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# We Need To Talk

*A global, student-run newspaper*





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# Current Events

## edited by Barsha Parajuli

### Black Women At the Olympics

by Andrew Daly

The Olympics have been in the news recently, but not because of the world-class athletes participating. Several organizations related to the Olympic Games have come under fire for actions widely seen as racist, especially to women of color.

#### **Sha'Carri Richardson**

Sha'Carri Richardson is the fastest woman in America, running the 100m dash in just 10.64 seconds in the Olympic trials. She qualified unofficially for the 100m dash and 4x100m relay in the Tokyo Olympics. Post-race, she tested positive for THC, a substance that is prohibited in competitions by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).



Richardson had smoked marijuana to help her cope with the death of her mother only a week before her Olympic trial race. It is USA Track & Field (USATF)'s job to dole out punishments to track athletes who violate the rules. USATF gave Richardson the minimum 30-day suspension while criticizing the WADA policy of prohibiting a drug that is not performance enhancing: in a statement, USATF said that they "fully agree that the merit of the World Anti-Doping Agency rules related to THC should be reevaluated." This 30-day suspension would cause Richardson to miss the 100m dash, but it would not stop her from participating in the 4x100m relay, which was more than 30 days away from the start of her suspension. However, USATF opted to exclude Richardson from the relay as well, effectively extending her suspension. Many are outraged over the decision to stop an athlete from competing because of her use of a non-performance-enhancing drug and the fact that the favorite to win Olympic gold is being excluded from the games entirely.

## Soul Cap

Soul Cap is a company that manufactures swim caps for Black athletes with thick, curly hair. The traditionally accepted swim cap does not fit many individuals with natural Black hair. However, upon reviewing the cap for use in Olympic competitions, the International Swimming Federation (FINA) denied Soul Cap's application. In their rejection, FINA stated that the caps "do not follow the natural form of the head", a statement that drew backlash for its tone reminiscent of phrenology, a pseudoscience historically used to deem Black people inferior due to the shape of their skulls. Many experts say that the exclusion of these caps in competitions will further alienate Black swimmers, already an extreme minority in the sport. After the extreme backlash, FINA claims it is currently reviewing its decision.



Rather than be banned from competition, Phelps was praised for his natural ability. CeCe Telfer, a Black trans female athlete, has been banned from running in the Olympics for the same reason. The argument that the exceptional talent of these Black female individuals would be unfair to the competition is viewed by many critics as overtly racist.



The international committees that make rules for athletes may want to take a second look at their rules & regulations because they end up disproportionately affecting Black female athletes, punishing and alienating them at every turn.

## Testosterone Testing

Namibian sprinters Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi have been barred from competing in the Tokyo Olympics because their natural testosterone levels are higher than the World Athletics limit for female runners. This move is being criticized by many because no one can control their natural physical advantages. This move had additionally been scrutinized because of the historical association of Black women with more masculine traits. Furthermore, critics have made comparisons to Michael Phelps, who has physical advantages of larger lungs and an 80" (203.2 cm) wingspan.



## Cicadas

by Tara Vidyababu

What makes Brood X cicadas different from other cicadas is that they are periodical insects, they feed on plant fluids both below and above ground, and are the largest brood of 17-year cicadas. Brood X are found mainly in Indiana, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and northern Virginia.

During their 17 years underground, Brood X cicadas go through five stages of development. When these cicadas finally become adults, the males come out and begin to mate. After mating, female cicadas end up laying around 500 eggs and die after mating. adult cicadas die soon after mating and fertilize the soil near the trees where their nymphs will feed and grow. These eggs are laid in trees and hatched six weeks later as nymphs that land on the ground and burrow there for the next 17 years until the next cycle. Usually they stay underground for 17

years but sometimes there are “straggler” cicadas which come out after 13 or 21 years. “There are currently 12 broods of 17-year cicadas and 3 broods of 13-year cicadas. The 13-year cicadas are not found near D.C. Two broods have gone extinct (one near Connecticut and one in Florida). The broods have migrated northward since the last ice age.”

Since these cicadas emerge every 17 years in large quantities, predators such as birds, raccoons, opossums, foxes, mice, shrews, frogs, toads, turtles, and fish, are able to get their share of food. This relationship is a survival strategy called prey satiation, this occurs because there are more cicadas than combined predators can physically eat. “[The many animals coming out to] eat cicadas and the emergence of brood X is a grand feast for the animal world. Studies

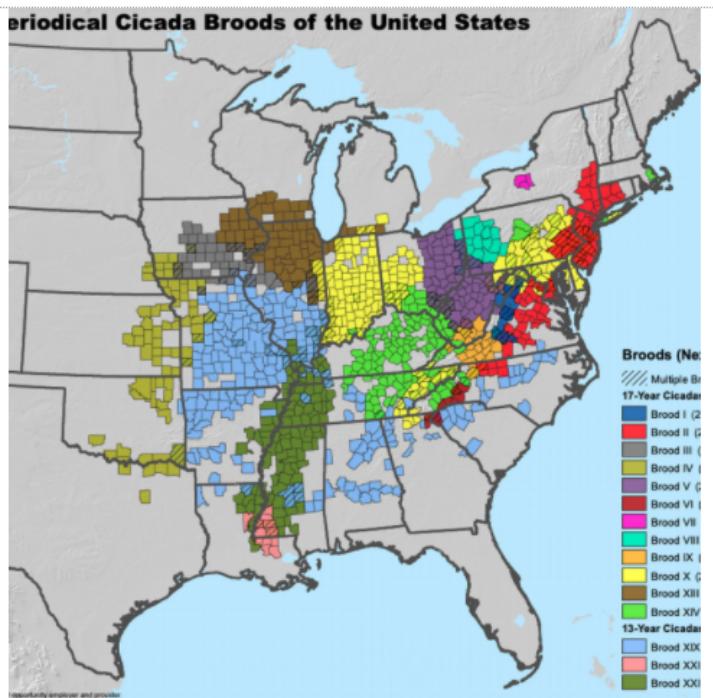
have shown that some birds have larger clutch sizes during the years periodical cicadas emerge."

