

MUCKRAKER

THE INDEPENDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL STUDENT NEWSPAPER

JFKS'S LATEST SC ELECTION

This year's Student Council presidential race was certainly quite exciting. So many qualified candidates all with great and innovative ideas to combat the issues our school is facing, specifically in trying times like these.

This year, of the three candidates (Noah Beere, Martina Gonzalez-Faber, and Louisbrian Drake-Bennett), the winner on the German side was Louisbrian Drake-Bennett with 41% of votes, securing him a victory over the runner up by 3 points, making this an extremely close call.

On the American side, Malka Beere emerged victorious over her for opponents (Michelle Gwodzik, Victor Hoppe, Richard Scott, and Oscar Brown) with 38% of votes, 7 points above the runner up.

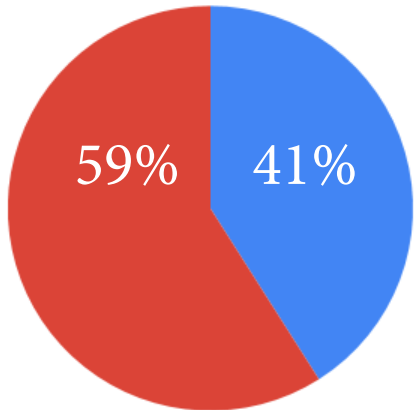
We are unable to provide any further information on the results of the runners-up, having been denied this data out of concern for the privacy of those who did not win. While we do not agree that this information should be kept a secret, especially after having been shared with JFKS for many years as a model of fair democratic processes, we respect the administration's concern for the wellbeing of their students.

These two will now be leading the student council, one of the most important and heavily scrutinized governing bodies at our school. Picking up an institution known amongst its community in recent years as unproductive and all talk and turning it into a functioning representative body of student interests is no easy task. Certainly, that has been a problem not one of the last several years' SC Presidents has found much success in conquering. Malka, Louisbrian, and a large percentage of their peers seem to believe they have a good shot at making this happen, though, and they hope to leave JFKS a better place than when they found it. Whereas Malka stated that her first goal as SC President would be to address discrimination at JFKS, Louisbrian stated that he wanted to make JFKS a "social place for all" and build community among students.

Both presidents have agreed to further collaborations with the Muckraker, meaning that further reports on their successes, challenges, and concerns will be published in the future. For now, the Muckraker congratulates the victors and wishes them the best of luck for the coming year. Jakob Reuter

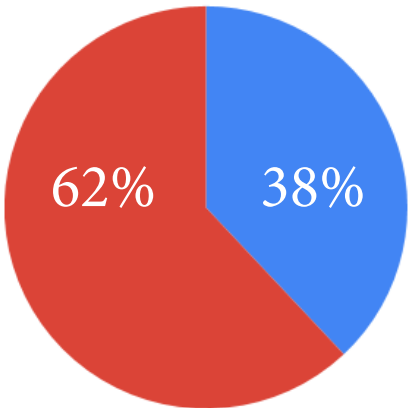
German Student Council President

● Louisbrian Drake-Bennett ● Other Two



American Student Council President

● Malka Beere ● Other Four



THE MUCKRAKER Speaks

So far this school year, we at the Muckraker have been contemplating how to come back to normal life, including normal reporting, during the pandemic. We hear all the time how we all, especially young people, cannot act as if the pandemic is over in any sense, but at the same time we're now expected to perform in school and extracurriculars as well as we would in any other time. The pandemic also has provided perspective for us at the Muckraker. How do our down-the-rabbit-hole articles and complaints about the JFKS administration stack up against the depressing onslaught of stories about new cases, deaths, failing vaccines, and isolated lives of many around the world?

We hope to start off this school year, the last at JFKS for much of the Muckraker staff, with a series of articles which matter to the modern JFKS student, on periods, on college, on the SC and NHS, but also some which encourage us to consider the systems and stories which make up our lives. We also hope you can have a bit of fun reading through this month's issue, as we had plenty while making it. More than anything, we wish all our readers the best for the coming year, in spite of it all.

We Bleed

800 million. That is the estimated number of women and girls menstruating each day.

