran who died in 2021 at age ninety-six. Bollinger and his father were very close but were at odds over Vietnam. The son opposed the war and resisted the draft, and the father could never understand the attitudes of students circa 1968. When Bollinger helped to restore NROTC to the Columbia campus, his father took it as “a great victory,” Bollinger said. For himself it was “an act of reconciliation.” In life, said Bollinger, “you want to have

that capacity to be open, to reconsider, then to change.”

In his two decades as president, Bollinger accomplished many things, but perhaps none was more remarkable than his having overseen this improbable renaissance. In the ballroom at Chelsea Piers, Bollinger addressed veterans directly.

“Thank you for being part of Columbia,” he told them. “But thank you most of all for reflecting and manifesting the values that we embrace.” 🍷

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## FIVE VETERANS REFLECT ON THEIR COLUMBIA EXPERIENCE

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### A SEA CHANGE

EBONNIE GOODFIELD enlisted in the Navy right out of high school in 2009 and became an electrician. Raised on Long Island, she loved the Navy — loved traveling the world, loved the sea. She got to know the warship, learned its weapons systems and how to troubleshoot. She met her husband in the Navy, and they had a son. Whenever she went on leave in her uniform, people would thank her.

But when she left the service, something changed.

“Once you take that uniform off and blend back into the civilian population, it seems that it’s the service member who was appreciated, while the veteran is overlooked,” Goodfield says. This is especially the case for women. “Veteran services are tailored to men, older veterans, and women without spouses or children. It almost seemed I was invisible — and so were my problems.”

By 2016, after being discharged for combat disabilities and returning to Long Island, Goodfield was in a bind: she and her husband did not



EBONNIE GOODFIELD

have money for a place to live. Being married with a child, Goodfield wasn’t eligible to enter a shelter and had to rely on family members. She looked for work and eventually landed an administrative job on a nearby air base. Part of her responsibility was to know which universities give the best benefits to potential students. “When I hit upon Columbia, I was looking for a school that could welcome me as a parent and a full-time professional and engage me in a classroom

that had older people with a wealth of experience,” she says. “Then I found out about the large veteran population there, and I was sold.”

The moment she walked onto campus, Goodfield was awed. “Low Library to the left, Butler to the right — it was so majestic and grand, so much bigger than me. There is a certain feeling when you’re on a naval ship for the first time: there’s something around you that’s so much bigger than you and that’s going to shape

you and you don’t know how, and you don’t know if you’re going to live up to it.”

As Goodfield explored the veteran resources at GS, her confidence grew. She is now vice president of MilVets and co-creator of the Intrapreneurial Leadership Fellows Program, in which five female GS student veterans and five Barnard students work together to learn leadership and problem-solving skills.

Goodfield finds that academic life is an ongoing adventure in self-discovery. “Thinking and learning about what you want — you don’t have that in the military,” she says. “As you transition to education it becomes all about you and who you are, and if you want to succeed, you have to figure out what you’re passionate about, what makes you an individual.”

For Goodfield, that means going on to graduate school. “The education I’m getting here at Columbia is unparalleled — the conversations, the Core — it’s really one of a kind,” she says. “I’m interested in taking it further.”



## DOCTORS NEEDED

AS RECENTLY AS 2019, there were fewer than a hundred veterans matriculating at US medical schools, according to Chris Bellaire, a former Marine Corps officer who served in the Pacific from 2014 to 2018 and who will graduate from medical school this year. “Medicine is a long training path, and the GI Bill and Yellow Ribbon Program provide significantly less funding for medical education than they do for JD and MBA programs,” Bellaire says. “There are many reasons why there aren’t a lot of veterans in medicine. But it’s very important to have physicians advocate for veteran health.”

Bellaire has always been drawn to caring for others. During his military service, he volunteered at a hospital in Hawaii, near his base. Then, in 2017, while he was deployed in the Philippines, an ISIS-aligned terrorist group laid siege to the city of Marawi, killing hundreds of people and

displacing tens of thousands. As part of a Special Operations task force that advised the Filipino government on its counterterrorism operations, Bellaire began to understand the health impacts of poverty, disease, and violence.

After his discharge, Bellaire, who graduated from Princeton, came to Columbia to complete the Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program at GS. “Columbia has a rigorous program, but I wanted that: for med school I needed to transition back into the academic setting, so it was great.” Once at GS, Bellaire bore down. “Columbia is not a golden ticket into med school: you still have to do well on your basic-science coursework, which at Columbia can be challenging. For many veterans, the difficulty of the coursework is a shock.”

While at GS, Bellaire resurrected Columbia MedVets, an organization for student veterans pursuing medicine.



CHRIS BELLAIRE

Aside from offering community, MedVets holds workshops on applying to medical school and organizes tours to Mount Sinai Medical Center, where Bellaire is now studying orthopedic surgery.

“I want to work with veterans with extremity amputations and traumatic injuries,” he says. “There’s a

pretty direct line between the military and medicine. In the military, you serve your country; in medicine, you serve your community. You’re dealing with life and death, and approaching those decisions with humility, compassion, empathy, and competency. For me, med school is a continuation of service.”



RICHARD BROOKSHIRE

## A VOICE ON THE HILL

DURING HIS TWO WEEKS in the psychiatric ward, Richard Brookshire ’16SIPA read a lot of books. It was 2017, and Brookshire, who served as an Army medic from 2009 to 2016, was struggling. Black, gay, closeted, and, as he would soon learn, bipolar, Brookshire had always had an outsider’s view of Army life. He endured sexual harassment even after Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell was repealed while he was in Afghanistan. And he was horrified to see some soldiers at a base in Germany display a fascina-

tion with Nazism. “There were microaggressions, but I also had to navigate the seeds of extremism, often excusing it away, because I had to serve alongside these people,” he says.

After returning from Afghanistan, he learned that Trayvon Martin had been killed in Sanford, Florida, where Brookshire had once canvassed for presidential candidate Barack Obama. The news crushed him. He moved to New York, bunked with a friend, and, wanting to finish college, enrolled at

Fordham (he hadn't known about GS). He graduated in 2014, hoping to do development work in Haiti, where his mother was from. But with Haiti unstable and the Black Lives Matter movement ascendant, Brookshire chose to stay in the US. He applied to SIPA and was accepted.

"I'm grateful for the program and got a lot out of it," he says. "But unlike most people there, I didn't yet know what I wanted to do." Even with a master's degree, he couldn't find satisfying work. "I was very depressed, very lost." When Donald Trump became president, Brookshire, tormented by the "double consciousness of being a Black American patriot," broke down. He sought help at the VA and

was "basically turned away." Despondent, he tried to kill himself and landed in the psych ward at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn.

One of the books he read while recovering was *When Affirmative Action Was White*, by Columbia history professor Ira Katznelson '66CC. "The book covers social-welfare policies under the New Deal and the GI Bill, and two chapters discuss the difficulty Black veterans had in accessing benefits during World War II," says Brookshire. After his release, he attended a job fair for veterans. Most of them were Black and unemployed or homeless or facing housing insecurity or formerly incarcerated. Brookshire knew he had to act.

He reached out to two Columbia friends: Kyle Bibby '15SIPA, a Marine Corps captain, and Daniele Anderson '20GSAS, a former Navy officer. Together they formed the Black Veterans Project, a nonprofit that uses storytelling to educate policymakers and the public about the Black veteran experience. Brookshire then got a job as communications director for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. There he learned that to lobby lawmakers you need hard data — and there was a glaring lack of reporting on racial disparities among veterans.

Undeterred, Brookshire formed a partnership with a law clinic at Yale, resulting in a massive Freedom of Infor-

mation Act request for disability claims. The data revealed that in the last twenty years, Black veterans were significantly more likely to be denied benefits than white veterans. In 2020, Brookshire formed a coalition with other Black veteran groups to work for legislative redress. He has since become the main voice for Black vets on the Hill — he testified before Congress last December — and the Black Veterans Project continues to work with its partners to demand compensation for lost benefits.

Few know better than Brookshire how precious those benefits are.

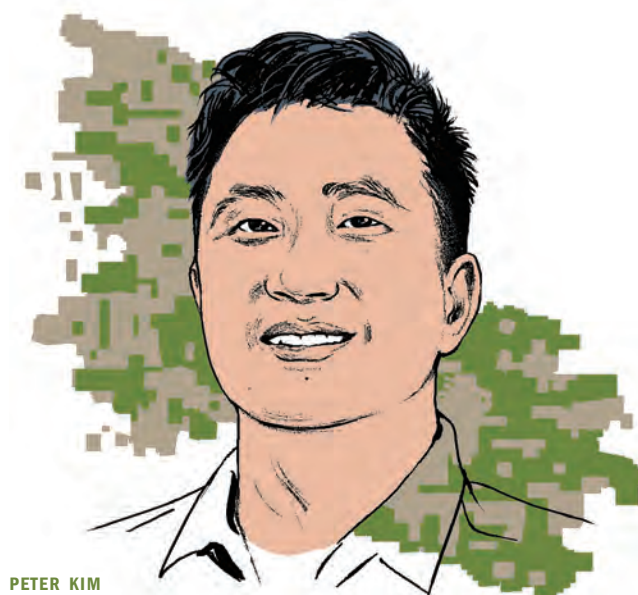
"If it wasn't for my ability to access the GI Bill to get an education," he says, "I don't know where I would be."

## WAR AND PEACE

IN HIS FIRST SEMESTER at Columbia, in January 2005, Peter Kim '09GS was hobbling on crutches across College Walk in his Marine Corps uniform when a man stopped him. "I'm a professor," the man said, "and I know that recruiters aren't allowed to be here."

Kim was shocked. "I'm a student," he said.

He did not explain that he was to appear that day before a military medical board about his reconstructed ankle (thus the uniform). He did not explain how, born in South Korea and raised in New Hyde Park, Long Island, he had enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve in 1999 at nineteen, to introduce some discipline into his life. Nor



PETER KIM

did he mention that he was a reservist when the Twin Towers fell, or that in 2003, instead of going to Iraq, he was deployed to the Korean Peninsula because North

Korea was testing missiles, and he served as a translator.

He did not describe his deployment, in 2004, to Fal-lujah, Iraq, where he worked trying to help rebuild Iraqi

institutions — the police, the courts — that the US invasion had shattered. He didn't discuss the particulars of providing convoy support to visiting dignitaries from Washington. In his bewilderment at the professor's words, all he thought was: *Talk about a liberal campus.*

Kim had wanted to shed his military past when he got to Columbia, but the encounter on College Walk "really opened my eyes to the reality that that chapter of my life can never fully close," he says. The alternative was to embrace it, and that's what he did — eventually.

The hardest part of the transition, he says, wasn't the occasional unkind remark or even the shift from a military mindset to an academic one.

No, the hardest part was being a twenty-seven-year-old freshman. “I thought, ‘Holy crap, these eighteen-year-olds are super smart,’” says Kim, who is now an executive at J. P. Morgan. “Forget being part of the military community: how do I be a student?” Once he got more involved with MilVets, he found his footing. “Luckily, we had forward-thinking leaders like Peter Awn and Curtis Rodgers,” says Kim. “Their

approach was the same ethos I had to embody in Iraq: win the hearts and minds. Win the hearts of people, of your community, your campus, and you can make change.”

Shortly after Congress passed the Post-9/11 GI Bill in June 2008, Kim became president of MilVets. His goal was to get all of Columbia’s schools to participate in the bill’s Yellow Ribbon Program, in which educational institutions match funds from the

VA to pay a student’s way. Kim met with the deans and grad-student veterans across the University. Seventeen schools signed up.

As a senior, Kim also accompanied Rodgers on a trip to Camp Pendleton to talk to potential recruits and made key introductions up the chain of command. Back home, he hosted get-togethers for veterans and nonveterans to help the vets enlarge their social circle and to give tradi-

tional students and faculty a new lens through which to see them.

“We weren’t warmongers, and we were trying to dispel that image,” Kim says. “The military is part of us, but it’s not who we are. How, as a veteran, do you break that stigma? Well, you stop drinking by yourself in a lone corner, talking about your time in Iraq, and instead you go have a discussion about Tolstoy.”

## OPERATION EDUCATION

DILIA INTROINI ’17GS, ’19TC desperately wanted to go to college. But her mother was an undocumented immigrant, so Introini did not qualify for financial aid. She had to find another way.

Born in Venezuela, Introini had come with her mother to New York at age six. They lived in Washington Heights and later moved to Rhode Island. One day, during her senior year in high school, she met with a Marine Corps recruiter.

“My mom and I agreed that this was my best shot at pursuing what I really wanted: education, travel, and adventure, and just being a part of something bigger than me,” Introini says. It was 2002, and Introini signed a four-year contract with the Marine Corps. Six months after graduation, she left for boot camp.

Her first duty station was in Okinawa, Japan, and from there she went to Washington and worked at the Pentagon for the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps. She spent nearly

eleven years in the Marines. Toward the end, while stationed in South Florida, she wondered what to do next. It was while working out at the gym that she started chatting with a guy who turned out to be a GS alumnus. “He said, ‘You *have* to go to Columbia,’” Introini recalls. “I’m like, this guy is crazy. I could never get into Columbia.” Then he told her about GS — how it was tailored to veterans. Introini applied and was accepted.

She started GS in the spring of 2014, at age thirty, wanting to study psychology. “At first it was overwhelming,” she says. “In the Marine Corps, everything is a team effort. Someone is always delegating and supervising. To be at Columbia and realize how much work I had to do all by myself was daunting.” And, like many student veterans, she suffered from impostor syndrome — the overwhelming sense that you don’t belong.

But she found help at GS, including a course called University Studies, where



DILIA INTROINI

student veterans discussed how to share a classroom with eighteen-year-olds who seemed to have worked their whole lives to get into the Ivy League. “It was so important for me to hear how similar my experiences were to those around me,” she says. “That course was like therapy.”

Introini graduated cum laude, got her master’s in organizational psychology, and is now a program specialist for the VA.

She wants student veterans who experience impostor syndrome to know they’ve already accomplished a great deal through their service. “It’s hard to realize that the day-to-day things you do in the military are big things,” she says. “They don’t feel like big things — it’s just paperwork, it’s just getting in formation. But the fact you signed on that dotted line and said, ‘Wherever you need me, send me’ — that is a big thing.”



# Self- composed

The meditative, multihued soundscapes  
of Tyshawn Sorey '17GSAS

By Paul Hond



Standing on the conductor's podium, Tyshawn Sorey '17GSAS summons colors with his baton, unplanned and unpredictable. Seated at the drums, he daubs his brushes on a moonfaced canvas, his ruminative gestures conjuring sound. A genre-defying composer and musician, Sorey, forty-two, is one of the most prodigiously talented, hardworking, and sought-after figures in the world of contemporary music, an artist who hears with his eyes and sees with his ears and whose works reflect a kaleidoscopic consciousness forever resolving itself into beguiling audio abstractions.

Since 2007, Sorey has released sixteen albums of highly individualistic music, from the hypnotic, plaintive dissonances of the fifty-three-minute chamber orchestral work *For George Lewis* (2021) to the percussive detonations and electric shredding of his 2020 session with guitarist Mike Sopko and bassist Bill Laswell (*On Common Ground*). As a composer, Sorey encompasses trans-European, Black, and world-music influences, as well as the American experimental tradition, ranging from postwar avant-garde giants John Cage and Morton Feldman to living legends Anthony Braxton and Roscoe Mitchell.