Although the large quantities of cicadas emerging from the ground and seeming relatively harmless, they harm the environment in a couple ways. Firstly, because female cicadas lay their eggs in trees, young trees' branches are negatively affected. Therefore, this Spring 2021, and every Spring every 17 years after is not the best time to plant young trees.

What most people take away from cicadas are the loud screeching noises that come along with them. It is important to note that only male cicadas use an organ known as a tympanic membrane that is placed on both sides of their body near the base of their wings. Males use this organ to "sing" and call to attract females, then females show they are accepting by making a clicking sound with their wings. "Male cicadas produce the loudest sounds in the insect world.

Entomologists believe that the sound protects these insects by hurting predators' ears."

This summer, do not be scared of the large amount of cicadas flying around. Brood X cicadas do not sting or bite, are relatively harmless, and if eaten will not cause any problems unless you have a shellfish allergy!





## Delta Variant

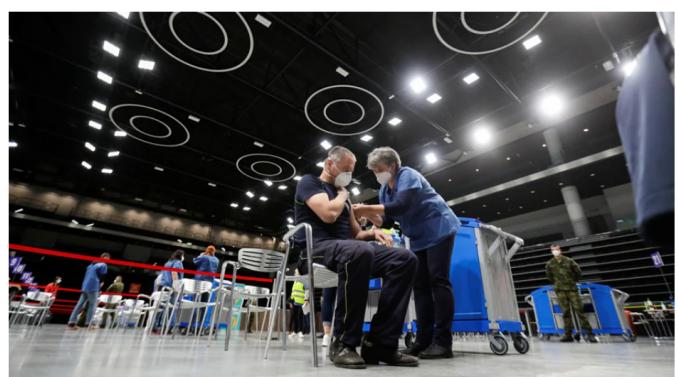
by Tara Vidyababu

The world is now facing another strain or variant of COVID-19, known as the Delta variant. The Delta variant originated in India in December 2020 and is now spreading world wide after being first being detected in the United States in March 2021. “Evidence suggests that it is potentially more transmissible than other variants.”

Before the Delta variant the three main strains of the COVID-19 virus were the Alpha, Beta, and Gamma strains.

The Alpha strain was the first variant detected initially in the United Kingdom and then in the United States in December 2020. Second came the Beta variant, first found in the United States at the end of January this year and initially found in South Africa at the end of last year. The Gamma variant was first detected in the United States in January 2021 but, “was initially identified in travelers from Brazil, who were tested during routine screening at an airport in Japan, in early January.”

In Europe, the World Health Organization followed the number of COVID-19 cases in 53 countries over the course of 10 weeks. The results of this study, presented by the regional director for the UN health agency, Hans Kluge, state that, “the number of [COVID-19] cases rose by 10%, driven by increased mixing, travel, gatherings, and easing of social restrictions.” This study was also taken while the Delta variant was evolving and where millions of people were still unvaccinated. Kluge also states that, “the Delta variant overtakes alpha very quickly through multiple and repeated introductions and is already translating into increased hospitalizations and deaths.”



Additionally, Hans Kluge believes that the WHO European Region will be dominated by the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus by August 2021. Kluge also highlighted how both doses together of the current vaccine against the COVID-19 virus are still effective against the Delta variant. Kluge states that, “delays in getting vaccinated cost lives and the economies, and the slower vaccination programmes are, the more variants will emerge.”

Kluge reminds us to not assume the pandemic is near over with low vaccination figures in Europe regions. “The average vaccine coverage in the [Europe] region is 24% only, and more [seriously], half of our elders and 40% of our health care workers are still unprotected.” Meaning that although it may seem that some countries are doing well, around the world there are unvaccinated people, which is unacceptable according to Kluge.

The Delta variant is still going to evolve and mutate causing it to need constant. As new information is learned on the delta variant, public health responses will be made accordingly.

Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, the World Health Organization's technical leader responding to COVID-19, mentions how “the virus has been evolving since it first emerged, it is what viruses do. [And that,] the variants of concern that we are tracking are currently four: Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta. They will continue to evolve: there will be more mutations, there will be more variants detected, and some of those will be variants of concern.”

Finally, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, WHO's Chief Scientist, rehashes the need for a full vaccination - both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are needed to be protected from the Delta variant. Nevertheless, even being vaccinated does not ensure immunity as current vaccines are not 100% effective. Dr. Swaminthan states, “even if you're vaccinated, you can get the infection, but the chances are you will get very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, and that the chances of getting seriously ill are really, really low.”

# History

## edited by Bruktawit Fisseha

### Rachel Carson: a Life Devoted to Prevent the “Silent Spring” by Grace Huang

“Man's endeavors to control nature by his powers to alter and to destroy would inevitably evolve into a war against himself,” stated marine biologist, conservationist, and best-selling author, Rachel Carson. When Carson was born in a small, rural town in Pennsylvania, nobody knew that she was going to devote her entire life to bring people's attention to the above quotation, writing one of the most influential books of the 20th century - Silent Spring. Growing up on a farm beside the Allegheny River, she began to develop her deep-rooted love and respect for nature as a child, influenced by her exploration of the river and her mother, who taught her to appreciate nature. Carson not only developed her passion in the environment as a child, but also demonstrated her talent in writing at the age



of 11, winning a prize and publishing her story in St. Nicholas Magazine.