And with menstruation affecting so many women every day, how can something so natural and common repeatedly be labeled "disgusting" or "shameful"? Menstruation is a bodily function that makes women unique; it is a part of their biology. If women around the world did not have this monthly cycle, none of us would be here. It's precisely the universality of periods that makes menstruation such a crucial topic all over the world.

However, access to needed hygienic supplies differs from place to place. A report from the Rochester Institute of Technology predicts that with an average of 450 periods in a lifetime, women will use around 15,000 period products. And forms of pain relief for menstrual cramps - which research from UCL's Institute for Women's Health has affirmed can be as painful as a heart attack - are just as necessary as pads. Access to these products is indisputably necessary, but they are often expensive. According to the NGO FAWCO in 2018, "45% of girls surveyed in Scotland reported using toilet paper, socks and newspapers to replace menstrual products, which they were unable to afford." Stuffing dirty scraps of cloth into underwear may lead to infections - or worse. Shortly after the FAWCO report, Scotland became the first

country to provide free pads to schools and colleges. However, feminine hygiene products in most countries are still taxed as "luxury items" instead of necessities. In the United States, for example, a 4-10% sales tax is added onto already expensive products - meanwhile, lip balm and Viagra are listed as "necessary items." This so-called "tampon tax," or "pink tax," remains a tremendous issue in nearly all developed and developing countries.

According to Global Citizen, approximately 2.3 billion people live without basic sanitation services. Many menstruating women may have to improvise, resorting to unhygienic practices. This lack of menstrual products quickly becomes an issue of human rights. The shame and humiliation that accompanies menstrual blood often prevents women and girls from getting an education. For example, in rural India, around 20% of girls leave school after starting to menstruate. This is detrimental not only to the individual girls, who may also be victims of other forms of abuse, but also to a country's economy. The Feminist Economics Journal argued that, "The social benefits from women's education range from fostering economic growth to extending the average life expectancy in the population, to improving the functioning of political processes." These far-reaching benefits are unfortunately undermined by social stigmas about menstruation in general.

Harmful period stigmas are reinforced by wide-

Album Review: *Zeros* by Declan McKenna



On the 4th of September British Indie-Rock artist Declan McKenna dropped his second album, three years after his debut record “What Do You Think About the Car?”. As a fan who has followed Declan since his debut, I was undoubtedly ecstatic upon hearing that he was dropping a new album. Declan is a young, talented artist from London, who has not yet gained the recognition or attention he deserves from the media. His first album was incredibly well written and showed his talent as a socially conscious and creative artist.

Immediately after starting the first track, I was taken aback by the contrast between his first and second al-

bums. The album consists of 10 upbeat songs with a runtime of 40 minutes. It is introduced by an eccentric, rock-inspired song titled “You Better Believe!!!”, which sets the overall tone for the album. The album favors a smooth transition between tracks, offering no pauses as the songs blend into one another to form a cohesive experience. The third song on the album titled “The Key to Life on Earth”, released as a single in April, is a personal favorite of mine accompanied by an equally great music video. The video features British actor, Alex Lawther, who is known for having a striking resemblance to Declan. In the music video, he plays Declan’s doppelganger. Although the music video is open to interpretation, it can be easily assumed that Alex represents Declan’s insecurities, because, towards the end, Declan becomes worn out by Alex’s antics and becomes increasingly more annoyed with his presence. Aside from the underlying message behind the music video, it was very enjoyable to watch and humorous that Declan featured Alex in his video after being compared to him for so long.

Moving forward through the tracks, the songs “Twice your size” and “Rapture” complement each other very well, both beginning with a futuristic sound and favoring synth and funk. Rapture quickly also became one of my favorite tracks of this album — it’s catchy and upbeat sound is easily addictive. Declan also surprises listeners later in the song by switching his style dramatically to hardcore rock. Another set of songs that pair well together on the

album are “Emily” and “Eventually, Darling”, which offer a short relief from the excitement of the fast-paced tracks on his album. “Eventually, Darling” brought a wave of melancholy over me, although the sound remains upbeat, the lyrics are insightful of the trivialities of love and relationships.

My only grievance with this album was the song “Beautiful Faces”, also previously released as a single. “Beautiful faces” is lyrically brilliant, yet the sound doesn’t match the overall tone of the album. This track stands out unpleasantly among the others, and I feel as though it disrupts the flow of the album. However, I do applaud Declan for stepping outside of his comfort zone and experimenting with a new style of music, as he does in multiple songs on this album.