Many of Sorey's works, like *Trio for Harold Budd* (for alto flute, piano, and vibraphone) and *For Roscoe Mitchell* (for cello and orchestra), with their mellow colorations and extraplanetary time signatures (*37/16*, anyone?), have fully notated scores. Others, like *Autoschediasms* (2021), are composed in the moment, with Sorey using gestures inspired by "conduction," a system of hand signals developed by another of his mentors, the cornetist and composer Butch Morris, to cue performers to respond instantly and interpretatively. Sorey is a great believer in the power of artistic collaboration, and performances of his works are acts of intense spiritual and emotional communion.

"People listen to music either for enjoyment or else to get a new perception — whether that involves digging deeper inside of themselves or trying to get a better understanding of something they haven't heard before," says Sorey. "I try to give listeners something to take with them, a different kind of energy and feeling."

A 2017 MacArthur fellow, Sorey is a musical universalist who has little use for categories and labels. He feels they are reductive and irrelevant in a post-genre world and often attaches a wary prefix to them: "so-called jazz," "so-called classical," "so-called hip-hop." Nor does he care for the word "improvisation," which as a musical strategy is frowned upon, he says, by "insecure composers or people who are mean-spirited about the idea of creating something spontaneous." Sorey prefers the term "spontaneous composition," since, he says, he is *always* composing, always thinking of structure, whether he's writing at the piano (what he calls "formal composition") or playing an instrument (a world-class drummer, Sorey is also a self-taught pianist and a classically trained trombonist).

Sorey's music has a haunting, ethereal beauty that illustrates his fascination with negative space, or silence, which gives, he says, "a certain ecstasy — the decay of a piano or a vibraphone, the emptiness left when a violin stops playing. The energy you get after hearing these sounds is what I try to capture with the silences: periods where the energies of what has been played are reflected onto the listener." Last year, Sorey conducted *Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)*, a work for percussion, viola, celesta, choir, piano, and vocal soloist that incorporates visual art and choreography, which he composed for the fiftieth anniversary of the Rothko Chapel in Houston, home to fourteen large Mark Rothko canvases painted in shades of black. It was an especially meaningful commission, since one of Sorey's heroes, Morton Feldman, composed *Rothko Chapel*, a modernist classic, which premiered a year after the chapel's 1971 dedication. Encountering the Rothko paintings for the first time, Sorey experienced what he called "an intimacy with silence," saying that for him, black represents "near silence or silence itself."

Silence is a luxury for Sorey. His schedule is a coffee-forward marathon of rehearsing, performing, composing, recording, teaching (he is a professor of music at the University of Pennsylvania), and parenting (he and his wife, the violinist and ethnomusicologist Amanda Scherbenske, have two daughters, age two and six). Yet he makes sure to find time for interviews: mindful of the ways in which Black orchestral composers have been mislabeled, misunderstood, and

subjected to double standards, Sorey has been purposeful in defining himself and his music on his own terms.

In an empty practice room in Carnegie Hall, where he is rehearsing for an ensemble performance of *The Witness*, by the experimental composer Pauline Oliveros, Sorey sits down to chat. Gracious and accommodating, he opens up about his time at Columbia, a difficult, profoundly transformative period in his creative development — what you might call his Light-Blue Period.

Sorey was an internationally recognized musician when he entered Columbia's PhD program in composition in 2011. He had released his first album of compositions, *That/Not*, in 2007 (a debut that featured a forty-three-minute piano piece of repeated, fading chords) but was best known as a virtuosic drummer who could play anything, a musical explorer with perfect pitch and an ability to quickly memorize complex scores. His list of collaborators already included such visionaries as Muhal Richard Abrams, Vijay Iyer, John Zorn, Roscoe Mitchell, Anthony Braxton, and the saxophonist and composer Steve Lehman '12GSAS.

Like Lehman, Sorey had earned his master's in composition from Wesleyan and studied with Braxton. He had come to Morningside Heights to work with another of his heroes, George Lewis, the MacArthur-winning composer, theorist, trombonist, author, and computer-music pioneer. But the scene in Dodge Hall wasn't what Sorey had expected.

"The minute I got to Columbia, I had a major identity crisis," Sorey says. "I thought I would be entering some post-Cage, post-Feldman continuum" — a practice that embraced elements of chance, performer agency, and nontraditional notation — "but some students there at the time weren't about that. Compositionally, my interests didn't align with theirs." First-year students had to present a work and talk about it, and Sorey presented one of his. "Some of the reactions I got were rather" — Sorey pauses. "There were a lot of dismissive

attitudes toward what I did. People said, 'Well, that's not composition, that's not what it's supposed to be.'"

Sorey was devastated. For the next two years he tried to fit in, suppressing his own artistic impulses to gain acceptance. "I will be frank about this," he says. "It was a very, very rough journey. I was trying to be this academic type of composer, but I hated what I was writing."

Still, there were other students who shared his eclecticism and interest in spontaneity, including Lehman and Courtney Bryan '14GSAS, an award-winning composer of orchestral and choral works. Sorey cherished those relationships, "but for the most part, it

(his barber would give him gifts of old R&B 45s after every haircut); in church (raised Catholic, he would play hymns by ear on the church piano); in the record store (where he discovered that music could be divided into discrete categories); in the clubs (house music, mostly); in the streets (hip-hop, salsa); and in the schools (where he picked up the last trombone in the music room). At home he used pots and pans to drum along with the radio, and when he was twelve his grandfather got him a drum set. "He spent what little money he had on me. A no-name kit. But it had all the pieces, everything I needed. I practiced in the basement every day."



Sorey in the Rothko Chapel in Houston.

was a weird situation for me," he says. "Admittedly, I had some social things I needed to work out. It wasn't that I didn't get along with people. It was more that I was a loner, and I felt even more alone at Columbia."

As far back as childhood, Sorey, with his unbounded musical tastes, felt like an "odd man out," he says. Born in 1980 and raised in an economically depressed area of Newark, he got his musical education wherever he found it: in the barbershop

Among his other household resources was the radio, often tuned to WBGO (jazz) or Columbia's WKCR. "Those stations really found me," Sorey says. "KCR played everything from Mississippi Delta blues to contemporary classical music to noise to straight-ahead jazz to avant-garde. I didn't know what the hell I was listening to, but I was able to really appreciate it." He would record stuff off the radio onto cassette tapes and listen obsessively. He later attended Newark's

Arts High School, which, to Sorey's amazement, did not have a jazz band. So he found some older students who were into jazz, and they'd jam together off-hours. A teacher got them into the Newark Jazz Festival and Kimako's Blues People, a music venue and salon operated out of the poet Amiri Baraka's basement, where Sorey saw pianists John Hicks and Big John Patton and trombonist Grachan Moncur III.

It was around this time that he started thinking about dedicating his life to music. He began composing in high school and continued to write as a jazz-studies major at William Paterson University. At Wesleyan, Braxton stoked his interest in John Cage, Anton Webern, and the artists in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Founded in Chicago in 1965 by Muhal Richard Abrams, among others, to support "serious, original music" and build community for Black experimental musicians, the organization has included Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell, Wadada Leo Smith, Lewis, and others who to Sorey stood as models of uncompromising personal expression.

At Columbia, it was in fact Lewis who helped Sorey heed his own muse. Lewis had worked with many great artists and found that Sorey shared their best qualities: "openness to change and new ideas, perspicacity, ability to face fears, leaving no creative stone unturned, and listening to everything, and I mean everything," Lewis says. "Certainly, Tyshawn taught me as much as I might have taught him." Lewis also referred Sorey to another professor, the composer Fred Lerdahl (now emeritus). "Fred said, 'Your music is speaking two languages, and you need a unified language,'" Sorey recalls. "You are so coherent as an improviser — why doesn't your composition have that same coherency? You have to address that."

As Lerdahl remembers, Sorey wanted to learn two things: chromatic harmony and compositional form. "Tyshawn has always had an interest in the work of Morton Feldman — very slow, moving at a large scale, with a kind of spiritual state of mind," Lerdahl says. "But he wasn't

sure how far to go, how much repetition to do, when to find contrast. I helped with that. One thing about Tyshawn is that while he's very confident in his abilities, he's always been extremely open and clearheaded about wanting to learn."

"Those first meetings with Fred changed my life," Sorey says. "In my

"It took me four years to get to the point where I could say, 'This is who I am, this is what I do, and if you don't like it, don't listen,'" says Sorey. "Four years to develop that kind of confidence. If not for George, Fred, and Chris, we wouldn't be sitting here right now."

"I try to give listeners something to take with them, a different kind of energy and feeling."

first lesson, I broke down in front of him, telling him I felt I was a failure, that I wasn't going to be a successful composer, that I should just go back to playing my jazz gigs and call it a day. He said, 'No. Don't do that.'" Sorey got a similar reaction from another professor, Chris Washburne '98GSAS. Sorey didn't study with Washburne, but he was his TA for four years, and they became close. "Tyshawn is just an extraordinary human being and an extraordinary artist," says Washburne. "And as a teacher he goes above and beyond in the care of students."

Sorey's doctoral dissertation, which Lerdahl sponsored, was both an introspective musical mission statement and a discussion of *Perle Noire: Meditations for Joséphine*, Sorey's song cycle about Josephine Baker, the expatriate American singer, dancer, and actor. Written for the soprano Julia Bullock and directed by Peter Sellars, with text by poet Claudia Rankine '93SOA, *Perle Noire* premiered in 2016 at the Ojai Music Festival and addressed Sorey's abiding social and artistic concerns, tackling identity and race relations while questioning, as he wrote, "assumed distinctions between improviser and composer and improvisation and composition." The piece, which the *New York Times* called "one of the most important works of art yet to emerge from the era of Black Lives Matter," was later performed in New York at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

A week after performing Oliveros's *The Witness* at Carnegie Hall, Sorey is at Columbia for a concert at Miller Theatre. On this night, Sorey, who premiered several pieces at Miller in 2019 as part of the Composer Portraits series, is playing with the Vijay Iyer Trio, with Iyer on piano and Linda May Han Oh on bass. As the group settles at their instruments, Iyer, who has called Sorey "a bona fide genius," reminds the audience that "Tyshawn became a doctor in this building." That brings whistles and applause, and then the musicians slide into a complex, intuitive interplay that some might consider modern or experimental jazz but which Sorey simply calls "creative music."

Sorey, dressed in black, dashes his sticks and brushes, splashes his colors. Eyes closed, ears wide open, he caresses the cymbals, stirs the snare, raises rolling waves, sibilant whispers, and crackling fusillades that fairly burst into light.

When it's over, Sorey greets well-wishers and breaks down his set. The audience leaves, the lights go out. With any luck, Sorey's schedule will permit him a few hours of dreamless, soundless sleep: the silence of meditation, of Rothko's black canvases. Sorey had spoken of it a week before, at Carnegie Hall.

"As Roscoe Mitchell put it: silence is perfect," Sorey said. "And so I'm just trying to produce music that I hope is as beautiful to others as silence is to me." ❧

# DRINK LOCAL



ALUMNI  
WINEMAKERS  
AND DISTILLERS  
ARE SHAKING  
UP THE CRAFT-  
BEVERAGE  
SCENE IN NEW  
YORK CITY AND  
BEYOND

BY JULIA JOY  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JÖRG MEYER



Marvina Robinson

## BRINGING BUBBLY TO BROOKLYN

**M**arvina Robinson '05GSAS has long appreciated a good champagne. As a college student, she remembers evenings sipping fine French bubbly on brownstone stoops in her home neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. “My friends and I would pool our money together for a bottle of Moët & Chandon and drink it out of plastic cups,” she says. “I’ve always loved champagne, and once I got older, I started to dig in a little bit deeper.” So much deeper that today Robinson is the founder and CEO of her own label, B. Stuyvesant Champagne, which is produced in France and sold in the United States.

Robinson, who has a master’s degree in statistics from Columbia, got to know champagne’s complexities while working in the finance industry. “I used to send bottles to clients as gifts, which involved researching brands and learning about the tasting notes,” she says. In 2018, Robinson quit her job at a large bank to realize her dream of starting a champagne brand and bar in Brooklyn. “There are so many beautiful champagnes that don’t make it to the States,” she says. “I wanted to be the person who introduced other champagne lovers to this world.”

The pandemic made opening a bar infeasible, so Robinson began focusing exclusively on her private label. B. Stuyvesant partners with a vineyard in the Champagne region of France to grow its grapes — chardonnay, pinot noir, and pinot meunier — and produce the wine, which is sold online and to stores, bars, and restaurants in and outside of New York City. Robinson, who runs her business and operates a tasting room out of a





two-thousand-square-foot space in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, makes regular visits to the vineyard. “I’m not just someone who’s set up abroad,” she says. “I’m very hands-on.”

At B. Stuyvesant’s tasting room, visitors can try the brand’s signature cuvées, or blends, including the best-selling *réserve* (flowery with spice) and brut rosé (notes of raspberry and red currant), as well as the popular blanc de blancs, consisting entirely of chardonnay. A 750-milliliter bottle of B. Stuyvesant champagne costs around sixty to seventy dollars. “Champagne requires a labor-intensive technique to produce,

which is why it demands a high price,” explains Robinson, who also sells her wine in half bottles.

When sampling a champagne, Robinson advises customers to consider the grape composition and the level of dryness. “I always start by smelling the glass before taking it all in,” she explains. “Everyone’s palate is a little bit different, but some of the tasting notes I look for are: Is it toasty or briochy? Floral or fruity? Tart? Crisp? Is the texture velvety as you swirl in your mouth? You start on your front palate and finish on your back palate, so whatever you’re tasting first might not be your finish.”

As one of the few African-American women to own a champagne label, Robinson stands out in the industry. “People are intrigued that I’m not from France and I’m producing champagne,” she says. “But I never lead with my genetics, because I feel they’re irrelevant. I lead with a quality product. Where I’m from is secondary.” Still, Robinson’s Brooklyn roots are very much a part of her brand. “Bed-Stuy is where I was born and raised and still live, and it’s shaped me into who I am today. With B. Stuyvesant I’m paying homage to my neighborhood.”

## SELLING THE BENEFITS OF WINE ON TAP

Until recently, the idea of wine on tap, served like draft beer, was anathema to the serious oenophile. Though keg wines have existed for decades, they have been slow to catch on with the American public or the hospitality industry. Gotham Project, a wholesale winemaking and distribution company run by two veteran vintners, has set out to make wine on tap not only respectable but preferable. “From a taste and freshness perspective, there’s no better way to serve wine by the glass,” argues Bruce Schneider ’99BUS, Gotham Project’s cofounder and managing partner.

Schneider explains that bottled wine, once opened and exposed to oxygen, quickly degrades in quality and begins to spoil. This forces many restaurateurs who sell glasses of wine to discard leftover half-full bottles. Schneider says Gotham Project’s refillable, stainless-steel kegerators keep their contents fresh between pours and regulate temperature. “A big problem with red wine is that it’s usually served at room temperature, which is a little too warm,” he adds.

The kegs, which hold the equivalent of twenty-six bottles, are also environmentally sustainable. “A tap is the only way



Bruce Schneider

to serve wine with zero packaging waste — no bottles, labels, corks, capsules, or cardboard boxes,” says Schneider. Since launching in 2010, the company claims to have saved approximately six million glass bottles and more than seven million pounds of single-use-packaging waste.



Schneider, who is also a consulting vintner at Onabay Vineyards on the North Fork of Long Island, comes from a multigenerational wine family. His grandfather was a bootlegger during Prohibition, and his parents ran an importing and distribution company in New Jersey.