With her passion for writing, she graduated high school with honors and entered Pennsylvania College for Women as an English major. However, in Sophomore year biology class, she met her mentor, Mary Skinker, one of the most important people in her life. Skinker awoke Carson's interest in biology, forever changing the trajectory of her life. Under the influence of Skinker, she made the brave decision to change her major from English to Biology. Further supporting her student down the path of biology, Skinker not only exposed Carson to marine biology with her summer fellowship at the Marine Biological Laboratory of Woods Hole, but also contributed to Carson's winning of a scholarship during her graduate work at Johns Hopkins University, an unusual accomplishment for a female at the time.

Due to the Great Depression and family members passing, Carson was forced to

terminate her plan to pursue a doctorate degree. However, Skinker encouraged her to study for the civil service exams and prepared her for them, allowing Carson to be ready for a part-time job in the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries that opened up in 1935.

Outscoring many competitors on the civil service exams, she became the second woman to be hired there. She was hired to write scripts for short radio programs called "Romance Under the Waters," expanding her exposure to marine biology.

Demonstrating her strengths at the intersection of biology and writing, she soon became hired as a junior aquatic biologist. Later, she began to manage publications of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. Over the course of 15 years of working with the government, she started with a part-time job, and ended with the position of Editor-in-Chief, overlooking all publications of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. Her responsibilities included reviewing manuscripts as well as reporting to the government by preparing speeches for congressional testimony.

While Carson expanded her career as a biologist working with the government, she did not cease to express her passion in writing. After her brief exposure to marine biology as a student, she had many more opportunities to interact with the sea after being hired professionally in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. To assist the government in policy making, she constantly visited the Chesapeake Bay to learn more about the environmental condition of the area. She also participated in a project exploring the undersea world for submarine warfare during WWII. With her easy access to the waters and frequent exposure to

marine life, she published a series of books about the ocean, including *Under the Sea-Wind*, *The Sea Around Us*, and *The Edge of the Sea*. Among these books, *The Sea Around Us* proved to be a great success, being listed as one of the New York Times best-sellers for a record-breaking 86 weeks, as well as winning her many awards and a considerable amount of prize money. Encouraged by this financial success, Carson retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and became a full-time author. It was during this time that she published the influential work that aroused national debate around the widespread use of pesticides: *Silent Spring*.



In fact, Carson's concern regarding pesticides began many years ago during WWII. Back in the days during the war, the invention of DDT, a particularly strong pesticide, was seen as a world-renowned accomplishment that met little criticism. Unlike previous pesticides that target specific insects, DDT is strong in that it is indiscriminate and kills many different insects, solving the problem of malaria-causing insects for the U.S. troops in WWII. Carson proposed several articles discussing the potential negative effects of wide pesticide use on the health of ecosystems to magazines at this time, but they were all

rejected.

Carson's concern proved valid. After the end of WWII, DDT began to expand its civilian use, primarily for increasing crop production in agriculture. With her background in biology, Carson was immediately alarmed and started to consider the potential effect of DDT on the environment and the health of humans. After receiving news from her friend about the unusual amount of bird deaths following the use of pesticides in Massachusetts, she finally set her mind on a book to warn the public about the consequence of pesticide misuse.

Her most influential piece of literature, *Silent Spring*, combined Carson's distinction as a meticulous biologist and talented writer. Foreseeing considerable controversy on the issue she hoped to discuss, she backed up her book with four years of research, culminating in 55 pages of research notes and the endorsement of many fellow scientists. Finally, the book was published, and her prediction was correct. The book indeed received instantaneous attention from all over the nation, and debates soon followed. Seeing a potential threat to the profit produced by their product, the chemistry industry fiercely attacked the credibility of the book as well as the author. As a result of all the attention from the public, President Kennedy ordered the Science Advisory Committee to investigate the validity of Carson's warning. Four years of tedious research paid off - her proposal suggesting the potential harm of pesticide use was validated by the report of the Science Advisory Committee. As a direct result of her bravery and meticulousness, the use of DDT became more restricted and eventually banned. A few years later, the government established the Environment

Protection Agency, an indirect result of Carson's effort to protect the environment. After her death in 1964, a middle school and a refuge of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services were named after her to honor her great accomplishments. Looking back at the life of Rachel Carson, we surprisingly find that her idea of collaborating with nature instead of rising above nature has transcended time - it is still, if not more, relevant in today's society. However, more important than her message to preserve the environment is the message she sent to the younger generation with her life story. Carson's achievements inspired the future generation to never be afraid of authority. Expecting a wave of attacks from the chemistry industry, she did not back off. Instead, she collected solid evidence to prove her point and stood up against the spread of misinformation. We should all be inspired by the life of Rachel Carson, a woman who demonstrated what to do in a power imbalance: don't hesitate. Fight back with facts.



# Spotlight

## edited by Rachel Lewis

### Chinese activist Ou Hongyi strikes for climate in the country that emits the most greenhouse gases

by Rachel Lewis



Ou Hongyi sits on the steps of a fountain in Lausanne, Switzerland, on Apr. 19 to protest the criminal charges she and other protestors received for trying to prevent the Mormont hill from being mined for concrete.

Photo credit: Ou Hongyi

China was responsible for over a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions in 2019, according to a recent report by the Rhodium Group. Since China has a one-party political system, there is no debate over how much the government should take action on climate change like in other nations.

Although China is not currently the hotspot for the global environmental movement, 18-

year-old Ou Hongyi hasn't been dissuaded by the lack of support she faces from her community.