A commonality between his first and second albums is his underlying themes and messages which provide insight into his critical thinking of our society and the issues surrounding it. Among this album, he addresses issues such as materialism, gender inequality, and mental health. I value that he uses his platform to express what he is passionate about, and to me this is especially important since I find it quite uncommon among popular artists these days. Overall, I was incredibly impressed with the album. I went into “Zeros” convinced Declan couldn’t match “What Do You Think About the Car?”, but I was pleasantly surprised. I thoroughly enjoyed this album and definitely believe it’s worth listening to.

Brooke Betten

Why You Shouldn’t Go To College (Yet)

Although we as JFKS students often refute our school’s reputation of being “elitist”, there is one aspect of our academic process that is irrefutably founded in the elitism most commonly fostered in the private school sector: the propensity to subversively pigeonhole students into pursuing a college education post-graduation. Now JFKS is by no means alone in this, especially in the United States the college experience has a romanticized reputation of personal autonomy, scholarship, and a pathway to financial security. Yet it is still concerning how monotonous the school’s portrayal of our options after graduation is. It would be unfair to say that we have never been presented with any “pragmatic” alternatives, although upon closer examination one realizes that these supposed alternatives are simply different roads that end in the same destination. What happens after that gap year in Thailand? What is the inescapable follow up to two-year trade-school? The answer, of course, is college. There is a good reason why the answer must always be college, and it lies at the core of the modern school system. College is the ultimate duality: a utopia that overworked, disillusioned high school students can hold on to, and a whip that is used to beat increasingly high standards of academic achievement into those students, beyond what is required to enter substantial parts of the workforce. Our school services the middle-class illusion that following the cookie-cutter regimen of a collegiate education, preferably one that leads to a high-earning job, also leads to happiness. It is common that students who pursue degrees in the arts or humanities with less job-security or potential salary are criticized by their peers or parents, but not attending college at all at a school like ours is tantamount to branding oneself an idiot. We have been

force-fed the collegiate dream almost since the beginning of our education and have convinced ourselves that rejecting is pure stupidity. No college means financial uncertainty, life-long imprisonment in our family home, no opportunities to pursue “smart” jobs that require a college education, and worst of all, no happiness. That is what we have been told, and we have never had a reason to doubt any of it. Yet there is a volatile truth. No matter if you are paying zero or eighty thousand dollars for higher education, studying finger painting or finance: colleges provide you with the fast food version of young adulthood. Everything is prepackaged and thawed for you and your thousands of peers. No matter how much independence or freedom a college advertises in its brochures, it is no less shackling of an environment than the one you just spent twelve years in. And as you graduate after four or even more years, the passionate flame that has been burning inside of you since your first day of high school, that longs to experience life’s beauty unconstrained, will have long since been extinguished and replaced with the at best mundane and at worst depressing reality of a career that differs from your all too familiar imprisonment in name only. So, what is the alternative? Well that’s up to the individual, but really it’s just living outside of the constraints of academia. Start from zero, discover your passion outside the classroom, become truly financially independent by not having your parents take on your student loans or housing fees. Discover what it means to really fend for yourself. Meet people and make experiences purely dependent on where your feet can take you. Yes, people in your life will probably look down on you, and that’s something you’ll have to get used to. Who knows? There may be a time later in life when you feel a

calling towards those ivory towers, but then it will be on your own terms. Find out what life could be while you are young. Don’t go to college. June Gromis

NHS Update

With the start of this new school year, the 2020/2021 National Honor Society Chapter is beginning to recommence their efforts to help the community. Because of the current circumstances NHS is focusing its efforts primarily toward aiding our school community. We have multiple projects that students are working on currently. Before summer break, NHS initiated a tutoring program to assist students with their classes, especially given that online school was a new challenge for both students and teachers. This program is set to continue into this school year, presumably virtually. At the end of last year, NHS students volunteered to help with the 6th grade Transition Assembly. Additionally, NHS worked together with the IDEAS club and Haywire to create and distribute a Black Lives Matter Art Journal. All profits were donated to Black Lives Matter. This year, students have also been engaged with the entrance class garden, preparing it for planting and helping out the entrance class team. NHS also organized the study room for grades 11 and 12 in W309. Students are committing time to keep it clean and organized so that the Oberstufe may continue to use this space. Aside from this, NHS students have been supporting our administration with various small tasks. We hope to launch further projects this year and foster positive change. Hopefully, we will be able to safely extend our efforts outside of our school community in the future as well.