In 1994, he started his own winemaking business, Schneider Vineyards, with his wife, Christiane Baker '91BC, '16TC. (His advice for aspiring vintners: “Start with good grapes — you can purchase them from reputable vineyards.”) In 1997, Schneider enrolled at Columbia Business School to learn how to build his enterprise. The decision paid off. A grant from the Eugene Lang Entrepreneurial Initiative Fund, which supports MBA student ventures, enabled the couple to buy an old potato farm on the North Fork and start growing their own vines.

The Schneiders specialized in cabernet franc, a parent grape of the better-known, more tannin-heavy cabernet sauvignon. “Cabernet franc has a ton of personality,” says Schneider, who sold his vintages at high-end restaurants and raised the grape’s profile among area sommeliers. “I think of it as the original cabernet. You get beautiful red-fruit characteristics — raspberries, red currants, a bit of strawberry — and a naturally occurring, savory herb quality.” Plus, the grapes are well suited to New York’s colder climate. “It’s a thick-skin variety; it’s winter-hardy.”

After selling the vineyard in 2007, Schneider moved into distribution and, in 2010, teamed up with his industry friend Charles Bieler, a winemaker specializing in rosé from Provence and



Washington State, to cofound Gotham Project. The company’s products, including bottles and canned wines, can today be found in more than a thousand restaurants, bars, venues, and stores in New York and across the US. Headquartered in Bayonne, New Jersey, the company sources

wine from the West Coast and globally, while also producing its own cabernet franc and riesling in the wine-rich Finger Lakes. “The glacier lakes there are super deep, which makes them very good at retaining heat and moderating the climate,” says Schneider.

Whether up in the Finger Lakes or out on the North Fork, Schneider is a passionate champion of New York wine. “Until the late 1950s and early ’60s, most of what was grown in the state was indigenous varieties like Concord grapes, which make sweet wines,” he says. “That all changed when European varieties like chardonnay, cabernet franc, and riesling were introduced. Now the state is one of the top five producers of wine in the country.”

## REDISCOVERING NEW YORK RYE AND GIN

Long before Prohibition and the rise of large beverage conglomerates, New York City was among the distilling capitals of the world. “The city has made gin since its earliest days as a Dutch colony,” says Tom Potter ’83BUS, the cofounder and CEO of the New York Distilling Company, a Brooklyn-based maker of artisan liquor. Rye, unlike other types of whiskey, has a rich history in the region, he explains. “It’s what we made here in New York.”

Potter, who has an MBA from Columbia Business School, is tapping into the historic spirit of New York distilling and helping to revitalize a bygone industry. With a focus on rye whiskey and gin, the New York Distilling Company’s creations can be found in bars, restaurants, and liquor stores throughout the Northeast.



Tom Potter

The distillery and accompanying cocktail bar, the Shanty, have operated out of Brooklyn’s Williamsburg neighborhood since 2011 and will relocate to nearby Bushwick this year.

Potter, who started his career in banking, is a veteran of the alcohol business. In 1988 he cofounded Brooklyn Brewery — an early pioneer in the craft-beer industry — and oversaw the company’s rise as a global brand. He left the brewery in 2004 and entered the wine world, serving as executive director of the American Institute of Wine and Food and planning to start his own vineyard. He opted instead for craft distilling (a less crowded market than wine) and teamed up with his son, Bill Potter, who worked in the fine-dining industry, and Allen Katz, a spirits expert, to cofound the New York Distilling Company.

“We began making gin and rye whiskey, two products which at the time were unusual choices,” says Potter. “The entire gin market was made up of generic, big-company names. Good products, but not craft.” Rye, which is made from at least 51 percent rye grain, had long ago fallen into obscurity as bourbon, which uses corn as its primary ingredient, emerged as the dominant American whiskey during the twentieth century. “Rye is the whiskey that George Washington drank,” says Potter. “It’s the spirit in almost all of the classic whiskey cocktails — a Manhattan, an old-fashioned, a Sazerac.”

The New York Distilling Company, which grows its own rye grain in the Finger Lakes, produces distinctive whiskeys including Ragtime Rye, which comes in three varieties, and Mister Katz’s rock and rye, made with rock-candy sugar, sour cherries, cinnamon, and citrus. Good whiskey, explains Potter, comes down to the quality of the grains and the consistency of the distilling process. “The terroir makes a difference. Heirloom crops have higher concentrations of flavor.”

Gin, which is made from vodka or another base liquor, gets its flavor profile from botanicals. “Along with juniper, we use orange and lemon peel and coriander,” says Potter. The distillery’s gins include the Dorothy Parker, which also comes in a rose-infused variety, and, for the stiffest of drinks, the Perry’s Tot, with a hefty alcohol content of 57 percent. “A great gin should taste good in a martini or negroni but still be distinct from other gins,” says Potter. And while he recognizes that gin is not for everyone (“Maybe you had a bad incident in college”), Potter recommends fostering an appreciation for it by drinking a classic cocktail, like a martini. “You’re going to taste the gin. It’s not going to be covered up.”

Having helped lead the craft-beer boom of the 1990s, Potter is amazed by the similar explosion of innovation in liquor and cocktails in the past two decades. “There’s more appreciation now for history and handmade things,” he says. “I think New York State will become a leading producer of craft spirits. We’ve got wonderful distilleries that are growing up and coming to maturity here.”



Tony Rock and Raphael Lyon

## MAKING MEAD MAINSTREAM

**L**ong associated with ye olde taverns and Renaissance fairs, mead, a wine made from fermented honey, is a libation as old as the Stone Age. The earliest archaeological records of its consumption, found in China, date back to at least 7000 BC. “Mead is by far the oldest alcohol we have evidence for,” says Raphael Lyon ’13SOA, the cofounder of Enlightenment Wines, an artisanal mead maker in Brooklyn. “Today it’s one of the fastest-growing areas of the US alcoholic-beverage industry.”

Lyon, a visual artist and musician, grew up in an “artist and herbalist” household and was a longtime grower and gatherer before taking up mead-making. “I spent a lot of time picking wild plants and learning about the natural ecosystem in my area of the Hudson Valley,” he says. After being introduced to some cider makers, Lyon started creating alcohol “from things I could get my hands on.” By 2009, he had received a New York State winery license and was making and selling his own mead.

Soon after, Lyon moved to the city and began an MFA in sculpture at Columbia’s School of the Arts. After graduating, he connected with business investor Tony Rock ’89BUS. “I thought Raphael’s wines were unique, since they were herbal and botanically infused, and I wanted to help him find a home for them in the market,” says Rock, a wine lover whose wife, Kate Rock ’89BUS, co-owns a California vineyard. In 2016, cofounders Lyon, Rock, and Arley Marks, a hospitality-industry veteran, opened Enlightenment as a full-scale production meadery with an adjoining tasting room and nightclub, called Honey’s, inside a former repair shop in Brooklyn’s Bushwick neighborhood.

As the company’s primary mead maker, Lyon is inspired by the drink’s connections to ancient alchemy and the natural world. “We’re continuing the tradition of looking at the fruits and herbs that grow in your local environment and combining them with honey to produce elixirs,” says Lyon, who sources his ingredients from the New York area. Enlightenment’s raw honey comes from an apiary in the Finger Lakes, and the botanicals, including sumac, dandelion, yarrow, and chamomile, are

purchased from local farmers or foraged by Lyon and his staff upstate.

Enlightenment’s natural meads, which contain approximately 12 percent alcohol (comparable to standard grape wine), are made from unpasteurized honey

that undergoes “spontaneous fermentation.” Rather than adding commercial yeast, the honey and fruits are left to ferment on their own with the wild yeast colonies that are naturally present in the ingredients, stimulating the process. “Making wine can be very industrialized and forced, much more about chemistry, or it can be more like having a garden or


compost heap where you’re controlling the inputs and atmosphere and allowing a complex network of organisms to do the work,” says Lyon.

Mead is not terribly difficult to make (our Neolithic ancestors figured it out) as long as you have the right ingredients, he adds. “You can make a pretty good mead at home in a bucket if you have good honey and are paying attention.”

All of Enlightenment’s meads are dry, rather than sweet, and, according to Lyon, they appeal to a variety of palates. Lyon recommends starting with Night Eyes, a sparkling mead fermented with cherries, apples, rose hips, and foraged sumac. “It’s fruity, very dry, and super fun,” he says. Those seeking more floral flavors, he suggests, should try Memento Mori, a dandelion wine. Mead lovers and the mead curious can order any of Enlightenment’s bottles online or visit Honey’s, where straight mead and mead-based cocktails are poured late into the night.

As mead and natural wine grow in popularity, Enlightenment is in the process of bringing bottles to more stores, bars, and restaurants within and outside New York City. “People are starting to understand that consuming natural, local products without added chemicals doesn’t just make you feel better about what you’re buying but actually tastes a lot better,” says Lyon. “I think more and more people are drinking less but drinking better, and that’s really good for everybody.” 🍷





“I have gained so much  
from Columbia. It gives  
me a thrill to give back.”



—Erin Hussein '92CC, '95LAW

Associate Director of Alumni Relations and Events,  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

## Broadening Perspectives

For Erin Hussein '92CC, '95LAW, attending Columbia proved to be a turning point in her life, expanding her view of the world—and herself. In appreciation for the financial support she received, Erin's gift in her estate plans will help others have the same chance to broaden their perspectives at Columbia.

Read Erin's full giving story at [giftplanning.columbia.edu/erin](https://giftplanning.columbia.edu/erin)

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# Reflections on an Era

## President Lee C. Bollinger looks back on two remarkable decades at Columbia and shares his personal hopes for the future



**You have led Columbia for more than twenty years, a tenure second only to Nicholas Murray Butler's. It's a demanding job, so we have to ask: Why so long?**

For me, it's been the perfect job. When I took this position in 2002, I was convinced that of all the university presidencies in the United States, Columbia's was by far the most interesting, in part because the institution had the greatest potential yet to be realized. We all know that Columbia had long been among the greatest universities in the world yet had suffered some very difficult decades, especially in the late 1960s and the '70s, which happens to be when I was a law student here. By the time I returned as president, Columbia was on the rebound but faced new challenges, a lack of space chief among them. Universities across the nation were undergoing enormous expansion — physically and in terms of their student population and faculty — and Columbia had limited options to grow in the dense urban environment of New York City. So the moment seemed decisive. Columbia could either find a way to make some major moves or risk falling out of the top tier of universities.

At the same time, I saw enormous potential to cultivate new relationships with alumni, with whom our connections had faded, and to strengthen our fundraising operations. And just walking around here, you sensed there was so much that could happen, given the intensely intellectual climate. It was exciting to take all of this on. And it's taken two decades to do the work I felt needed to be done.

**How would you say Columbia has changed since you became president in 2002?**

A good measure, in my view, of successful leadership is whether you leave the institution with a meaningful future. Columbia now has a brilliant future ahead of it. There is room to grow. The new Manhattanville campus, for one, is not even one-third built. We have a more engaged alumni community and a much stronger base for fundraising. The institution is in better organizational shape as well. People will still complain about Columbia being inefficient, but I would argue that the administration is better organized and more responsive than it's ever been. Academically, I'd say that Columbia now maintains a culture

of creativity and excellence such that we expect every department to be among the top in its field. We've become a more global institution, with Columbia Global Centers in cities across Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. And Columbia has taken the lead in transforming how universities conceive of themselves as actors in the world in cooperation with outside partners, pursuing what I've called the Fourth Purpose of the university. We're devoting more of our energies to addressing real-world problems affecting people's lives, including climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

**You've certainly pursued a bold agenda. To use a baseball analogy, you've been swinging for the fences pretty much since day one.**

There's no question that I like living in the realm of big ideas. I enjoy thinking long-term and then working toward an ambitious vision, day in and day out. I mean, what better job could you have than to help chart the future of one of the world's greatest institutions of research and teaching, with the goal of maximizing our contributions to human welfare? And when you approach your



Lee C. Bollinger '71LAW, '02HON speaks at the 2018 Commencement.

work that way and get other people onboard, then all sorts of new and interesting possibilities open up.

Building the Manhattanville campus, which I think everyone knows I'm very proud of, was a big idea. In the beginning, people told me it was a crazy, ridiculous proposition. They said, "There's no way we'll be able to develop a whole new campus in West Harlem." But I thought it was imperative that Columbia attain the long-term capacity for growth. A great university shouldn't be in the position of telling its faculty and students that they can't undertake new intellectual pursuits because of a lack of space. And so we set our minds to developing Manhattanville, and after years of working closely with local residents, clergy, business leaders, activists, and city leaders, we made it happen.

My administration has since helped to establish major interdisciplinary research programs in neuroscience, data science, climate science, and precision medicine. Columbia faculty and students are making extraordinary contributions in these areas, and the programs are popular on campus. Inevitably, people will debate what resources ought to be

devoted to new endeavors like these relative to existing programs, but nobody questions their importance.

**You've also overseen the revitalization of Columbia's alumni-relations and fundraising efforts. What is the most important thing you've learned about the role that alumni and donors play and how to engage them?**

I've seen again and again that having a vision and sense of mission is critical to fundraising success. People typically ask deans and university presidents, "How much time do you spend courting donations?" But I've *never* thought about it that way. Better to ask me, "How much time do you spend articulating what the University might achieve with additional resources?" Because that's what fundraising is. It's not about going into somebody's office and charming them. It's about engaging them in this incredibly exciting institution and inviting them to participate in making it even better. And that's a pleasure, truly a joy.

Also, by talking to alumni you come up with ideas for enriching the experiences of current students. For example, early on I noticed that alumni love to

share memories of meeting prominent figures who visited campus when they were at Columbia. At first, I didn't think much of it. But then I realized, "My goodness, of course, what an incredible thing for a young person to be in the same room with the president of India or the Dalai Lama and to be asking them questions!" That realization helped inspire our creation of the World Leaders Forum, which has brought hundreds of heads of state and other dignitaries to campus since 2003.

**You've staked out a clear place for Columbia as a global university. But we've recently witnessed a reaction against globalism in the world — from Brexit and other isolationist movements to rising geopolitical tensions and migrant crises. Do you still think the future is global?**

Yes, I do. The world is incredibly integrated now, and despite the existence of countervailing forces, it will remain so. It's important to understand, though, that creating an identity for Columbia as a global institution was never about endorsing globalization per se. The motivation has been to support scholarship and teaching that helps people to make sense

of this complex new world we're living in and to think on a more global scale. The momentous changes that we've witnessed in recent decades — the integration of the world's economies, the spread of information technology, the movements of people around the globe — are relevant to scholars in nearly every discipline. In my own field of First Amendment law, for example, it's no longer enough to be steeped in the history of US free-speech cases. Now, with the Internet, we're confronted with all sorts of new questions: What happens if a journalist is murdered in another country for a story they publish on an American news site? What moral responsibility do we have to help people prosecuted overseas for things they post online that we read? What should we do if our own government tries to prevent us from accessing information online that it claims is dangerous propaganda from another country? People across academia are grappling with complicated issues like these, and the issues aren't going away.

**Being a First Amendment scholar seemed to prepare you well for leading Columbia, since college campuses have always been hotbeds of debate about freedom of expression.**

Certainly, the issue of free speech is central to running a university. That's

another thing that I loved about this job. I could continue to be engaged with my field, teaching and writing books, while those activities directly informed my work as president. Everything worked together. That was important for me.