Ou is from Guilin, a college town in southern China, where her parents work as lecturers on the university's campus. Ou first became concerned about the impact that her life has on the environment three years ago. She had a dream in which she was dining at a restaurant and was forced to kill a fish while it stared at her fearfully. After that, she stopped eating meat and started researching the toll that human industry is taking on Earth. Ou tried to convince her school's cafeteria to switch from plastic utensils to reusable ones, but the cafeteria director refused, citing hygiene concerns and the lower cost of plastic.

Ou soon discovered the #FridaysForFuture climate strike movement that helped environmental activists who call attention to

their calls for action. There were no #FridaysForFuture strikes in China at the time, so Ou decided to hold the first.

In late May 2019, Ou stood in front of government buildings in Guilin, holding a sign that asked for others to join her to advocate for climate action. Officials forced her to leave after a week because she didn't have a permit – but not before her strike went viral on social media. She even caught the attention of Greta Thunberg, who retweeted a picture of her on strike on May 26, 2019 and called her a "true hero".



Ou Hongyi protests the lack of action, in her view, by Chinese policymakers to combat climate change in front of her local government building in May 2019.

Photo credit: Ou Hongyi

Thunberg and Ou are about the same age and both forgo school for environmental advocacy. However, they have very different amounts of public support: Thunberg spoke to world leaders at a UN conference on Sep. 23, 2019, while Ou faces harassment from law enforcement wherever she protests. Ou stopped attending school in Dec. 2018 so that she could devote all her time to kickstarting the climate movement in China. She wanted to return so that she could advocate for change at school as well, but officials banned her from coming back.



Ou Hongyi sat in front of a hotel in Guangzhou for 10 hours overnight in Nov. 2020, protesting the hotel industry's overuse of water and disposable materials.  
Photo credit: Ou Hongyi

The pandemic hasn't stopped Ou Hongyi from calling attention to the need for action to mitigate the effects of climate change. In spring 2021, she and other global activists protested the continued use of a concrete mining quarry on the biodiverse and archeologically significant Mormont hill in Switzerland. On Mar. 30, the protestors, who had set up camp on the hill, were forcibly removed and soon sentenced to various amounts of prison time. Ou and a few fellow activists started a hunger strike on May 21 to protest the prison sentences and fees that the Swedish courts had levied. Ou's activism won't stop until climate change does.



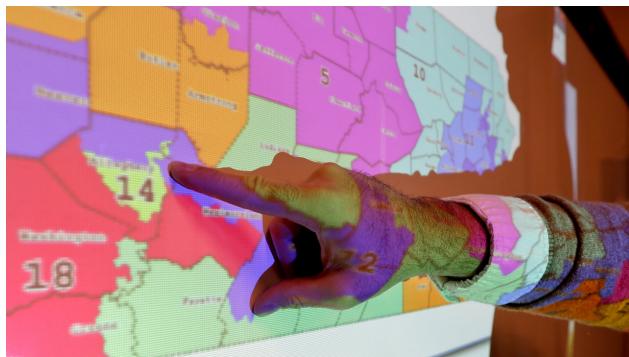
Ou Hongyi strikes in a square in Lausanne, Switzerland to protest the prison time she and other activists face for protesting the extension of a concrete mining quarry.  
Photo credit: Ou Hongyi

# Opinion

edited by Sanjana Mittal

## Gerrymandering: What It Is and the Need for Reform

by Ketevan Gallagher



Every ten years, the United States holds a census, which counts the amount of people that live in the US, among other information such as where they live. One of the most important things the census helps us determine is districts. By knowing where people live in a state, politicians can divide up states into congressional districts, with each district electing one representative to the house of representatives. However, the district lines are often drawn unfairly. This practice is called gerrymandering.

Gerrymandering is the practice of drawing district lines in a way that will ensure one candidate has an advantage over another.

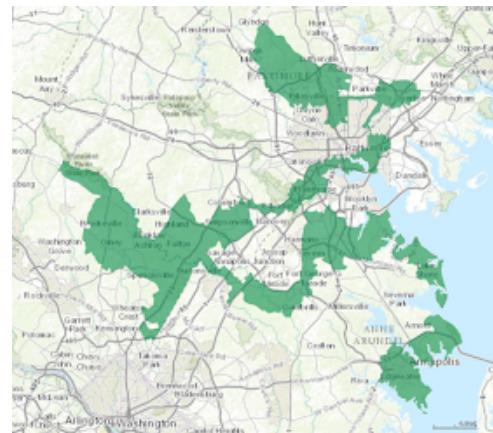
Each district in a state elects a representative to congress. This means that a state with six districts that contain majority Democratic voters and four districts that contain majority Republican voters will have ten representatives: six Democrats and four Republicans. Over the past decade, gerrymandering has commonly favored Republicans, although both Democrats and Republicans are guilty of drawing political borders to give their party an advantage. For example, say a state has ten US Representatives, and 40% of voters in the state are Republican and 60% are Democrats. At first glance, one may want to divide up the state using county or city lines, trying to keep communities together. However, the whole point of districts is to divide the state up evenly by population so that each person is equally represented. To divide up the state fairly in this scenario, there should be ten districts, all with the same number of people. To make it fair on a political basis, there should be six with Democratic voters and 4 with Republican voters.

But people do not normally live in perfect cities where the political climate reflects the ratio of the state. In fact, Democrats generally live in cities, while Republicans tend to gravitate to rural areas.

In addition, the population of different cities changes as people move. The population balance between and within states is constantly shifting while the number of representatives stay the same, so district lines must be redrawn to ensure that each representative represents approximately the same number of people. That is why redistricting happens most commonly after the census.