Hannah Cook

Why We Need to See Buchenwald

Politics in the 21st century is truly a special kind of mess. Unfortunately, for one reason or another, political systems all over seem to currently be heading down questionable or outright dangerous paths. Focusing on specifically Europe, a pervasive concern right now is addressing our problematic past. Since nearly every modern European nation has committed some form of atrocity, human rights violation, or genocide in its history. Because dealing with these things is difficult, especially for younger generations, who feel very much removed from the past, we need to take active steps now to ensure that we address our history prudently.

Germany in particular is a fascinating country because it contains within itself some of the best and worst of humanity. Great artists and thinkers such as Goethe, Kant, Schiller, Lessing etc. are German and have shaped German culture and society into what it is today. On the other hand, we have the Holocaust, the Herero genocide, and the stain of two world wars on our legacy. This theme of duality is what, in my opinion, shapes Germany. One of the great aspects of JFKS is the multicultural historical understanding it provides. Having this perspective is already a necessary step to viewing history in a less biased way. However, there is more that is necessary to adequately understand German history, especially in volatile times such as these. This is where the 11th grade Weimar class trip comes in.

I had the privilege of attending a class trip to Weimar earlier this semester with my Grundkurs German class. This trip was cancelled for most due to the Coronavirus, but the GK German class of Fr. Freymadl had the opportunity to go at a later date thanks to the efforts and dedication of our teacher. For me personally, the experience was surreal, as Weimar is an intense example of this German dichotomy between good and evil, beautiful and disgusting. In Weimar, you have great historic sites like the houses of both Goethe and Schiller, two of the greatest writers of all time. The culture is quite overwhelming and the aura of the city is truly magnifi-

cent, easily Germany at its best. On the other hand, however, you have the nearby concentration camp of Buchenwald, a large complex in which innocent people were wrongfully imprisoned, tortured, and executed. To visit this place of horror and suffering was truly moving, especially in contrast to the rest of the city.

To my surprise, visiting the camp is not on the official plan for the Weimar trip, and rather is something Fr. Freymadl’s classes tend to do exclusively, as she emphasizes both in class and on the trip that experiencing this is key to get a deeper understanding of Weimar and Germany more broadly. The thing is, Weimar is located in the state of Thuringia, which is a hot spot for the AfD. The AfD is clearly a far right party, and some of the key politicians of the party have openly stated or implied doubt regarding the events of the holocaust. Furthermore, their rhetoric is very similar to 1930s fascist rhetoric, which further displays the dialectic between advancement and regression that is so prominent in Weimar. Not visiting the camp, as too many German classes do, is simply to deny students a complex understanding of Weimar. One may say that the trip is unnecessary, as classes already visit the Sachsenhausen camp in Berlin in middle school. While the Sachsenhausen visit is indeed very impactful in its own right, one has a far more nuanced understanding of the events as one matures. Plus, to experience the camp specifically in the city of Weimar, this model of marvelous German culture, is something that makes the experience truly unique and worthwhile. Is it depressing and disheartening? Absolutely, and it is that very uncomfortable undertone that lurks in the back of your mind as you experience the rest of the city. It is also what makes the trip more than a simply sight-seeing tour, but rather a fascinating dive into what Germany truly is and how Germany’s history affects not just modern politics, but all of us as individuals.

Jakob Reuter

The Princess and The Proletariat

Okay, so this title is clearly inflammatory in its nature. Companies like Disney and Pixar make wonderful, heart warming children’s movies that everyone has seen and everyone loves. Despite some controversies about entertainment’s relationship to China, most of them have stayed out of most political affairs. There is however a concerning phenomenon that is noticeable within children’s animated movies, which is exemplified by one movie in particular. The 1997 animated classic “Anastasia” is about a Russian princess who is saved as a child from revolutionaries, and as an adult must embark on a quest to reunite with her grandmother in France, all the while being haunted by the evil, communist (for some reason) magician Rasputin. I recently re-watched the movie on Netflix with my friends as we all remembered it fondly from our childhoods. What we found, however, was quite concerning. The issue with this movie in particular is that it claims to be at least inspired by true history, and has many historical figures in it. During the course of the movie however, it becomes clear that we are meant to feel a certain way about the revolutionaries as well as the monarchy.