**So how do you respond to critiques, often lodged by right-wing commentators, that US universities have become intolerant of conservative viewpoints?**

Well, I have no doubt that there are problems with intolerance across colleges and universities today. We see it in the news with some frequency now, where public figures who've been invited to speak on campuses are subsequently disinvited because people object to their ideas. And I've heard from students on the conservative side of the political spectrum who say they feel uncomfortable speaking freely because of social pressure. Faculty say it can be difficult to generate full discussion on some topics. These are significant issues, and they concern me. In speeches and in meeting with students, I always emphasize the importance of listening to different viewpoints.

I must add, though, that these problems are being exaggerated by political actors who want to discredit universities in the eyes of the public. And this can obscure the fact that US institutions of

higher education, despite the internal challenges we face, are still among the world's staunchest defenders of the open exchange of ideas. For example, at Columbia, we regularly host provocative speakers of all political stripes, including speakers whose ideas I consider wrong-headed, offensive, and even dangerous. Yet the events proceed smoothly, generating spirited and civilized debate.

It shouldn't be surprising, moreover, that academic communities, like any other communities, would struggle to decide how permissive to be of speech that is widely perceived as noxious or offensive. It's human nature to be intolerant of unpopular viewpoints. That's exactly why we have a First Amendment — to make sure that controversial opinions can be aired. On college and university campuses, young people are taught to overcome that natural tendency to be intolerant; it's an integral part of the educational experience.

**Columbia students often do protest when controversial figures speak here.**

And I support their right to do so. Protest is a valid form of counter-speech. The protests rarely, if ever, turn obstructive in a way that could be considered censorship. We have worked hard to make sure that doesn't happen. Furthermore, in my



The Lenfest Center for the Arts, the Jerome L. Greene Science Center, and the Forum on the new Manhattanville campus.

FRANK OJDEMAN



time as president, Columbia has resisted revoking any speaker's invitation. And we've faced intense pressure to do so, most notably when Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was invited by our School of International and Public Affairs to appear here in 2007. I think that disinventing controversial speakers is always a misguided decision.

In any case, the most significant threats to free speech on campuses today are coming from outside academia, not within it. I'm thinking of the coordinated efforts by politicians in some states to roll back academic freedoms, such as by restricting the teaching of critical race theory, and to demonize particular groups of students and faculty, including those from China, by suggesting they're national-security threats. These efforts are very harmful, very destructive, to higher education and to society in general.

**Is there anything that you wish you had done differently as president?**

Of course, I have some regrets. Most have to do with feeling that sometimes I wasn't there enough for people when they needed me. In this position, so many people — faculty, students, administrators — look to you for counsel every day. I don't think it's possible to be an empathetic person in this role and *not* feel like you just didn't have enough time.

**The job must take a lot out of you, physically and emotionally.**

This is a really, really hard job. Universities are among the most difficult organizations to lead, in part because of their complex structures, and there are times of enormous challenge and stress. It tests you on every level. But it also engages you on every level, and this ultimately inspired me and enabled me to thrive.

I must add that my wife, Jean Magnano Bollinger, was a true partner to me in this work. And the demands on her time and energy were extraordinary. Despite having her own career as an artist, Jean was very active in the life of the University. She got involved in efforts to advance racial equality, women's rights, and other causes. And she contributed

to the planning of many important initiatives. The idea to build our new arts building next to the Jerome L. Greene Science Center in Manhattanville came out of conversations between me, Jean, Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist Eric Kandel, arts dean Carol Becker, and others about the connections between modern art and brain science. The creation of the Columbia Global Centers can be traced back to a meeting that Jean and I had with the king and queen

the playing field for Black, Latino, and Native American applicants. When you ban such policies — as California, Michigan, and several other states have done in recent years — the proportion of the student population that's composed of people of color can drop dramatically, sometimes by 50 percent or more. So if this Supreme Court rules that college admissions need to be completely colorblind, as many legal scholars anticipate based on the

**“I like living in the realm of big ideas. I enjoy thinking long-term and then working toward an ambitious vision, day in and day out.”**

of Jordan, who asked if Columbia faculty would be interested in participating in their efforts to secularize the country's public-education system. Jean has had a hand in many transformative ideas.

**You're a fervent proponent of affirmative action, and you've overseen initiatives aimed at diversifying Columbia's faculty and student body. But the US Supreme Court now seems poised to strike down the 2003 ruling in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, a case that affirmed that US universities can consider race in admissions without violating the Constitution, and which bears your name from your time as president of the University of Michigan. If the court overturns that precedent, what will be the ramifications for higher education?**

The ramifications will be dire. It will be an absolute tragedy and a deep shame. Affirmative action in higher education is one of the most powerful tools we have in the United States for addressing centuries of invidious racial discrimination. The consequences of that discrimination persist today, not least of all in children's unequal access to high-quality K-12 instruction. College admissions policies that account for an applicant's race or ethnicity help level

justices' questions in a pair of affirmative-action cases they heard last fall, the results will be horribly unjust.

**The way you talk about this is interesting. Other university presidents, when discussing affirmative action, tend to emphasize how campus diversity enriches the educational experience of all students. They rarely talk about affirmative action as a way of righting historical wrongs. Why is that?**

This is a sad example of how a US Supreme Court ruling, in this case its 1978 decision upholding affirmative action in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, has shaped our public discourse for the worse. Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr., in his controlling opinion in the case, wrote that universities and colleges could consider the race of applicants, but only for the purpose of creating a diverse learning environment. Since then, every university president, provost, and dean has been told by their general counsel, “If you say we're doing this to combat racial injustice, our admissions policies could be declared unconstitutional.” I've been very open in saying that Powell's opinion in *Bakke* was overly restrictive. For decades, the opinion has limited discussion about the real reasons

and needs for affirmative action in the United States, leading proponents to make arguments that sound unconvincing and out of touch with the realities of race in America. When I discuss this topic, I'm always careful to specify that I'm speaking as a constitutional-law scholar and as a litigant in a past affirmative-action case, not as Columbia's president.

**Putting your president's cap back on, what can you tell us about the tools Columbia will have at its disposal for continuing to promote diversity if the court overturns *Grutter v. Bollinger*?**

Columbia is committed to diversity of all sorts, of course, and will remain so. Our student body is very socioeconomically diverse — as well as racially and ethnically diverse — for an Ivy, in part because we've made financial aid a key fundraising priority. But if the US Supreme Court decides that we cannot consider race in admissions, the makeup of our student body is going to change; there's no way around it. Some people will say, "Oh, well, if you just admit more students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, you'll succeed in addressing both economic and racial inequalities." But this isn't a solution, because there are more whites in every income bracket in the US. I think people imagine that we'll find creative ways of working around the court's decision, like using an applicant's ZIP code as a stand-in for their race. But we won't. We can't knowingly violate the US Supreme Court's decision. We'll have to abide by it, no matter how painful.

**On a happier note, the University recently announced that Nemat "Minouche" Shafik, a prominent economist, will succeed you as president this summer. What are your impressions of her so far?**

Well, she seems to embody all of the values we've been talking about. I'm referring to her commitment to learning, intellectual progress, diversity, social justice, and the betterment of society. And talk about having a global perspective! She was born in Egypt, educated in the United States, went on to earn a doctorate at Oxford University, and

then assumed leadership positions at the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Bank of England before returning to academia and directing the London School of Economics. I mean, this is quite remarkable. Plus, she's a wonderful person to talk to and a great listener.



Lee C. Bollinger and Jean Magnano Bollinger '72TC

I think she possesses all the qualities we could possibly hope for in the next president of Columbia.

**President Shafik seems to share your conviction that faculty and students ought to harness their academic knowledge to address real-world problems, both locally and globally.**

I do believe strongly that we as academics have a responsibility not just to advance knowledge in our fields but also to leverage our ideas to improve people's lives. My administration has put new structures in place to support translational projects, whether they involve Columbia engineers improving access to clean water in disadvantaged rural communities in the US or climate scientists helping smallholder farmers across the world anticipate rapidly evolving growing conditions. Our most visible step in this direction was to launch Columbia World Projects, a University-wide initiative that provides financial, administrative, and technical assistance to such ventures. But we've explored making additional changes behind the scenes, like updating our tenure-review procedures so that faculty members are rewarded not only

for traditional academic achievements like publishing articles in journals but also for translational work that benefits the public. President Shafik, a global economist who's helped guide macroeconomic policy in Europe and beyond, is clearly adept at turning theoretical knowledge into action. I'm delighted and eager to see where she takes these initiatives in the years ahead.

**What's next for Lee C. Bollinger?**

I started out as a law professor, and I'm happy to return to being a law professor. I'll still be teaching my course, Freedom of Speech and Press, to Columbia undergraduates, as I've done for years, and possibly additional courses at Columbia Law School and around the University. I have several books to work on. The legal scholar Geoffrey Stone and I just edited a large volume of essays about the US Supreme Court's recent decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which will come out this fall, and we're currently editing a forthcoming journal edition about the future of free speech. Next, I want to write a history of US Supreme Court rulings on campaign-finance laws.

Also, I have it in mind to write a memoir. There have been such major events in my time as president of Columbia, starting with 9/11 — the exact day of my meeting with the University's search committee — right up through the pandemic. In between came the Great Recession — which happened as I was serving on the New York Federal Reserve Bank board — and growing calls for racial justice, increased political polarization, and threats to democracy in the US and abroad. I mean, these are the great transformations of an era, at the beginning of a century. There are just so many themes. Thinking about this great university, and my own life, in the context of these issues is one of the most stimulating things I could do. As you finish something, it's exciting to look back and try to understand all that's happened.

— David J. Craig and Jerry Kisslinger  
'79CC, '82GSAS

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# EXPLORATIONS

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## Hidden benefits of NYC trees

Studies have shown that public parks, community gardens, and landscaped boulevards in inner cities can be life-altering, improving residents' mental health, cooling off their neighborhoods in the summer, and filtering the air they breathe.

But urban green spaces also play an underappreciated role in absorbing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and in combating global warming, according to a new Columbia study of vegetation in New York City. On a typical summer afternoon, the researchers discovered, the trees, shrubs, flowers, herbs, and grasses in New York's five boroughs collectively absorb more than 40 percent of the city's total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

"That's a much larger impact than we expected to see," says atmospheric chemist Róisín Commane, who led the research team at the Columbia Climate School's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

Until now, Commane says, scientists have lacked reliable estimates of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> absorbed by urban vegetation because they did not know how much plant life exists in cities. "Researchers who study the role of trees in the carbon cycle have traditionally focused on assessing the absorption and storage capacity of large forests," she says. "Looking

at satellite images of the northeastern US, for example, they'd see New York City as a gray box and largely disregard it. They wouldn't consider the contributions of the individual trees that line city streets, the little lawns behind row houses, and the rooftop gardens."

In the study, Commane, postdoctoral researcher Dandan Wei, and several colleagues used a new type of ultra-high-resolution map that breaks down New York City into a grid of six-inch squares to help them to identify tiny patches of carbon-capturing vegetation that previous surveys had missed. This led the scientists to conclude that approximately one-third of the city's total surface area is covered by vegetation, more than twice as much as past studies had assumed.

The new findings do not invalidate previous estimates of New York City's total carbon footprint, which are based largely on CO<sub>2</sub> measurements gathered at power plants, buildings, roadways, and other sources of pollution. But Commane says that her team's discovery highlights the incalculable importance of urban greenery.

"We already knew that street trees had this great benefit of cooling and providing shade," she says. "That they're also inhaling enormous amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> is an added bonus."

## The politics of depression

American adults who identify as politically liberal have long reported lower levels of happiness and psychological well-being than conservatives, a trend that mental-health experts suspect is at least partly explained by liberals' tendency to spend more time worrying about stress-inducing topics like racial injustice, income inequality, gun violence, and climate change.

Now a team of Columbia epidemiologists has found evidence that the same pattern holds for American teenagers. The researchers analyzed surveys collected from more than eighty-six thousand twelfth graders over a thirteen-year period and discovered that while rates of depression have been rising among students of all political persuasions and demographics, they have been increasing most sharply among progressive students — and especially among liberal girls from low-income families.

The authors, who include Columbia professors Katherine M. Keyes '10PH, Seth J. Prins '16PH, and Lisa M. Bates, along with graduate student and lead author Catherine Gimbrone, speculate that left-leaning teens may have been deeply affected by Donald Trump's election as president, the US Supreme Court's subsequent lurch to the right, rising socioeconomic inequality, and worsening political polarization. "Liberal adolescents may have therefore experienced alienation within a growing conservative political climate such that their mental health suffered in comparison to that of their conservative peers whose hegemonic views were flourishing," they write.



## The single best way to beat inflammation

Chronic inflammation, often subtle and undetected, has been shown to contribute to a staggering array of health conditions, including heart disease, stroke, various cancers, diabetes, hypertension, Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, depression, and bipolar disorder.

Fortunately, scientists have made progress in understanding how to prevent runaway inflammation, which occurs when the immune system becomes hyperactive and attacks healthy tissues. Studies suggest that avoiding exposure to tobacco smoke, air pollution, and other environmental irritants can help, as can limiting one's alcohol use and reducing stress. But some of the biggest scientific breakthroughs have come in understanding the massive role food plays in boosting — or busting — the immune system.

"We now know that our dietary choices have an outsized impact on our inflammation levels, because the food we eat influences them via the gut microbiome," says Shilpa Ravella, a Columbia gastroenterologist who specializes in treating rare inflammatory disorders. "The microbiome is essentially an organ in its own right and is tightly integrated with the immune system."

Trillions of benevolent bacteria in our large intestines work closely alongside our immune cells, helping them to detect the presence of dangerous germs. They also turn on and off inflammatory pathways throughout the body to fight infection or clear out damaged tissue. "If those microbes don't get the nourishment they need, then they can't do their jobs and the immune system starts to function poorly," says Ravella, who explores this topic in her recent book *A Silent Fire: The Story of Inflammation, Diet, and Disease*.

Our inflammation levels can be assessed with a simple blood test that detects the inflammatory biomarker C-reactive protein, or CRP, but determining which foods are best at fighting inflammation and which may spark it can be a little more complex. Many popular diets that are marketed as "anti-inflammatory" offer conflicting advice. Yet Ravella says that a scientific consensus has begun to emerge around what a truly anti-inflammatory diet looks like. The bottom line: eat mostly plants. "Meta-analyses that have looked at the results of several large nutrition studies have concluded that the foods with the highest anti-inflammatory scores are leafy greens,

## EXPLORATIONS

fruits, vegetables, spices, herbs, tea, soy, whole grains, legumes, seeds, and nuts,” she says. “These foods contain a wealth of substances that are essential for regulating the immune system, including polyphenols, carotenoids, and other phytochemicals, as well as unsaturated fats like omega-3s, which are critical for switching off inflammatory activities when it’s time.”

Eating more plant-based food is also important because our gut bacteria feast on plant fiber and need a lot of it — ideally more than the US government’s daily recommendation of twenty-two to twenty-eight grams for women and twenty-eight to thirty-four grams for men, according to Ravella. “Those guidelines should be considered a bare minimum, yet 95 percent of Americans don’t even get that much,” she says, noting that members of many traditional agricultural communities around the world consume vast quantities of fiber — around a hundred grams per day or more — and tend to have low rates of chronic disease. “A bowl of oatmeal contains about four grams of fiber, as does an apple or a serving of broccoli, and a cup of cooked beans contains about fifteen grams,” she says. “So you can see that it takes a sustained effort to get the fiber your body needs.”