Because the states decide how district lines are drawn, there are several ways the redistricting process could happen. Most district lines are drawn by the state legislature. If the state legislature is primarily Democratic or Republican, then the district borders can be created with the intention of making it easier to reelect candidates from that party. As mentioned earlier, Democrats generally tend to live in cities, while a higher proportion of Republicans live in rural areas. That's why one may see divided cities, while the rest of the district encompasses the surrounding suburbs or rural areas. The division of the Democratic city area allows all the districts to be majority Republican, even if that may not reflect the overall state. This method is referred to as cracking. Another method, called packing, is when the legislature attempts to put the voters with opposing political views into one district, but the others are still their supporters. This can lead to districts where political races are not competitive, and voters may feel like their votes do not matter, or their voices are not heard. Modern gerrymandering often uses computers to maximise the number of seats a political party can gain.

That's why gerrymandering is known to create irregular district shapes, much like Maryland's third congressional district, pictured here.



Some states have taken steps to combat this practice. For example, New York has created an independent commission to take over the redistricting process, while Virginia has a bipartisan association. By giving the power of drawing district lines to a commission that has less bias or contains many people with different biases, the process will be more fair. The supreme court has ruled that courts cannot decide the legality of districts, but it should be decided by either congress or the states.

The best way to ensure that gerrymandering does not continue and each voter's voice is heard through fair district lines is to take away the power of redistricting from biased politicians and hand it over to an independent commission. If you live in the United States, I encourage you to look up how your state determines district borders, and if your state has passed any redistricting reform bills. If you want to help end gerrymandering, reach out to your local or state representative and tell them to put an independent commission in charge of drawing district lines. Make your voice heard to ensure fair and equal representation in voting.

# Police Unions: Labor Above Law

by Vijay Fisch

## TW: domestic abuse, depictions of anti-black violence

In 2007, Oakland Police Officer Hector Jimenez fatally shot an unarmed 20-year-old man. 7 months later, he killed another unarmed man, shooting him three times in the back. Jimenez was rightfully fired, but reinstated quickly (Friedersdorf). In Pittsburgh, similar fatal incidents occur routinely. According to Alex Zimmerman of the Pittsburgh City Paper:

"In December 2009, Eugene Hlavac was accused of slapping his ex-girlfriend (and his son's mother) so hard that he dislocated her jaw. And in November 2010, Garrett Brown was accused of running two delivery-truck drivers off the road in a fit of rage... Each of these men, who were all Pittsburgh Police officers at the time of the incidents, shares a common experience: They all were fired, charged criminally, cleared of those charges... and then got their jobs back..."  
(Zimmerman)

The list goes on and on, and the vast majority of cases end similarly: unnecessarily violent officers ending up back on the force. A 2017 Washington Post report found that "Since 2006, at least 1,881 police officers have been fired from 37 of the nation's largest departments for behavior that betrayed the public's trust" (Kelly et al). 451 of these officers got their jobs back, including rapists, murderers, and drug abusers. Why is it so hard to keep dangerous officers from rejoining our police forces? The answer often lies in the protections afforded to police officers throughout the nation at the behest of powerful police unions.

Unionization is the process by which workers in some field (ie. carpenters, engineers, firefighters, etc.) organize together to lobby for increased wages, benefits, and other workers' causes.

According to national data-focused police reform organization Campaign Zero:

A police union contract, also known as a collective bargaining agreement, is the formal working contract between a city and its police department. These contracts control how officers can be investigated or disciplined for misconduct; what appeals processes officers can use to seek reinstatement after being disciplined or fired, whether records of misconduct will be disclosed or destroyed, how much money officers receive in wages, benefits and other funding; and other issues... (Nix the Six)

After the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer, a national reckoning on police conduct has thrust these unions into the limelight. Police union arbitration policies ratified by towns and states have received increased scrutiny. Nationally, most police bargaining agreements grant police officers undue rights and overly lenient disciplinary structures that non-police officers are not afforded.



While many labor unions are designed to promote workers' rights and ensure employers do not take advantage of their employees, police unions differ in their especially large influence over local governments, police policies, and police wages, which perpetuates discriminatory police practices and systemic racism; the abusive practices of these police unions must be checked through policy restrictions that limit arbitration and reduce union influence over disciplinary structures.

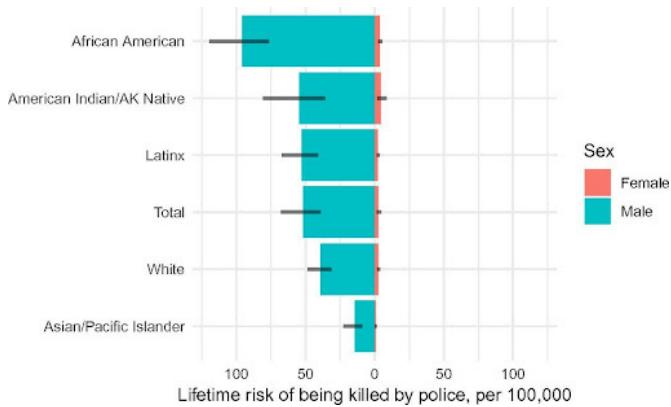
According to the American Bar Association, “Arbitration is a private process where disputing parties agree that one or several individuals can make a decision about the dispute after receiving evidence and hearing arguments... the neutral arbitrator has the authority to make a decision about the dispute” (“Arbitration”). Police unions are often given the right to request an arbitrator in the case of a grievance and cooperate with the police chief to select a “neutral” mediator whose decision is binding. Different departments have slight variations, such as granting unions and officers complete authority over choosing the arbitrator, and granting individual officers the right to request a specific arbitrator.