From the beginning on, the Russian monarchy, specifically Tsar Nicholas, is depicted as elegantly gliding through beautiful Russian palaces and treating

his people well, while the angry revolutionaries and workers are depicted as nasty, evil, and soulless. Tsar Nicholas was of course a tyrant who trampled on civil liberties and minority rights and whose palaces were built with the blood of thousands of innocent Russians. Of course, after the revolution, depicted in the film as well, things didn’t really get better, as the USSR is one of the most well known examples of oppressive regimes in history. The point I’m making here is not that the revolutionaries should have been depicted more fondly, but rather that the message delivered by showing this stark contrast is quite concerning. See, the issue with the USSR, according to the movie, is not that it’s an authoritarian hell-state that tramples on people’s rights, but rather that the wrong people are at the helm of that state. That Tsar Nicholas would have trampled in a more gracious way, perhaps. This movie is of course a bit of an outlier, as most kids films aren’t about historical events, but the broader point still stands.

Think of Disney movies such as Snow White or Cinderella, where oftentimes evil family members attempt to usurp the throne from the protagonist and make everything terrible, which is then nullified when the protagonist returns to the throne and makes everything good again. The stance of these

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spread cultural taboos that menstruation is “unclean”. One tragic example is in Nepal, where in 2017 multiple women died in “period huts” due to lack of ventilation. Period huts isolate menstruating girls and women in remote areas because they are seen as “impure”. Even though the practice is currently criminalized by the Nepalese government, these women may still be banished to separate areas of the home, forbidden from contact with other people or even household objects, like books. In developed countries, women also face menstruation stigmas which are reinforced in seemingly harmless language. For instance, a 2015 study by the period tracker app Clue states that there are around 5,000 euphemisms used to substitute “period” or “menstruation” - many of them negatively connoted. Terms such as “the curse” reinforce the mindset that periods are embarrassing, shameful or unaddressable in public.

As the Feminist Initiative, we spent a large portion of the 2019-2020 school year raising money and awareness for The Pad Project. Founded in 2013, the organization distributes pad-making machines and educates communities about reproductive health in developing countries. These machines not only provide women with locally produced hygiene products, they provide work for women who normally wouldn’t have an income. Their efforts were highlighted in the Academy Award-winning film Period. End of Sentence., which we screened twice at JFKS.

Although “period poverty” may be less severe in Germany than in India, it is just as important an issue. Why shouldn’t schools all over the world provide free period products for students? They are just as essential as toilet paper. We can only hope that other countries will follow Scotland’s example. It is so important to talk about period stigma - it can literally save lives, save money, save economies, and save generations of women from unfair disadvantages and humiliation.

No one should feel discriminated against or embarrassed because biology works the way it does. Let us talk about it so we can break this toxic cycle of shame.

For more visit: <https://thepadproject.org/>

On behalf of The Feminist Initiative
(instagram: @feministinitiative; email: feminist.initiative@jfkbsberlin.org)

movies is that authoritarianism is good, as long as the right people are in charge. Obviously, it would be ridiculous to suggest that the next Disney movie must contain an ending where the kingdom turns into a functioning democracy, but it is important to consider the political implications of the entertainment we consume. Especially in politically divisive times like these, understanding that most everything has a political background, even Disney movies, is key to fostering thought and discussion on these topics. That young girls around the world wish to be princesses should not be taken for granted—why are children’s heroes always ultimately rich, beautiful, and seemingly without any drive at the end of the story, when we all agree this is nonsense? In American culture, where just about every institution hammers principles of democracy into children’s heads, why is the best possible life that of a monarch? And finally, do we feel comfortable passing these stories of divine right and greatness down to the next generation?