And the greater the variety of plants in your diet, the better. “Different plants sustain different bacteria in your gut,” she says. “And your microbiome is healthiest when it’s biologically diverse, just like other ecosystems on earth.” Fermented foods like kimchi, kombucha, sauerkraut, and yogurt will introduce new bacteria into your body; “probiotic” supplements sold as pills and powders also contain live bacteria but are generally helpful only for people with certain health conditions, such as gastrointestinal disorders, Ravella says. “Whereas supplements contain high concentrations of just a few types of bacteria, fermented foods provide more species.”

Nightshade vegetables like tomatoes, eggplants, potatoes, and peppers are good for your immune system, Ravella says, despite some health practitioners’ claims to the contrary. “Although they contain alkaloids, which are chemicals that have some inflammatory properties, these vegetables are on balance anti-inflammatory when you consider all the nutrients they possess,” she says. “It’s a matter of seeing the forest for the trees.”



But meat and dairy products should be consumed sparingly, according to Ravella. “Saturated fats from animal products, in addition to clogging your arteries, tend to damage your gut microbiome and overstimulate immune cells, fueling inflammation,” she says. “Eating significant amounts of animal protein has similar effects.” What’s an appropriate amount of animal protein? Ravella recommends that people aiming to prevent inflammation limit themselves to two to three servings of fish or poultry, a couple of eggs, and a few servings of plain yogurt each week.

Obesity also fuels chronic inflammation, researchers have discovered, as

the immune system perceives excess fat as a foreign substance and tries in vain to remove it. “This is one reason why obesity is a risk factor for heart disease, cancer, autoimmune diseases, and many other ailments that tend to start in inflamed tissue,” says Ravella. But no matter our size and shape, we all need to pay closer attention to our eating habits and eschew many of the highly processed foods found in supermarket aisles, including breakfast cereals, crackers, pastries, pretzels, and white bread. “Not only do these products lack the fiber that your gut bacteria need, but they tend to contain refined sugars and excessive amounts of salt, along with artificial sweeteners, emulsifiers, and other additives, all of which can be inflammatory,” Ravella says. “Human beings evolved to digest whole foods close to their natural state. When we eat ultra-processed foods, our bodies recoil and set off alarm bells.”

Of course, anyone who is considering making major changes to their diet should talk to a physician or licensed nutritionist, since each person’s body is unique, and those with medical conditions may have special nutritional needs. But for most people, Ravella says, a whole-food, plant-based diet is ideal for regulating the immune system as well as for overall health. She points to the Mediterranean diet and its Japanese equivalent, the Okinawan diet, as just two examples of centuries-old plant-based eating traditions that have been shown to reduce the risk of chronic inflammation along with cardiovascular disease, cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, and many other modern health threats.

“In fact, the more we’ve learned about chronic inflammation, the more apparent it has become that these diets’ health benefits derive in no small part from their anti-inflammatory power,” Ravella says. “For so many diseases today, it seems, inflammation is the common denominator.”

# Are toy cosmetics making kids sick?

**F**ace paint, body glitter, lip gloss, and nail polish. The products are marketed to children in brightly colored packages adorned with images of princesses, unicorns, and cartoon characters. They must be safe, right?

In fact, cosmetics for kids, like those for adults, are subject to little regulatory oversight and have been found to contain toxic chemicals including lead, cadmium, asbestos, phthalates, and formaldehyde. Experts say that even products advertised as “nontoxic,” “organic,” or “natural” must be regarded with caution, since such terms are not defined by the US Food and Drug Administration for makeup and therefore have no legal meaning. Still, debate has raged about whether strict new safety standards for

kids’ cosmetics are needed, given uncertainty about their levels of exposure.

Columbia researchers have now turned up the heat on this issue, revealing that children in the United States use cosmetics more frequently and for longer periods of time than was previously known. Led by epidemiologist Julie B. Herbstman, the director of the Columbia Center for Children’s Environmental Health, the researchers surveyed hundreds of American families about their children’s play habits, finding that the vast majority of polled kids under the age of twelve had at some point used makeup that may contain harmful chemicals and carcinogens. Furthermore, they found that 54 percent of children in the study used play cosmetics on a monthly basis; 10 percent used



the products daily, often for hours at a time; and more than one-third of the children had unintentionally ingested makeup in the previous year.

The study, which appears in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, comes as several states, including New York and Washington, are considering tightening their consumer regulations around toys, makeup, and personal-care products. But the authors say that stricter oversight of the cosmetics

industry is needed at the federal level, especially to ensure the safety of products intended for kids.

“Children’s small body size, rapid growth rate, developing organs, and immature immune systems make them particularly vulnerable to the effects of environmental chemicals,” Herbstman says. “Our findings suggest that federal regulators should consider children as a special class of individuals who are using personal-care products and who need protection.”



Human skin grown in a Columbia lab.

## Skin grafts that fit like a glove

**I**f you’ve ever tried gift-wrapping an oddly shaped present, you can appreciate the challenge that surgeons face when grafting artificial skin onto the human body. Like wrapping paper, engineered skin comes in flat pieces, which can be difficult and time-consuming to stitch together around someone’s hand, foot, knee, or face.

Columbia bioengineers led by Hasan Erbil Abaci appear to have solved this problem by devising a way to grow skin in complex shapes. First they create a laser scan of the injured body part. Then

they use a 3D printer to create a plastic scaffold in the same shape and seed it with skin cells and nutrients. Three weeks later, a perfectly proportioned skin graft is ready for transplant — to be slipped onto, say, a severely burned hand like a glove.

The Columbia researchers, who have shown that their technique works in mice and hope to begin human trials in a few years, say the method could dramatically reduce the length of time required for surgeries, minimize the need for suturing, and make the end result stronger and more natural-looking.

## EXPLORATIONS

# Cooking clean in NYC

Many American homeowners have been replacing their gas stoves with electric models lately, prompted by a succession of studies that show that gas cooktops emit potentially harmful levels of nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, and other toxins.

Yet, health officials say, it is renters who face some of the worst consequences of cooking with gas, since they typically do not choose their own appliances and often live in tight quarters with minimal ventilation. Some experts have suggested publicly funding stove-replacement programs to protect low-income apartment dwellers in urban areas.

To assess the potential impact and feasibility of such a program in New York City, a team of Columbia scientists

recently conducted a pilot study at a ninety-six-unit public-housing project in the Bronx, randomly assigning households to receive new electric stoves or to keep their old gas ones. The researchers then monitored the air quality in the tenants' homes for ten months and found striking differences. For example, they determined that the residents still using gas stoves were routinely exposed to nitrogen dioxide at levels twice as high as the safe standard set by the US Environmental Protection Agency for children, the elderly, and people with respiratory ailments, while electric-stove users faced only negligible amounts of nitrogen dioxide. Similar discrepancies were found in residents' exposures to carbon monoxide.

On the strength of the study, which Columbia researchers conducted in

partnership with the environmental organization WE ACT and the Berkeley Air Monitoring Group, New York City officials have announced plans to expand the stove-replacement initiative to serve all residents in the Bronx building where the research was conducted. The authors say that the initiative, if it were to be expanded citywide, could significantly reduce rates of asthma and other medical conditions linked to air pollution, which disproportionately affect low-income communities and people of color.

"Electric stoves are better for health, better for the environment, and according to the residents we spoke to, easier and more enjoyable to use," says Darby Jack, a Columbia associate professor of environmental health sciences who took part in the research.

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## How our most meaningful memories are made

One of the mysteries of the human brain is how it decides what information to encode into memory. A popular hypothesis is that the brain prioritizes our most emotionally resonant experiences, which would help explain why we often recall joyous, frightening, or sorrowful events more easily than mundane ones. Scientists have struggled to determine exactly how and where such neuronal calculations are made, however, as they rarely have the opportunity to peer deeply into the human brain as it performs cognitive tasks.

Now Columbia researchers have achieved a breakthrough in this area by observing the brain activity of people with epilepsy who already have electrodes implanted in their brains to monitor seizures. These cognitive experiments reveal that at times of heightened emotion, the brain's emotional control center, the amygdala, communicates feverishly with the nearby hippocampus, which is the brain's main memory system, in order to make sure the relevant information is prioritized for storage.

"We found that when people were asked to memorize emotional words, like 'bomb,' 'knife,'

or 'smile,' a neuronal circuit that connects the amygdala and the hippocampus lit up with activity," says Joshua Jacobs, a biomedical engineer who oversaw the research. He and his colleagues also observed that the intensity of this neuronal activity was positively associated with the person's ability to later recall a term. "It seems the amygdala and the hippocampus work together to determine how much effort the brain ought to invest in encoding particular thoughts," he says, noting that scientists are still unsure where in the brain memories are ultimately stored.

The Columbia researchers are now conducting follow-up experiments to map this amygdala-hippocampus circuit in finer detail. Whereas popular brain-imaging technologies such as functional magnetic-resonance imaging (fMRI) enable scientists to observe broad patterns of neuronal activity, the implanted electrodes that Jacobs and his colleagues are using can detect the firing of individual neurons. The researchers say that understanding the circuitry could eventually inform the development of new treatments for Alzheimer's disease and other conditions that cause memory problems.

### STUDY HALL RESEARCH BRIEFS

#### Fake plastic employees

Executives at US corporations place so much value on workers' outward expressions of enthusiasm

that they routinely promote people who are passionate yet ineffective, finds Erica Bailey, a doctoral student at Columbia Business School.

#### Driving under the influence of dementia

People in the early stages of dementia tend to avoid making left-hand turns and frequently slam on their brakes when behind the wheel, according to research led by Columbia engineer Sharon Di. She and her colleagues, who analyzed the driving habits of thousands of Americans using in-car monitoring systems and artificial intelligence, say their work could lead to the development of alert systems that tell drivers when to seek neurological care.

**Sit, stay, survive** Columbia environmental-health scientist Norman J. Kleiman has found that stray dogs thriving at the site of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster are genetically distinct from ones in the surrounding area, a discovery that he says could lead to the identification of genes that enable animals to survive radiation exposure.



#### Air pollution accelerates osteoporosis

Older women who live in US cities with poor air quality lose bone mass twice as fast as those in areas with cleaner air, according to Andrea Baccarelli and Didier Prada of the Mailman School of Public Health.

**Cosmic recalculation** An international team of astronomers includes Columbia's Zoltán Haiman has discovered that a black hole at the center of the galaxy OJ 287 is much smaller than previously thought — just one hundred million times the



mass of our sun, rather than ten billion times. The study has implications for our understanding of blazars, or galaxies powered by supermassive black holes.

**Hold on a picosecond** Columbia engineers led by Simon Billinge have invented a camera whose lightning-fast shutter speed — one-trillionth of a second — enables it to document the movements of atoms, which could be crucial for the development of new materials needed for clean-energy solutions.

# NETWORK

YOUR ALUMNI  
CONNECTION



Matthew DeSantis in Bhutan.

## Great Explorations

Matthew DeSantis '08SEAS, an entrepreneur and adventure seeker, promotes and preserves the wonders of Bhutan

When systems engineer Matthew DeSantis '08SEAS first visited Bhutan in 2010, he expected to be there for only four weeks. The small South Asian country nestled at the foot of the eastern Himalayas had recently transitioned from an absolute monarchy into a democratic constitutional monarchy, and DeSantis was working in both the public and private sectors on technology projects such as developing management systems and building digital financial infrastructure.

Thirteen years later, DeSantis is one of Bhutan's longest-term and most deeply engaged foreign residents. As the founder and CEO of MyBhutan, a luxury boutique travel agency, he shepherds tourists through vibrant villages and unexplored wilderness. His second company, Beyul Labs, creates technology for service industries, including Bhutan's first platform for accepting international online payments. DeSantis is also responsible for introducing baseball to the country, and as the US State Department's warden for Bhutan, he steps in to help American travelers and expats in need of assistance.

DeSantis, who was born and raised in Connecticut, first learned about Bhutan at age twelve while at boarding school, where Bhutanese prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, a son of then king Jigme Singye Wangchuck, was his classmate and friend. Years later, after graduating from the College of the Holy Cross and Columbia Engineering, DeSantis was employed as an IT consultant when he got the opportunity to do some technology work in Bhutan.

Upon arrival, DeSantis says he was immediately drawn to Bhutan's vast nature reserves, rich culture, and peaceful lifestyle. Often seen as a real-life Shangri-la, Bhutan was never colonized, and until the late twentieth century, the predominantly Buddhist kingdom remained largely isolated from the outside world. It is one of the few carbon-negative countries (the constitution mandates that 60 percent of land must remain forested), and it is the only one to prioritize "Gross National Happiness" in addition to GDP. "There's a greater emphasis here on valuing culture, environment, a stable government, and socioeconomic stability," says DeSantis.

MyBhutan, which DeSantis founded in 2013, offers private guided journeys, including tours of monuments and monasteries, and leads adventure-seeking clients on treks and other expeditions through Bhutan's diverse landscape. DeSantis, an avid outdoorsman, plots many of the routes with his team. "We've ventured to unreachable parts of the Himalayas, rafted river segments that had never been rafted, and crossed through some of the least explored rainforests in the world," he says.

The natural wonders are innumerable. "The highest unclimbed mountain in the world is in Bhutan, and because it's considered sacred, it will remain unclimbed," says DeSantis. "The country is also an incredibly biodiverse hot spot, in large part thanks to the Buddhist value of not harming living beings. You have everything from snow leopards in the north to elephants in the south. We have one of the last ecological corridors in the world for tigers. I won't even begin to list the many globally threatened species in the jungle."

MyBhutan is a social enterprise, generating revenue for several com-

munity projects. Those include working with the Central Monastic Body of Bhutan to digitally archive thousands of ancient relics and training local students to reforest historic trails and plant fruit-bearing trees for monasteries and rural communities.

DeSantis also founded and chairs the Bhutan chapter of the Explorers Club, and he recruits glaciologists, tiger conservationists, and other scientists to conduct field research in the Himalayan kingdom. (In 2019 he won the Explorers Club Citation of Merit as part of a team that discovered more than 450 dinosaur fossils in the Gobi Desert using drone imaging.) In addition, he helps oversee the internationally recognized Bhutan Baseball and Softball Association as its chairman. The organization, which DeSantis started as a two-week camp in 2010 with several hundred kids, now has around ten thousand registered athletes.

Though he returns periodically to the US, DeSantis feels most at home in Bhutan, which after thirteen years is still a source of surprise and delight. "You think you know Bhutan well, and then something happens and you feel like you're entering a new realm," he says. "That's why it's known as a land



Bhutan's Paro Taktsang or "Tiger's Nest" monastery.

of *beyuls*, which according to Tibetan Buddhist teachings are hidden lands that can be found only once you reach certain levels of enlightenment and clarity. There's so much to study and absorb by exploring the landscape and spending time with the people here. Bhutan is a place with endless potential for discovery." — *Julia Joy*

## ASK AN ALUM: A SERIOUS LOOK AT A CHEEKY TOPIC

Journalist **Heather Radke '19SOA** explains the fascinating scientific and cultural history of the human backside.



**Your book *Butts*, which came out last year, has gotten rave reviews. How did you become interested in this unusual subject?**

I have a big butt, and when I was growing up in the 1990s in a suburb of Lansing, Michigan, I was

teased about it. In that time and place, having a big butt was not considered desirable, especially for a white woman, and I felt the kind of mundane shame most of us have about our bodies.