Arbitration is not always biased, but the police have managed to skew the process in favor of officers, even unnecessarily violent ones. According to a University of Pennsylvania study of hundreds of police departments, “A little over fifty-four percent of all departments in the dataset give police officers or the police union significant authority in the selection of the arbitrator that will hear a case on appeal” (Rushin 574). Arbitrators who frequently compromise on discipline are more likely to be rehired, earning their paycheck at the expense of the public, who face the reinstated officers on the streets.

Such reinstatements are far from unique. For example, in Boston, “Fully 72% of disciplinary actions taken against Boston Police officers are overturned in arbitration...” (Howard). According to former Boston Police Commissioner Bill Evans, “If someone isn't fit to be an officer, I should have the right to get rid of him... It's troubling when an arbitrator doesn't stand behind me when we have grounds for termination” (qtd. in Howard). The vast majority of police departments grant their officers a right to this skewed arbitration. In 2018, Stephen Rushin, a law professor at Loyola University Chicago, examined 656 police union contracts and found that “...the majority of departments allow officers to appeal disciplinary sanctions to an arbitrator selected, in part, by the local police union or the aggrieved officer” (Matthews).

Studies have shown that collective bargaining protections such as arbitration that put problematic officers back on the force after discipline result in police abuse. An analysis of the 100 largest American cities found that “the extent of protections in police contracts was directly and positively correlated with police violence and other abuses against citizens... extending collective-bargaining rights to Florida sheriffs’ deputies led to a forty percent statewide increase in cases of violent misconduct...” (Greenhouse).

It is common for officers who commit acts of police brutality, often against citizens of color, to repeat offenses with no accountability. This increase in violent misconduct inevitably increases inequality; data shows black Americans are more likely to be killed at the hands of the police, whether armed or unarmed (Edwards et al).



Further data supports these claims; an analysis of thousands of police shootings found that unarmed black people are killed at a rate 3 times higher than unarmed white people (Belli). These figures lend credence to the claim that the increase in police misconduct due to arbitration would likely correspond with an increase in violence against black Americans.

Police unions throughout the nation inhibit police discipline through their influence. For example, some protections include “...keeping an officer’s disciplinary record secret, erasing an officer’s disciplinary record after a few years, or delaying any questioning of officers for twenty-four or forty-eight hours after an incident such as a police shooting” (Greenhouse). These are protections that only police officers are afforded. Erasing an officer’s disciplinary record after a certain period makes it easier to repeat infractions with no accountability. Delaying questioning for days after an incident allows an officer to consult video footage, fellow officers, and legal counsel about an incident to craft the best account. These provisions implemented by unions are often statewide. According to Campaign Zero: “...Professor Samuel Walker and Kevin Keenan documented in 2005 how police unions helped to enact statewide police bill of rights laws with provisions that constitute ‘impediments to police accountability’” (Nix the six).

The impact of these widespread policies has been dangerous. Recent studies show that unions’ “...political and bargaining power has enabled them to win disciplinary systems so lax that they have helped increase police abuses in the United States” (Greenhouse). Current policy proposals are attempting to reign in union influence over disciplinary structures. Recent Washington D.C. legislation ensures that “All matters pertaining to the discipline of sworn law enforcement personnel shall be retained by management and not be negotiable... future collective bargaining agreements between the Fraternal Order of Police/Metropolitan Police Department Labor Committee and the District of Columbia does not restrict management’s right to discipline sworn officers” (Washington, D.C., Legislature). Similar proposals to curtail union influence over disciplinary structures can tear down the wall that unions have erected between problematic officers and accountability. Policy restrictions that limit arbitration and eliminate union influence over disciplinary structures are vital to limit these unreasonably powerful unions that exercise dangerous control over local governments, politicians, and police policies, perpetuating discriminatory police practices and systemic racism. It is undeniable that the brutal murder of George Floyd in 2020 shook the American view of policing. Few had realized how union influence has corrupted our police disciplinary systems. Derek Chauvin, the murderer of Floyd, had at least 17 misconduct complaints, several of them for using unnecessary force. Tragically, there are many more officers like Chauvin who are never brought to justice.



# Art

## edited by Jyotsna Bisariya

### Activism as a Platform for Modern Art

by Deetya Adhikari

The human mind, though capable of independent thought, is susceptible to the persuasive power of image. Throughout history, art influenced the grasp that rulers had on their empires. A strong example of this is Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the First Persian Empire. The emperor at the time, Derius, used grandiose images of Persepolis to communicate with those living in conquered lands. These diverse groups of people were very impressed by depictions of considerable power and the ornate capital, thereby willingly giving tribute to Derius and strengthening his rule. Derius also imprinted his face on the currency so as to expose the people to a symbol of his rule, further cementing his power.



Closer to the present day, we have Cold War propaganda, which was prominently used to fearmonger the citizens, appeal to select groups to spread their agenda, and filter the truth to the public. The USSR aligned propaganda with women, as a ploy to gain the support of women. As a result, women who saw this propaganda were more predisposed to communism than capitalism under the US. They attempted to portray women as equal to men under communist society; however, this unquestionably was not the case. Multiple statistics from the time show that women had more opportunities in the United States than in the USSR. Less than half of the women in the USSR were among research and professional personnel from 1947-1959. Those who did not have access to such data were forced to blindly believe the propaganda, and were molded into model loyal citizens to their government.



"Soviet Women! Be the first in line for the national struggle to successfully fulfill the Five-Year Plan in four years!"