Jakob Reuter

The College Board Shakedown

Many JFKS High School students graduate each year with myriad College Board qualifications under their belts. Abitur students with even a notion of studying in the United States know their American Diploma is all but worthless if they don't invest time and money into AP Tests and an SAT score. Almost every single Diploma student graduates with at least a couple AP Scores, and many take up to six, seven, or eight AP tests per year during their junior and senior years. Why is this, exactly? The College Board may tell you their tests demonstrate academic excellence and inspire ambition amongst students. Ask me, though, or any informed student or teacher, and they'll tell you one thing: The College Board has monopolized education for American students, and is working to take every penny they can from hopeful kids with big dreams.

The College Board starts early in integrating students into their academic machine: their PSAT tests are marketed to schools as benchmark tests for academic success, and have long been administered nationwide to test schools full of middle schoolers for little to no cost. School systems identify and target "gifted" students for advanced programs as well as give their schools and families a reference for their student's relative academic prowess. More importantly for this organization, though, they are establishing one the most accurate and influential profiles of student development throughout high school by getting in early, building their ethos as a benevolent overseer of American education to students and parents.

Students see their academic skills compound or falter as they go through the PSAT 8/9, PSAT 10, PSAT/NMSQT, and finally SAT (which many take several times). Throughout, organizations for "Gifted and Talented Education" and scholarship organizations

like the National Merit Scholarship provide opportunities for school districts and individuals who buy into the College Board system. At this point, it becomes only natural that schools began to offer AP Courses, as Colleges adopted the SAT and thus the College Board heavily into their early college credit and admissions processes. Nowadays, many American and international universities alike require certain AP and SAT scores as admissions standards, meaning high-achieving students likely will not be accepted to elite colleges without access to College Board tests and standard curriculum.

The College Board is a not-for-profit organization, whose mission is to help students on the road to college. It is odd, then, that participation in their system becomes more and more costly as students age and have their futures more and more tightly entwined with it. PSAT tests are usually only about 10\$ or even free for students, though it is extremely similar in nature to the SAT. The SAT, on the other hand, is around \$50, with another \$15 for the essay which some universities require, and yet another \$15 for their Student Answer Service, the only way for students to see what they got wrong on the SAT in order to study and improve their scores. Plus, at JFKS, the initial \$50 is just about doubled due to international fees. Then come the AP tests. They cost about \$100 each, so JFKS's ambitious (or maybe just insane) students often spend more than \$1000 over the junior and senior years on these tests. It is a frequent topic of discussion how odd it is that the College Board can shake down millions of normal American families for thousands of dollars each, especially considering the numerous College Board executives all making around \$500,000 per year.

These qualifications aren't even considered elite in many circumstances, though. Highly-ranked Amer-

ican schools and international universities see the American Diploma as so weak a high school education that students will not even be considered for many programs without applicable AP tests. This is clear evidence of Americans using the College Board, a private enterprise, as a crutch for a lackluster public education system—AP Classes are supposed to count as college credit, but colleges see them as such basic courses that you need good scores to even get in. This has been known for a long time, and largely accepted worldwide as the new standard in American education despite the complaints and minor pushbacks of American high schools and universities. So, then, why lament it now? Because out of the Corona-crisis that stopped much of the world in its tracks, and frankly caused unmitigated disaster in the United States, has emerged an unprecedented opportunity for universities and high schools to free themselves from obligation to the College Board.

For the first time in many years, a significant portion of colleges and universities in the United States have become so-called "test-optional" for incoming applications. This means the SAT and its largest competitor, the ACT, have taken a critical blow in their dominance over the admissions process. There is now a possibility that American universities will develop methods of evaluating applications that allow them to remain test-optional for students in coming years. While AP Tests are still necessary parts of the admissions process, having no SAT requirement means allowing students whose skills don't lie in multiple-choice onslaughts to emphasize a diverse and exemplary set of skills and interests in applications. Besides, giving families the freedom to save money in the already absurdly expensive American college system by restricting the power of the altogether too influential College Board may not seem like such a bad thing to many students. Liliana Walker

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Staff

Editors: Jakob Reuter, Liliana Walker

Reporters: Brooke Betten, June Gromis, Hannah Cook, Jakob Reuter, Liliana Walker

Layout: Liliana Walker

Contact Us: themuckraker@gmail.com, muckraker.now.sh

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