But later in my life, my butt started to attract a different, more positive kind of attention. I was fascinated by the shift. How could a body part come in and out of fashion? There seemed to be so many cultural and historical factors at play.

**You write that the butt may be one of humankind's greatest evolutionary advantages.**

Yes, the scientific research on that is pretty compelling. We are the only animals that have butts — this particular set of muscles is a uniquely human feature. I had always

thought that standing upright and using tools were the keys to human evolution. But Daniel Lieberman, an evolutionary biologist at Harvard, believes that the unique way humans run was actually an important factor in our survival. Humans are slower runners than four-legged animals, but thanks to the butt, we have something they do not — endurance. The gluteal muscles are the largest muscle group in the human body, and their strength and positioning are what allowed humans to keep running and chasing prey when other animals

## NETWORK

had to stop. That endurance gave humans a competitive advantage.

In the book, I write about a story I did for the public-radio program *Radiolab*, where I work as a reporter. In October 2019, I went to the Arizona desert for a remarkable race called Man Against Horse, which is exactly what it sounds like. Humans and horses go head-to-head up Mingus Mountain for a fifty-mile ultramarathon. The race has been an annual event since 1983, and in every single race, at least one runner has beaten at least one horse. In 2019, for the first time, ultramarathoner Nick Coury beat them all.

**Much of your book revolves around the tragic story of Sarah Baartman, often referred to as “the Venus Hottentot,” who was taken from South Africa around the turn of the nineteenth century and brought to Europe, where her large butt was displayed as entertainment. What is so significant about her?**

While Baartman was surely not the only Black woman treated this way, she was likely the first and certainly the most famous. There was a highly publicized trial in 1810 to determine



Kim Kardashian

whether Baartman was enslaved or living in Europe of her own free will, so there are court documents chronicling many of the horrifying details of her life. And Baartman’s body was exploited long after her death. Her remains were on display in museums in Paris continuously through the

1980s and then again in the 1990s, which is shockingly recent.

### **Why do you think curves go in and out of fashion?**

I think that fashion is always reflective of bigger cultural conversations, and we can learn a lot about a time period based on what was in style. In the late nineteenth century, for example, the bustle — a bunch of fabric, or a pillow, that was worn under a dress to literally make the butt bigger — was ubiquitous. As I write in the book, there is evidence that directly links the bustle trend to Sarah Baartman: white European women essentially devised a prop to allow them to mimic the Black body.

There was a dramatic shift in the 1920s, the age of the flapper. Curves were no longer stylish, and fashion trends celebrated thinness, even androgyny. Of course, that also tells a larger story. Women were beginning to question domesticity and experiment with new roles in society.

### **Where are we now?**

The rise of hip-hop culture in the 1990s and early 2000s brought butts back, but it was segregated racially. Black culture celebrated those curves, but white women still sought the rail-thin aesthetic popularized by model Kate Moss. Then Kim Kardashian — and specifically her butt — skyrocketed to fame in the 2010s. Suddenly, big butts were more visible and desired than they had ever been, even for white women.

### **Did researching this topic affect how you feel about your own butt?**

My relationship with my body has changed in a lot of ways over the years. Now, whenever I feel negatively about my body, I try to ask myself why I’m having that reaction. I don’t think we’ll ever be free from a society that says that some bodies are better than others, but I think there’s real value in examining why that is.

— *Rebecca Shapiro*

## Rhapsody in Columbia Blue



The **New York Youth Symphony**, a program for musicians between the ages of twelve and twenty-two, won the 2023 Grammy Award for best orchestral performance, beating out heavy hitters like the Berlin Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Six alumni and current students from Columbia and Barnard — trumpet players Yael Cohen ’21CC and Matthew Sidler ’22CC, cellist Deborah Ro ’21BC, flutist Kelsey Chin ’22BC, violinist and Columbia College freshman Joshua Wang, and oboist and Barnard sophomore Emma Braunberger — performed on the winning album, which was recorded during the pandemic and features only music by Black women composers. “To receive such a lifetime achievement at this age is stunning,” said Chin, a SIPA student studying urban and social policy, in a recent interview. “We made history — we’re the youngest orchestra to win this award.”

# Sculpture in the City

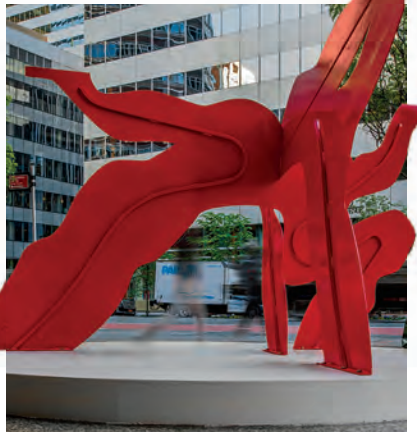
**A**nn Gillen '69SOA has been creating abstract sculptures and public-art installations for more than half a century. Now in her late eighties, the Brooklyn-born artist continues to live and work in the SoHo loft she moved into in 1973. Gillen's geometric figures, which have been exhibited around the world, are inspired

by the fluid relationship between moving bodies and urban spaces. "I'm always playing with different vantage points and how the sculpture interacts with the surrounding site," says the artist, who in late 2022 had her first solo show in twenty years. Here are just a few of Gillen's eye-catching works installed in the tristate area. — *Len Small*



## ▼ Trenton Tower (1988)

"This installation, made from aluminum pipe and situated in the light-soaked atrium of the Community Affairs Building in Trenton, New Jersey, is three stories tall. It looks different from each floor, each direction, and at different times of day. When you do a public-art piece, you have to work within the limits of the space. The sculpture couldn't block doors, and people had to be able to move by it swiftly. So I made the bottom narrow and connected the upper part to the ceiling for support. I'm slightly dyslexic, so thankfully I got help with measuring."

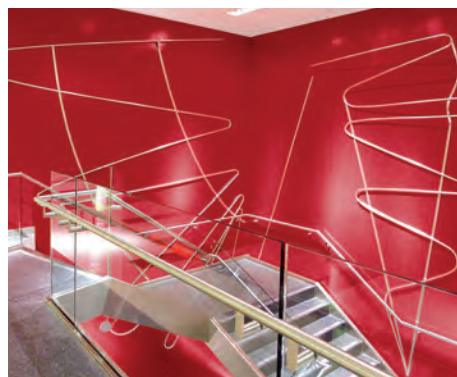


## ▲ Flying Red (designed in 1973, fabricated and installed in 1987)

"This aluminum sculpture outside 909 Third Avenue in Midtown Manhattan was inspired by a series on how groups of people move through space. As part of that collection, I had created a large-scale work based on the 1968 Columbia campus protests, which I participated in. This related piece recalls an array of figures that combine to form a body splitting apart."

## ▼ Reaching (1987)

"This piece sits next to a brick building in the playground of PS 12 in Woodside, Queens. I used red and yellow paint to bring out the color of the bricks and make the space look livelier. The figure reaches up to the sky, as children should do. Like many of my works, the sculpture is still but suggests movement."



## ◀ Line by Line (2007)

"The CUNY graduate school of journalism on West 40th Street is in the former building of the *New York Herald Tribune*, which stopped publishing in 1966. The wire 'drawing' on the wall brings to mind the scribble of a pen. I felt that these stairs, which once connected the newspaper's offices to its pressroom, represented the heart of the school, so I made the walls red."

## NETWORK

### On the Town

Four new shows on Broadway this year, all from talented alumni

#### **Fat Ham**

Saheem Ali '07SOA directs this Pulitzer Prize-winning contemporary spin on *Hamlet*, which stars Marcel Spears '15SOA as a queer college student who encounters a vengeful ghost in his backyard.

#### **Jaja's African Hair Braiding**

Ghanian-American writer Jocelyn Bieh '08SOA penned this play, which is slated for premiere in fall 2023, about a community of West African hair braiders in Harlem.

#### **New York, New York**

This stage adaptation of Martin Scorsese's 1977 film musical of the same name uses the original songs by John Kander '54GSAS and Fred Ebb, as well as new ones with lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda.

#### **The Thanksgiving Play**

Written by Larissa FastHorse and directed by Rachel Chavkin '08SOA, this satirical comedy is about a theater troupe attempting to put on a "culturally sensitive" play about Thanksgiving.



Laboratoria cofounders Rodulfo Prieto, Mariana Costa Checa, and Gabriela Rocha.

### Tech Support

Laboratoria prepares women across Latin America for rewarding careers in technology

When Pilar Figueroa graduated from college in Mexico City with a degree in international business, she struggled to find stable and satisfying work. After unfulfilling stints at a government office and a bank, she ended up working at a convenience store. Then she discovered Laboratoria, an education nonprofit that trains women in Latin America for technology jobs. "I started out with zero hope that I would be successful in the technology world, but as it turns out it's my true passion," says Figueroa, who today is a product manager focused on data analytics for an Atlanta-based company.

Figueroa is one of more than three thousand women to have graduated from Laboratoria, which since 2014 has been attempting to close the gender gap among Latin America's tech professionals. "Women are overrepresented in low-skill jobs, underrepresented in high-skill jobs, and left out of amazing opportunities because of deeply rooted stereotypes," says Mariana Costa Checa '13SIPA, who cofounded the organization with Rodulfo Prieto '13SIPA and Gabriela Rocha '13SIPA. "We serve women who either haven't had access to a

quality education or for other reasons haven't been able to make the most of their talent and potential."

Laboratoria, headquartered in Lima, Peru, and also operating in Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador, offers a six-month "boot camp" intensive with tracks in Web development and user-experience (UX) design and then assists students with job placement. "We have students everywhere from the Andes to northern Mexico," says Costa, the CEO and a Lima native. "We also have displaced students from Venezuela who are able to find a new path in a new country."

Costa, Prieto, and Rocha met as graduate students at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs. "We all came to Columbia looking for a problem to solve," says Prieto, Laboratoria's chief product officer, who is originally from Venezuela. After graduating, Costa and Prieto briefly ran a digital-services agency in Lima, but they found it difficult to recruit female technology staffers. "As we grew our team, gender diversity was lacking," says Prieto. "We also realized that the best talent had acquired their skills in nontraditional ways, like through coding boot camps."

To create their own pipeline for women tech workers, Costa and Prieto

## NEWSMAKERS

went on to found Laboratoria with Rocha, who is now the organization's chief operating officer, working out of Mexico City. The boot camp, originally started as an in-person program with fifteen students in Lima, now offers fully remote learning and graduates some 700 students from across Latin America each year. Tuition is \$3,800, but students are not required to start paying until after they graduate and find their first technology jobs.

In addition to teaching coding and design, Laboratoria's boot camp is set up to instill greater confidence, a solid work ethic, and the ability to collaborate. "The technical skills were huge, but the soft skills we developed were also top-notch," says Figueroa. "Laboratoria helped me find my purpose, gave me the 'punch' I needed to trust myself, and taught me how to demonstrate my talent even though I was a beginner."

Laboratoria is currently fundraising in an effort to expand its offerings while keeping them affordable, with a goal of graduating 1,500 women a year by 2025. The founders plan to branch out to other countries and to introduce tracks beyond Web development and UX design. Recently, the nonprofit launched a pilot program called Laboratoria+, which invites practicing professionals to take part-time classes and network. "We like to foster a mindset of lifelong learning," says Prieto.

As more technologists graduate from its boot camp and find work, Laboratoria hopes that companies will begin to adjust expectations around hiring and start to realize that the best candidate for a job isn't always the person with the flashiest résumé. "Companies are used to recruiting in the same ways and often rely on referrals from within their networks, which makes professional mobility harder for people outside of those circles," says Rocha. "So much talent gets wasted when qualifications are judged solely on someone's background, the university they went to, and the people they know." — *Julia Joy*

● Several alumni reporters received 2023 George Polk Awards honoring achievements in journalism. *New York Times* correspondent **Valerie Hopkins '13JRN** was recognized for her reporting on the war in Ukraine and the *Washington Post's* **Terrence McCoy '12JRN** for his coverage of deforestation in the Amazon. **Sarah Blaskey '17JRN** and **Nick Nehamas '14JRN** were members of the *Miami Herald* team honored for covering Florida governor Ron DeSantis's transport of migrants from Texas to Martha's Vineyard, and **Laila Al-Arian '06JRN** was one of several Al Jazeera English staffers recognized for a television segment on the death of Palestinian reporter Shireen Abu Akleh.

● **Jonathan C. Abbott '84CC**, the former CEO of public-media organization GBH, received a lifetime achievement award from American Public Television, the oldest distributor of public-TV programming across the US.



● *The Inspection*, written and directed by **Elegance Bratton '14GS** (above), won for outstanding independent motion picture at the NAACP Image Awards, which celebrate Black entertainers. **Aimée Allen '02LAW**, a singer and attorney, received a nomination for outstanding jazz vocal album.

● Actress and model **Hari Nef '15CC** (right) starred in the off-Broadway play *The Seagull*/*Woodstock, NY*, a contemporary take on Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*.



● *Forbes* featured several alumni and students on its 2023 "30 Under 30" list, including **Briana Chen '22GSAS**, a Columbia health researcher working on creating the first antidepressant specifically for women; **Shensi Ding '15SEAS** and **Gil Feig '15SEAS**, cofounders of software-integration company Merge; **Dominique Gordon '19SEAS**, a product manager at Xbox; **Chloe Shih '16SEAS**, a product lead at the social platform Discord; and **Emma Xu**, a mechanical-engineering PhD student and inventor.

● **Eric Garcetti '92CC, '95SIPA**, the former mayor of Los Angeles, was confirmed by the Senate as US ambassador to India.

● Alumni films premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival, including *You Hurt My Feelings*, written and directed by **Nicole Holofcener '08SOA**; *Radical*, written and directed by **Christopher Zalla '04SOA** and produced by **Ben Odell '04SOA**; *Invisible Beauty*, codirected by **Frédéric Tcheng '07SOA**; and *Joyland*, directed and cowritten by **Saim Sadiq '19SOA**, cowritten by **Maggie Briggs '19SOA**, and produced by several other alumni and faculty.



Diana Vagelos, Columbia medical-campus head Katrina Armstrong, and P. Roy Vagelos.

### ROY AND DIANA VAGELOS GIVE \$175 MILLION FOR NEW INSTITUTE FOR BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH EDUCATION

Two of Columbia's most generous benefactors, P. Roy Vagelos '54VPS and Diana Vagelos '55BC, have given \$175 million to the University to launch the Vagelos Institute for Biomedical Research Education. The institute will advance medical science and clinical care by expanding the ranks of PhD students and early-career physician-scientists engaged in research capable of producing breakthroughs in health care.

University officials say the institute is designed to address a problem that has prevented biomedical science from progressing more rapidly in the US, which is that financial burdens and career incentives often dissuade young researchers from undertaking high-risk, high-impact projects. To encourage more students and junior faculty to tackle seemingly intractable medical problems, the institute will create an academic environment that rewards bold experimentation and intellectual risk-taking.

The largest portion of the Vageloses' gift — \$125 million — will establish an endowment to support PhD students working in the biomedical sciences. The remaining \$50 million will support early-career

physician-scientists who do cutting-edge research at the intersection of fundamental biology and clinical medicine.

With their latest donation, the Vageloses have given more than \$500 million to Columbia University. Their previous gifts include \$250 million to the medical school in 2017, of which \$150 million was allocated for scholarships. Together with scholarship support from many other alumni, friends, and faculty, the donation enabled the school to become the first in the nation to offer debt-free education to medical students and precipitated a national movement among medical schools to eliminate student debt. In a tribute to their impact, Columbia's medical school was renamed the Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.