Art has a long history with activist movements, and has been used as a means to inform the public and spread awareness of a certain issue outside of protests. Activist art evokes a profound sense of empowerment among individuals and communities. Thousands rose in an uproar after the murder of George Floyd, where Minneapolis cops stood idly as one of their own killed him unprovoked, bringing attention to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. From there, millions of infographics and posters have popped up, aiming to spread knowledge on systemic racism and what can be done. Activist art is meant to actively address cultural power structures rather than representing them or simply describing them, according to activist artist Tania Bruguera. In other words, the purpose of modern activist art is not to merely point to the issue, but truly represent the issue at hand – to make a difference.

Music is another popular form of modern-day activist art, with songs covering issues such as climate change, inequality, etc. *Fake Plastic Trees* by Radiohead, first performed in 1995, is a call against consumerism and overconsumption. It repeats the line "It wears her out" saying that a fake, plastic lifestyle causes harm to one's mental and physical health, while also leading to environmental destruction. Another song with a clearer motif is *Internet Religion* by Baby Queen, released in 2020, with lyrics such as "Let me show you all the best parts of my life / My clothes and my phone and the gap in my thighs / My friends own things you can't buy / But all of them are broke..." These lines are fairly self-explanatory, highlighting how perfect peoples' lives are shown to be on the internet, while in reality, they are suffering physically and mentally as a result.

Activist art manifests itself in all forms: in song and graphics/paintings and additionally in written word and film, all equally effective and penetrative. These pieces of art are not only a way to unleash creativity, but also a tool to unify, grow, and develop as a community.

# Art of Earliest Civilization

by Paleesa Kapoor

## Art of the Fertile Crescent

Civilization developed in a few great river valleys where deposits of rich soil produced abundant harvests so people could settle and create villages. One of these villages extended about 280 km north of the Persian Gulf, between the Tigris and Euphrates River. Because of the fertile land and warm climate it was known as the Fertile Crescent. It is known as Mesopotamia (the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent) attracted settlers.

## Sumerian Civilization

Sometime before 4500 B.C., Sumerians (who were nomads), settled in a part of Mesopotamia that was called Sumer. They farmed and built homes and created a community. They are believed to have invented wheeled transportation and the potter's wheel. Their cooperative lifestyle formed a government and set of laws.

## Ziggurats: Symbolic Mountains

Each Sumerian city was built around a shrine called a ziggurat (a stepped mountain made of brick covered earth). This was a structure that symbolically linked the earthbound worshippers with heavenly gods.

## Sumerian Decorative Arts

Much of the evidence of art objects comes from the ancient cemetery where burial sites were found filled with chariots, jewelry, headdresses, sculpture and musical instruments. Combining human and animal features was a common practice in their art objects and the imagery of the bull was common as well.

## Evolution of Writing

Sumerian writing (through pictures and symbols) is one of the first we have found.

They wrote on clay tablets with a writing instrument called a stylus. The wedge-shaped character writing is called cuneiform. The clay tablets were then baked and in this way contracts, records, and cultural stories were handed down.

## Akkadian Period

Northwest of the Sumerians lived a Semitic people in an area called Akkas and they had a king that eventually ruled over Sumer as well. Although this ruling period was short lived, art and literature flourished.

## Symbolism in Akkadian Art

King Naram-Sin of Akkad in Horned Tiara Near Mountain Summit with Soldiers. Found in Susa, Iran 2230 B.C. Sandstone Stele. The king wears a horned helmet symbolizing his status as a god. He is placed before a triangular mountain with stars shining down on him as he tramples the body of a defeated foe.



## **Neo-Sumerian Period**

Akkadian dominance in Mesopotamia ended around 2150 B.C. The revival (known as the Neo-Sumerian period) lasted more than 300 years. The most famous ruler of the Neo-Sumerian people was Gudea who was honoured for his devotion to literature, religion and good works. He built temples, promoted education and showed compassion for the less fortunate. He was worshipped as a god after he died and his appearance has been captured in many portraits.

## **Babylonian Civilization**

Around 1800 B.C. after centuries of war with the Mesopotamian city states the Babylonians, under the rule of their king, Hammurabi, gained control of Mesopotamia. King Hammurabi is famous for his code of legal practices that he published on a stele (an inscribed stone pillar), in a public area for all to see. The code was a set of rules accompanied by the appropriate punishment.

## **Assyrian Civilization**

When this king died there was chaos for a while until the powerful Assyrians from the north rose to power around 900 B.C. They ruled until the early 7th century. The most impressive visual records of the Assyrians are the stone reliefs used to cover the mud-brick walls of their royal palaces.

## **Neo-Babylonian Period**

Early in the 7th century, under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian supremacy was re-kindled. Unfortunately, the temples and other structures erected were made of clay and crumbled easily, so we don't have them today. The Ishtar Gate was the only surviving example of architecture from this time. It was named after a goddess and is one of eight gateways marking a procession route that curled through

Babylon. When this King died in 562 B.C. his empire only lasted about another 30 years, before it too crumbled.

## **Persian Empire**

Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria were many centuries old when a vigorous people appeared and they called themselves Irani (their new homeland is now called Iran). They were mistakenly called Persians (because some Greek geographers named them after a territory known as Parsa). In 539 B.C., the Persians captured the city of Babylon, without a fight, and made it their capital. This lasted until 331 B.C. when they were conquered by Alexander the Great.

## **Persian Architecture and Relief Carving**

Palaces are the highest accomplishment of Persian Architecture. The remains of the great audience hall at Persepolis is in ruins today. It contained 100, 65 foot columns, ornate wooden ceilings and a huge audience hall. Unlike the military scenes shown on Assyrian reliefs, Persian carvings portray people bringing tributes and offerings to the king. When Alexander the Great marched into the city in 331 B.C. he destroyed this magnificent palace.

Art has been in our world since the beginning of time. We may not realize it but art has been evolving. Nowadays, art has turned away from classical tradition, embracing new media and aesthetic ideals.

# Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning

by Shrinidhi Thiruvengadam

When Cathy Park Hong, author of the fiery *Minor Feelings*, was in the ninth grade, her teacher insisted that she and her classmates would fall in love with the *Catcher in the Rye*, just as a gamut of established literary critics had for decades upon decades. She recalls how “I kept waiting to fall in love with Salinger’s cramped, desultory writing until I was annoyed. Holden Caulfield was just some rich prep school kid who cursed like an old man, spent money like water, and took taxis everywhere.” Hong critiques the near-obsessive confluence between American escapism and the nostalgia of childhood, manifesting in several multimedia facets. She finds it quite paradoxical that her youth, while fully American, did not have a tinge of the sensationalized “innocence of youth” that we glorify in films, television shows, and books: her childhood was acutely unstable, rife with the challenges of learning English and the frequent racist rhetoric and attacks that her family experienced.

Hong occupies a very unique space as an Asian-American poet and essayist. Recalling her earlier writing endeavors in a coveted spot at the prestigious Iowa’s Writing Workshop, she saw herself “as a good student of modernism”, effectively deciding that writing about her Asian identity was about the most pedestrian, contrived thing to do. She would not be compartmentalized as an Asian American writer who got acknowledged for her “Asianess”, nor would she be acknowledged for writing about her racial identity. Clearly, she has since graduated from that mindset, penning a series of essays that hold a great deal of candor regarding the Asian American experience and the several stories that

conveniently slip through the cracks, even as the enchantment of the model minority fills idealistic discourse. In *Minor Feelings*, Hong has the upper hand, giving the spotlight to people like her father, someone who defied the conventional Asian immigrant narrative by immigrating to the United States under a lie. Hong remarks that when the 1965 immigration ban was lifted in the United States, only select professionals from Asia were granted visas to the United States, which entailed people who were already doctors, engineers, and mechanics. Naturally, the roots of the successful “American Dream” were first cultivated here, despite only a select number of people being able to enter the country; her father thus had to falsify his occupation as a mechanic in order to come to the United States. Looking back, one can trace the path that has resulted from this “brain drain” to key actions taken by white America to pit minorities amongst each other, using highly educated Asian immigrants as archetypes of the American minority experience, devaluing all other minority experiences.

The spotlight is extended to perhaps the most sobering essay in the collection, titled *Portrait of an Artist*, wherein Hong covers the life, death, and legacy of writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, demonstrating the clumsy nature in which her death was handled by the authorities and the media. Writing about the egregious nature of Cha’s rape and subsequent murder, the essay provides an unflinching commentary on the circumstances in which Asian female bodies are handled in the mainstream, a topic that goes severely undiscussed. This is precisely what Hong aims to discuss in her novel – the

unglorified, unsexy stories of minorities that are too repercussive to be palatable.

Hong opens the novel by describing a rare neuromuscular condition that she first developed in her early twenties: known as a hemifacial spasm, she details how this condition would present itself as annoyingly as an uncontrollable toddler, appearing like an imaginary facial tic on the right side of her face, which she would attempt to awkwardly cover-up by hiding her face in public or peering or averting her gaze. Becoming a point of self-consciousness, she asserts that this tic was the starting point of her depression, a depleting parasite that affected her ability to perform, socialize, and carry through her lifestyle. It was at this time that Hong decided to begin seeing a therapist, intentionally picking a Korean therapist because “[she] wouldn’t have to explain [her]self as much”. Much to Hong’s devastation, this therapist would go on to essentially break-up with her following their first session for unexplained reasons, leaving Hong to deal with all of her animosity and dissonant feelings at her lonesome. This experience ultimately parallels the overarching theme of a large portion of these essays in regards to “minor feelings” - when white America demands that minorities deny their “minor feelings” and put on a coat of armor instead; it can often feel like the aftermath of a bad break-up with your therapist. There is no reconciliation of one’s feelings but rather a complete suppression. Left in the debris of unresolved turmoil, Asians are expected to keep their heads down and continue to work hard in order to uphold the facade that America does have a place for minorities, but only the ones that do not complain about the ossified system.

Towards the end of the book, Hong includes this quote from Cha: “Arrest the machine that purports to employ democracy but rather causes the successive refraction of her.” Hong’s persistent message that minorities in America should not have to suppress these so-called “minor feelings” that arise as a result of marginalization is a refusal to put on the so-called “thick skin” as a means to ward off microaggressions. A resounding perspective, Hong begs the audience to consider these minor feelings as not-so-minor - they are indeed feelings with larger implications that are valorized by their mere existence.



# Call to Action

**Petition to help Frito-Lay union members:**

[https://www.change.org/p/laura-kelly-frito-lay-union-members-asking-for-better-treatment?source\\_location=topic\\_page](https://www.change.org/p/laura-kelly-frito-lay-union-members-asking-for-better-treatment?source_location=topic_page)

**Resources to help Trans kids play sports:**

<http://pinkmantaray.com/lettranskidsplay>

**Allow critical race theory in schools:** [https://www.change.org/p/bill-lee-end-tennessee-s-ban-on-teaching-critical-race-theory-in-schools?recruiter=1210672085&utm\\_source=share\\_petition&utm\\_medium=sms&utm\\_campaign=psf\\_combo\\_share\\_initial&recruited\\_by\\_id=991a6220-cad5-11eb-a806-c11a8e75ed02](https://www.change.org/p/bill-lee-end-tennessee-s-ban-on-teaching-critical-race-theory-in-schools?recruiter=1210672085&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=sms&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&recruited_by_id=991a6220-cad5-11eb-a806-c11a8e75ed02)



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