"We all know that continued scientific progress is the foundation for solving our most pressing medical problems," says P. Roy Vagelos, a physician, scientist, and former CEO of Merck. "The larger the number of talented researchers who are able to explore areas of discovery that capture their imaginations, the greater the impact they will have in changing medicine and improving health."



## LAURA ROSENBURY NAMED PRESIDENT OF BARNARD



**L**aura Rosenbury, a prominent legal scholar and academic administrator who for the past eight years has served as the University of Florida's law dean, was recently named president of Barnard College. She will assume her new role on July 1.

Rosenbury, who graduated from Harvard-Radcliffe College and Harvard Law School, is a legal theorist with expertise in family law, employment discrimination, reproductive rights, children's rights, and

sexual harassment and abuse. The first woman to lead Florida's Levin College of Law on a permanent basis, she is the coauthor of the textbook *Feminist Jurisprudence: Cases and Materials* and has also taught at Harvard, Stanford, the University of Chicago, and Washington University in St. Louis.

At Barnard, Rosenbury will succeed Sian Leah Beilock, who is stepping down to become Dartmouth College's first woman president.

Says Rosenbury: "I grew up in rural Indiana, and until my freshman year of college I had never even heard of women's history. Higher education is where I learned to see the world in a new way and was given the space to identify where my passions lie. It's incredibly special to be joining a community devoted specifically to helping the next generation of women do the same."

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## COLUMBIA, SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY FORM PARTNERSHIP

**C**olumbia University recently formed a partnership with Southern University and A&M College of Baton Rouge — one of the nation's historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) — that will facilitate new research collaborations between the institutions; exchange programs for students, postdoctoral researchers, and faculty; and economic-development initiatives.

A major focus of the partnership will be the creation of "pathway programs" that will encourage Southern University undergraduates to apply to Columbia PhD programs, with admitted graduate students having the opportunity to be mentored by both Columbia and Southern University professors.

In March, a delegation of faculty led by Dennis J. Shields, the president of the Southern University system and the chancellor of its flagship Baton Rouge institution, came to New York City for two days of meetings with Columbia faculty and administrators to discuss areas of common interest and the next stages of planning.

Columbia officials say the new partnership could provide a road map for future alliances with HBCUs. "Collaboration is key to scholarly excellence, and by bringing diverse talent and expertise together, we create new opportunities for innovative research," said Columbia Provost Mary C. Boyce.



## HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON COMES TO COLUMBIA

**H**illary Rodham Clinton '22HON, the former US secretary of state, has joined Columbia University as a professor of practice at the School of International and Public Affairs and as a presidential fellow at Columbia World Projects (CWP).

At SIPA, Clinton is working closely with the school's dean, Keren Yarhi-Milo '03GS, and other senior faculty members on a variety of academic initiatives. For example, she is helping to lead a new effort to convene prominent thinkers and practitioners from around the world to develop innovative policy solutions. She and Yarhi-Milo are also co-teaching a new course on foreign-policy decision-making, Inside the Situation Room, beginning this fall.

In her role with CWP, Clinton is working with Wafaa El-Sadr '91PH, who oversees a number of Columbia global initiatives including CWP, and Ira Katznelson '66CC, the CWP deputy director, to explore new ways to bolster democracy and foster effective engagement with women and youth in the United States and around the world.

"Columbia's commitment to educating the next generation of US and global policy leaders, translating insights into impact, and helping to address some of the world's most pressing challenges resonates personally with me," Clinton says.

COLUMBIA-LED PROJECT TO ENSURE NYC WATER QUALITY



The New Croton Reservoir in Westchester County, New York, which supplies about 10 percent of New York City's drinking water.

Columbia's Center for Climate Systems Research (CCSR) has been awarded nearly \$3 million in federal funding to study the potential impact of climate change on New York City's water supply and to

find ways to reduce that impact. As part of the study, Columbia scientists will help develop a strategy to ensure that farms north of the city do not resort to land-management practices that risk contaminating waterways.

The new study will be conducted by CCSR's Agricultural Model Intercomparison and Improvement Project, which develops computer models to anticipate the effects of climate change on agricultural productivity, together with the Watershed Agricultural Council, a nonprofit that promotes environmentally sustainable farming practices. (New York City's water system collects surface water from two thousand square miles of land in three upstate watersheds where farms are ubiquitous, necessitating close cooperation between agricultural and water officials.)

"This project provides a wonderful opportunity for the Agricultural Model Intercomparison and Improvement Project to apply the best of our agriculture and climate research and modeling to help farmers respond to the climate crisis," says Columbia climatologist and agronomist Cynthia Rosenzweig, who is overseeing the effort. "It's a fantastic opportunity for the team to support the development of climate-resilient farm and land management practices and to facilitate the work of New York City to protect its drinking-water resources."

NYC WATER

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## KIKKA HANAZAWA AND SHOSHANA SHENDELMAN JOIN TRUSTEES



Columbia University's Board of Trustees recently welcomed two new members.

Kikka Hanazawa '00GS is a nonprofit leader whose organizations promote social justice, women's entrepreneurship, and sustainability in the fashion world. She is the cofounder and CEO of Yabbey, a digital fashion library and marketplace, and a cofounder of Fashion Girls for Humanity, which mobilizes designers and other industry leaders to raise money for disaster-relief efforts. Hanazawa studied art history at Columbia's School of General Studies and has served on the school's Board of Visitors.

Shoshana Shendelman '05GSAS is the founder, CEO, and chair of Applied Therapeutics, a clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company in New York City. She previously founded Clearpoint Strategy Group, a boutique life-sciences consulting firm. Shendelman, who received her PhD in cellular, molecular, and biophysical studies from Columbia's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, is vice chair of the clinical advisory board of Columbia University Irving Medical Center and VP&S.



## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL WINS FIRST IVY CROWN

The Columbia women's basketball team won its first Ivy League Championship this year, rallying from twelve points down against Cornell on the final day of the regular season to earn a 69–64 overtime victory. A standing-room-only crowd of 2,600 people packed into Columbia's Levien Gymnasium and watched anxiously as Cornell nearly pulled off an upset against the heavily favored Lions (28–6 overall, 12–2 Ivy), but then erupted in celebration when, in the game's waning seconds, senior guard Jaida Patrick cut through the Big Red's defense, caught a pass from senior teammate Carly Rivera, and sank the basket that sealed the win. The Lions then made a deep run in the postseason Women's National Invitation Tournament, beating Fairleigh Dickinson, Fordham, Syracuse, Harvard, and Bowling Green before falling to Kansas in the championship game.

## COLUMBIA, ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE LAUNCH DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM IN ENGINEERING

Columbia Engineering and the École Polytechnique in Palaiseau, France, have joined forces to create a joint bachelor's-master's degree program in engineering, which will accept its first cohort of students in the fall of 2024.

Students completing the global dual degree in engineering will earn two degrees: a bachelor's from the École Polytechnique and a master's from Columbia. The four-and-a-half-year program will include jointly taught courses, research opportunities, and a PhD track.

"Engineering is an increasingly global discipline, and the global dual degree program will give students an unprece-



École Polytechnique

dent opportunity to learn the range of skills needed to be a twenty-first-century engineer," says Columbia Engineering dean Shih-Fu Chang. "This unique program testifies to the innovative spirit of our respective institutions and will foster an even closer network of collaboration for both education and research among our faculty."

# BOOKS

## White Cat, Black Dog

By Kelly Link '91CC (Random House)

**W**hite Cat, Black Dog, Kelly Link's fifth short-story collection, showcases the 2018 MacArthur "genius" at the top of her uncategorizable form. Link '91CC has been hailed as a fantasist, a fabulist, a magical realist, a science-fiction writer, a horror writer, a teller of ghost stories, and a mystery writer and has been compared to authors ranging from H. P. Lovecraft and Jorge Luis Borges to Shirley Jackson and Angela Carter.

She is all of the above. She is none of the above. Link's short stories may be infused with elements of multiple genres and literary influences, but her originality and idiosyncratic imagination defy classification or comparison. She places herself simply in "the long tradition of the weird," an amorphous category broadly defined by the presence of "something in this story that you don't expect."

Indeed, it genuinely can be said of Link's work that you never know what will happen next. The seven stories collected here (each accompanied by a gorgeously evocative illustration by the Australian artist Shaun Tan) are inspired by classic fairy tales. Hence, the action often (though not invariably) involves the suspension of natural law. Yet Link treats her stories' fantastical elements — talking animals up and down the food chain, cannabis farms run by enterprising cats, witch-queens who reign in hell and can flatten flesh and bones into rags — with a straightforward, rigorous realism. The spooky, unearthly worlds she creates operate with the immutable logic one finds in a fairy tale or a dream.

In "Skinder's Veil," one of two stories with protagonists who are academics, PhD candidate Andy Sims lives in a grubby Philadelphia apartment with a roommate whose hyperactive sex life with his new girlfriend (hilariously rendered by Link) seems calculated to drive Andy crazy as he plugs away at a dissertation that is going nowhere. So when an old friend asks him to take over her housesitting gig in a remote part of Vermont, he quickly accepts. From the time he arrives, though, things seem off-kilter — a feeling intensified by the edibles he's brought with him, as well as some hallucinogenic mushrooms harvested on the property by an attractive stranger who shows up and promptly seduces Andy. More uninvited visitors, animal and human, follow, along with ghosts, doppelgängers, and stories-within-the-story. In short, Link constructs the perfect eerie-yet-realistic fairy-tale setting in which to work her distinctive magic.

Link also brings her offbeat sensibility — one that brims with humor and incisive social commentary — to the exploration of love. In "The White Cat's Divorce," an aging, youth-obsessed billionaire finds the presence of his three grown sons an intolerable reminder of his mortality. So he dispatches them on a series of yearlong scavenger hunts — for the perfect dog, a suit of the most exquisite cloth, and the "prettiest, wittiest bride" — promising that the son who brings home the most pleasing prize will inherit all his wealth. (Think Rupert Murdoch meets King Lear.) The sons, accustomed to their father's capriciousness, set off on their quests, figuring they'll split the proceeds later. To say more would betray the plot of this deliciously twisted tale, but it is no spoiler to say that in the end, the power of love enables the youngest son to prevail over his father's greed and casual cruelty.

Romantic love, deep and indefatigable, fuels the action in "Prince Hat Underground," one of the book's most overtly fantastical

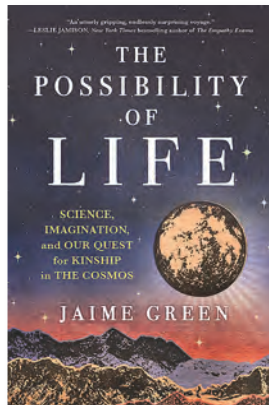


stories. Gary and Prince Hat have been a couple for thirty years, yet Gary knows little about Prince Hat's life before they met. One Sunday, Prince Hat's former fiancée shows up and slyly whisks him away. Heartsick, Gary embarks on a tortuous journey to retrieve his lost love from hell, to which he soon learns Prince Hat has been abducted. En route, and aided by an assortment of talking animals, Gary faces ordeals so harrowing that his destination seems tame by comparison. Yet amid the allegory and the plethora of surreal, often gruesome atmospheric, readers will discover a tender demonstration of the indestructibility of true love.



This wild and wonderful story, along with the other gems in this collection, reveal a mature writer in full command of her craft — which to date has been deployed solely in the service of short stories. For those new to Link's work, *White Cat, Black Dog* is an ideal introduction. For Link completists, there is even better news: a dream long deferred is about to be realized. Her first novel, *The Book of Love*, will be published in spring 2024.

— Lorraine Glennon



## The Possibility of Life

By Jaime Green '15SOA

(Hanover Square Press)

Are we alone? It's a question that ricochets around our brains whenever we step outside on a starry night and try to grasp the incomprehensible vastness of the cosmos. It's a question that feels natural and deeply human. But as science journalist Jaime Green '15SOA points out in her nonfiction debut, *The Possibility of Life*, it's a question we couldn't even have thought to ask until a few hundred years ago.

If there's anyone to blame for planting the seeds of our cosmic angst, Green posits, it's probably Nicolaus Copernicus. His heliocentric model of the solar system launched a scientific revolution that rapidly dismantled our anthropocentric view of the universe and raised the possibility that there might be other Earths orbiting distant stars. In the sixteenth century, the night sky was transformed from an abstraction into a canvas populated with a seemingly endless number of worlds, and for the first time, humans could contemplate what life in those distant worlds might be like.

In *The Possibility of Life*, Green explores how the interaction of science and culture have continued to shape

our ideas about extraterrestrial life, and what our fictional depictions of aliens reveal about our all-too-human biases and limitations. Each chapter focuses on a broad theme — evolution, intelligence, technology, language — that Green uses to analyze the aliens of science fiction through the lens of scientific fact. The result is a book that is remarkably wide-ranging. Green effortlessly moves from discussing the origins of life and the physics of stellar evolution to the politics of *Star Trek* and the evolutionary biology of *Avatar*. It's a refreshingly unique contribution to the extraterrestrial canon, and Green's lifelong love of both science and science fiction permeates every sentence.

Throughout the book, Green introduces readers to a diverse cast of scientists whose research may completely change our understanding of life on Earth and across the cosmos. There's a planetary scientist planning a mission to Saturn's icy moon of Titan to search for signs of life in underground oceans, a biologist trying to recreate the origins of life in a flask, and a psychologist who has spent her career talking to dolphins. While it's tempting to think of science as a perfectly rational pursuit, Green emphasizes the radical creativity that these scientists must harness to navigate the uncharted frontiers of human knowledge — and the important role that science fiction plays in that process.

For Green, science fiction isn't merely a vessel for exploring the world around us. It's also a way for us to interrogate our own deeply human hopes and fears about the future and our place within it. "When we imagine aliens," Green writes, "we're often imagining versions of our future selves, a superior civilization evolved from a common or analogous primeval past. We look to the stars, to the future, and hope or wonder: *That could be us too.*" In this sense, science fiction allows researchers to adopt an alien mindset, to look at old problems in new ways and ask how things might have turned

out if an aspect of our world that we take for granted — say the size of Earth or the composition of human DNA — were just a little different. There is a tension in all science fiction between what scientists know and what artists can imagine, and it is through this tension that worlds are built and groundbreaking discoveries are made.

When writers and filmmakers create alien beings, they are guided both by scientific understanding and by an artistic impulse to go beyond it. What if life evolved into a planet-scale intelligence, as it does in Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*, or if it developed the ability to see the future, as it does in the movie *Arrival*? How might such an alien inhabit its world, and what

might it think if it encountered some fleshy, relatively hairless hominids on a planet called Earth? Would it come in peace or to destroy civilization? Green acknowledges that we may never encounter these situations in real life. But for the sake of scientific progress, she insists that we never stop asking the questions.

— Daniel Oberhaus

# Bloodbath Nation

By Paul Auster '69CC, '70GSAS (Grove Press)

When Paul Auster '69CC, '70GSAS was a young man, he learned a dark family secret: on January 23, 1919, in the throes of a domestic argument, his grandmother shot and killed his grandfather.

permeates Auster's latest work, *Bloodbath Nation*, an aptly titled investigation into the causes and consequences of gun violence. Countless writers have addressed this timely topic, but many pieces devolve into tirades, seemingly directed to a limited,

elements of memoir, history, cultural criticism, sociology, and psychology. Auster is relentlessly thorough in his interrogation of American history and the psychology of gun ownership. He analyzes everything from the turbulence of the Colonial period and the birth of the Second Amendment to the pivotal role of the Black Panthers in the gun debate and the deep flaws of our political and electoral system, in which vocal minorities can override majority opinion. But Auster's writing is also raw, personal, and justifiably angry. Though he doesn't offer any groundbreaking ideas for ending gun violence, he does



Mandalay Bay Hotel. Paradise, Nevada. October 1, 2017. 61 people killed; 897 injured (441 from gunfire, 456 in the ensuing chaos).

“Whenever I think about the essential goodness of my father and what he could have become,” Auster writes, “I also think about the gun that killed my grandfather — which was the same gun that ruined my father’s life.” That ineluctable ripple effect

already like-minded readership. In *Bloodbath Nation*, Auster takes a different tack. He asks a simple question — “What makes us the most violent country in the Western world?” — and then tries to approach its answer from a wide array of angles, incorporating

advocate for common-sense measures such as mandatory background checks, assault-rifle bans, and the closing of the gun-show loophole. The text alone is compelling, but Spencer Ostrander's stark black-and-white photographs, which are thoughtfully interspersed throughout the chapters,



give the book a solemn power. Each depicts the empty site of a mass shooting from recent American history. Lacking human figures, the scenes are bleak and haunting. As Auster writes in an introductory note, Ostrander's lens transforms these forgotten structures into “gravestones of our collective grief.”

Auster understands that this book won't solve this seemingly intractable problem, but readers who immerse themselves in this deft melding of text and visuals will emerge better prepared to reexamine their own beliefs. Perhaps they can contribute to, if not a solution, at least a mitigation of this exhausting violence.

— Eric Liebetrau

SPENCER OSTRANDER

## READING LIST

New and noteworthy releases

### **MASTER SLAVE HUSBAND WIFE**

By Ilyon Woo '04GSAS

As dawn broke on December 20, 1848, enslaved couple William and Ellen Craft escaped captivity in Macon, Georgia, and fled to freedom in the North. But what made their journey especially remarkable was that they traveled: out in the open, on trains and on steamships, with the light-skinned Ellen dressed as a man and the darker William posing as “his” slave. The Crafts garnered some celebrity, and their story has been told before, but Ilyon Woo breathes new life into it, relying on exhaustive research to recreate their harrowing journey in astonishing detail.

### **TAKE WHAT YOU NEED**

By Idra Novey '00BC, '07SOA

With a busy New York City life, Leah thinks she’s finally escaped her Appalachian childhood. But then her ex-stepmother Jean dies, leaving Leah a strange collection of giant sculptures. Leah travels back to the Allegheny Mountains to find not only the sculptures but also a young man who has been living with Jean, embracing her as family when Leah could not. In her latest novel, Idra Novey — also a poet and translator — introduces us to a memorable cast of characters who skillfully illustrate the increasingly stark divide between rural and urban America. While all are well-drawn, the star of the show

is clearly Jean, a cantankerous sage, who “made art seem like something any obsessive loner who craved it could achieve.”

### **HOW DATA HAPPENED**

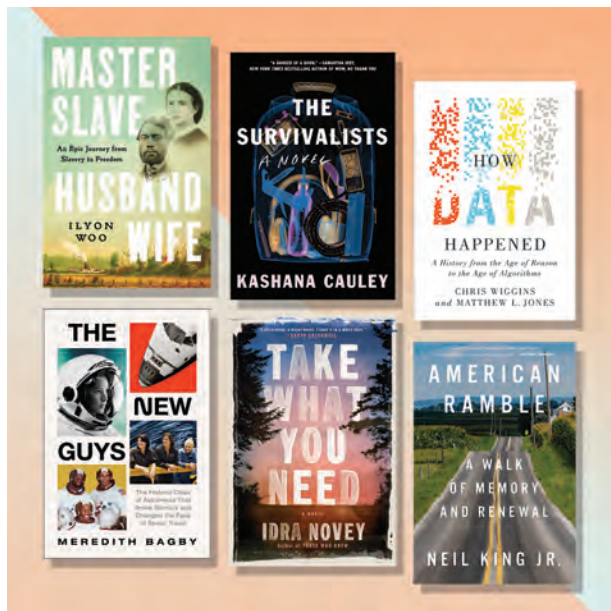
By Chris Wiggins '93CC and Matthew L. Jones

Our world is powered by numbers: data-driven algorithms decide everything from what ads we see online to how we board a flight. But how did we get here? Columbia mathematics professor Chris Wiggins and Columbia history professor Matthew L. Jones argue that the road to data dominance has been much longer than we might have thought. In 2017, they teamed up to teach what has become one of Columbia College’s most popular courses — the history of data science. Here they distill much of that material into a fascinating text, chronicling the way society has collected and used data over the last three centuries and describing what they see as the way forward.

### **THE NEW GUYS**

By Meredith Bagby '00LAW

In 1978, NASA opened its doors to civilians, ushering in a new era of space travel. In doing so, it achieved a number of other firsts — the first American women, Black, Asian-American, and gay astronauts were remarkably all part of the inaugural civilian class. Drawing on the Johnson Space Center’s oral-history project, as well as hundreds of her own interviews,



Meredith Bagby tells the inspiring and often heart-wrenching story of this group of barrier breakers.

### **THE SURVIVALISTS**

By Kashana Cauley '06LAW

Aretha is an ambitious New York lawyer, striving toward partner at a morally questionable “big law” firm while reeling from the deaths of her parents. Then, she meets Aaron, a fellow orphan who seems to get her right away. But Aaron’s world is a little different from Aretha’s. He and his housemates are coffee entrepreneurs — and also gun-toting conspiracy theorists, with a bunker in the backyard of their brownstone. Aretha moves in and begins to question everything about her by-the-book life. Kashana Cauley, a lawyer turned *Daily Show* writer, showcases her sharp wit in this debut novel, a dark comedy with plenty of insight about race, gender,

politics, and the role of guns in modern America.

### **AMERICAN RAMBLE**

By Neil King Jr. '85GS

The road between Washington, DC, and New York City is well-trodden and, most would say, not very interesting. But after a life-altering bout with cancer and a world-altering pandemic, journalist Neil King Jr. decided to slow down and take a closer look. In the spring of 2021, he walked the distance between the two cities — a twenty-eight-day trek that he punctuated with visits to historical landmarks. King is an amiable travel guide, but he also delivers plenty of depth, especially when he deploys his Columbia philosophy training to reflect on his experience. As he writes, “We should go about our days like itinerant archaeologists, kicking at stones and pulling back vines to see what is hidden there.”

# How to Focus in the Digital Age

In *Attention Span*, UC Irvine informatics professor Gloria Mark '91GSAS shares two decades of research on how technology has affected our ability to focus at work and at home — and how we can start to get that skill back



**Columbia Magazine:** You conducted a study that showed that in 2004, the average office worker switched between tasks every 2.5 minutes. In 2012, it was every seventy-five seconds, and in 2022, it was every forty-five seconds. How did we get to this point?

**Gloria Mark:** People have gradually spent more and more time using technology, and technology makes it difficult to focus because it provides infinite external distractions. Smartphones give us access to screens all the time, and things like text messages and e-mails draw us out of our current task. But external distractions aren't the only problems in an increasingly digital world. Humans are actually inherently motivated to self-interrupt, which means that we constantly have urges to do something else. So even if we turn off audio or visual signals, just knowing that we can stop our current task at any point to go online or check social media is difficult to ignore.

**CM:** Why is this such a problem? Are we just becoming a society of multitaskers?

**GM:** We know from decades of research that when people shift their

attention, every task takes longer to complete, and they are more likely to make errors. There's something called a switch cost, which means that even if an interruption is short, it takes time to get back into the flow of the original task. But in addition to hindering productivity, shifting attention causes stress. We've conducted lab studies where we've hooked people up to heart-rate monitors and blood-pressure gauges and found spikes in stress levels with every interruption.

**CM:** Despite this, you argue that taking breaks is necessary, as long as you do it mindfully. What's the best way to take a break?

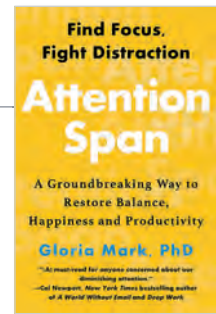
**GM:** People really do have a limited attentional capacity, and most of us are not able to focus on one task for long stretches of time. So it's very important to be proactive and take a break. I like to recommend doing a simple rote activity. Rote attention is a state in which your mind is engaged but on an easy task like knitting, gardening, or playing simple games. Maya Angelou used to talk about her "big mind" and her "little mind." She used her "big mind" when she was writing and her "little mind" for doing crossword puzzles during breaks. Rote activities are proven to reduce stress and can actually improve divergent or creative thinking, because they keep the brain active while allowing our thoughts to wander. If you're someone who gets stuck in a rabbit hole doing rote activities, though, I recommend setting a time limit so you can get back to your main task.

**CM:** Are there techniques that we can use to train our brains to focus?

**GM:** One thing I recommend doing when you find yourself getting distracted is asking yourself why. Why are you reaching for your phone? Why are you looking at social media? Why are you checking e-mail? Try to understand the reasons. Are you doing it because you're bored? Because your task is too hard? Because it's a habit? As soon as you become aware of the reason, you have the chance to correct that behavior. You can also practice what's called forethought, which means imagining your future self later in the day and considering how this behavior is going to affect you. So if you're on social media for thirty minutes or an hour, will that interruption mean you'll be working late?

**CM:** In the book you outline the paradox of work in the digital age: that distractions like texts and e-mails can hinder our productivity but are also integral to our jobs. We often can't ignore those notifications or we'll fall behind. How do we strike a balance?

**GM:** I talk about strategies to control our own distractions, but I actually think we need to think about bigger solutions on the organizational or societal level. Within organizations, team leaders can employ tactics such as "quiet hours," so employees know that there's a certain period of time that they are not expected to respond to messages. On a societal level, I'm a big fan of France's and Ireland's "right to disconnect" laws, which free employees from the burden of having to answer electronic communications after work hours. Workers who have regular meaningful mental breaks from their jobs tend to be able to focus better when they're back on the clock. — *Rebecca Shapiro*





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# One-Hit Wonder

A hundred years ago, the legendary Lou Gehrig hit a monstrous home run on South Field. But where did the ball really land?

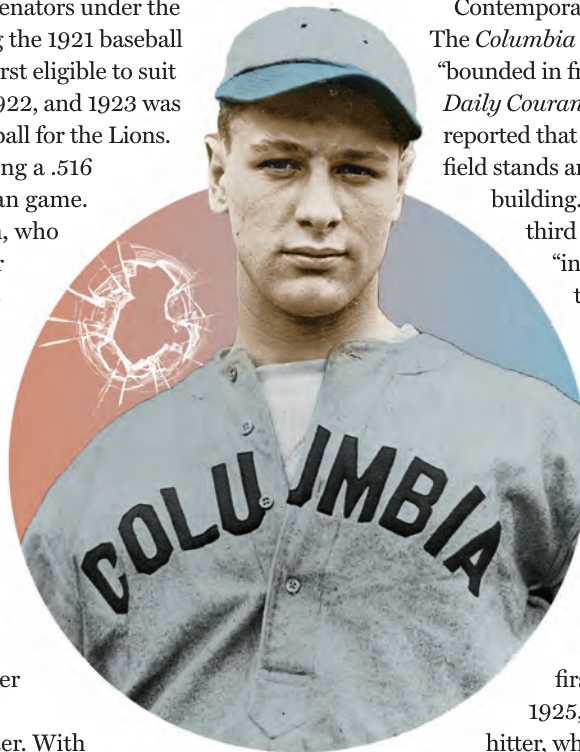
It was a warm Saturday afternoon, May 19, 1923, and the Columbia Lions were playing the Wesleyan University Methodists and hoping for their fourth consecutive victory. With a record of 8–7, the Lions had been struggling to play winning baseball, despite the efforts of their star first baseman, outfielder, and pitcher, Henry Louis “Lou” Gehrig.

Gehrig was a multitasking athlete. The recipient of a Columbia football scholarship, he had been forced to serve a year’s suspension from all collegiate sports for playing professionally for the Hartford Senators under the nom de guerre Lou Lewis during the 1921 baseball season. As a result, Gehrig was first eligible to suit up on the gridiron in the fall of 1922, and 1923 was the only year he would play baseball for the Lions.

He made the most of it, carrying a .516 batting average into the Wesleyan game. Like Yankees slugger Babe Ruth, who had been a lights-out pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, Gehrig was a fearsome hitter as well as a dominant southpaw. Just a month earlier, on April 18 against Williams College, he had struck out a club-record seventeen batters. But in the May 19 game, while he gave up just three hits to Wesleyan in a 15–2 Lions romp, Gehrig would make his biggest impression at the plate.

In the first inning, leadoff hitter and freshman second baseman Charlie Kennedy singled to center. With one out, the sophomore hurler Gehrig strode to the plate. Clad in gray flannels with navy-blue Columbia lettering on the front, Gehrig stepped into the left-handed batter’s box, clutched his lumber, and fixed his gaze on pitcher Joseph Layton “Layt” Moore.

South Field, just north of 114th Street on the Morning-side Heights campus, was at the southernmost edge of the growing university, and from home plate Gehrig could see Low Library beyond the right-field bleachers and, behind center, the brick-and-limestone marvel of the School of Journalism, more than four hundred feet away. A week before, Gehrig had launched a ball over the stands into 116th Street, which would later become College Walk.



Now Kennedy took his lead off first, and Moore hurled the baseball toward home plate. Gehrig stepped forward and unleashed his mighty swing.

What happened next has been a matter of speculation for a century. The 1942 Gehrig biopic *The Pride of the Yankees* (cowritten by Herman Mankiewicz 1917CC) depicts “Columbia Lou” hitting a blast so prodigious that it broke a window beyond center field — exactly where the journalism building stood. But did the homer actually shatter glass in the edifice that is known today as Pulitzer Hall?

Contemporary accounts of Gehrig’s clout differ. The *Columbia Daily Spectator* wrote that the ball “bounded in front of Journalism.” The *Hartford Daily Courant*, which serves Wesleyan territory, reported that “the sphere went over the center field stands and hit the School of Journalism building.” The *New York Times* offered a third account, stating that the ball sailed “into the small campus surrounding the School of Journalism building.”

But unless three reporters from three different newspapers somehow missed it, there was no broken glass that day.

The Lions finished the 1923 season 10–8–1. By then, Gehrig had signed with the Yankees, and on June 15, just shy of his twentieth birthday, Gehrig made his debut in pinstripes as a ninth-inning replacement at first base. Two years later, on June 1, 1925, he entered a game as a pinch hitter, which marked the beginning of his fabled streak of 2,130 consecutive games played.

The feat ended on May 2, 1939, when Gehrig, ailing with what would be diagnosed as ALS, removed himself from the lineup. His record of durability stood for fifty-six years.

Today, long after Gehrig’s storied career as baseball’s Iron Horse, the legend of the shattered glass at Columbia still swirls. “What I’ll never also forget are those stories that they used to tell about how Lou broke all of those windows in the journalism building with his home runs,” recalled the late Gene Sosin ’41CC, ’58GSAS, who was a director of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, upon the seventieth anniversary of Gehrig’s death in 2011. “Myths, perhaps. But good myths.” — *Leslie A. Zukor*

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