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GW

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GW Arts & Sciences

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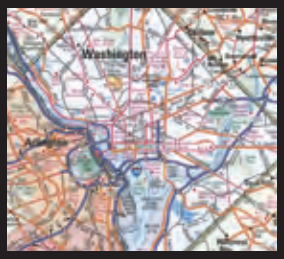
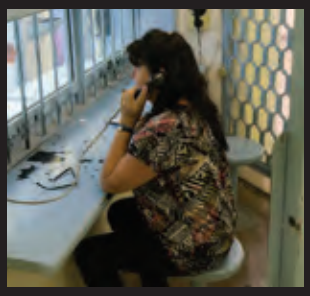
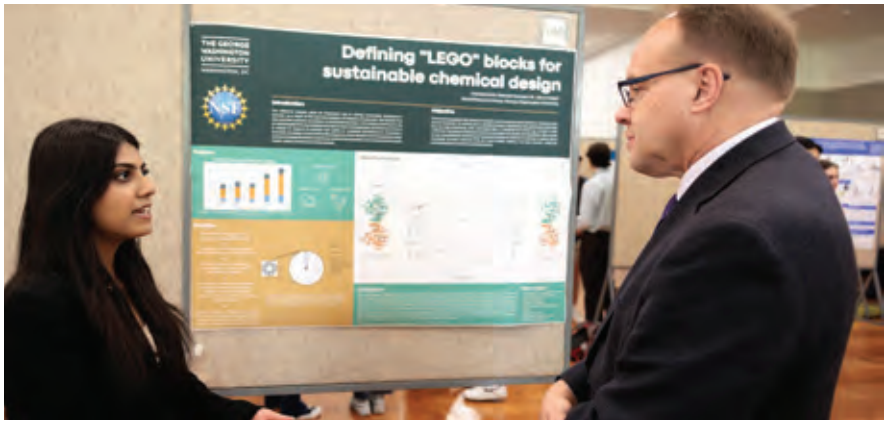




briefcase

Showcase Celebrates Student Research



Biology and statistics major Chaitrali Patil with CCAS Dean Paul Wahlbeck

MORE THAN 125 UNDERGRADUATE and graduate students across the science, social science and humanities disciplines displayed poster presentations of their scholarly work at the inaugural CCAS Research Showcase.

The day-long event celebrated the range of research across the college with projects that represented more than 20 disciplines and were supported by over 100 faculty research mentors. Topics—many of them interdisciplinary—ranged from exploring COVID-19 anxiety to understanding autism. More than 350 visitors were in attendance, including Dean **Paul Wahlbeck** and Vice Provost for Research **Pamela Norris**, along with faculty and fellow classmates.

"This work is a testament to the broad reach, depth and interdisciplinarity of what we do in our classrooms, labs and studio spaces," Wahlbeck said. "These are students ready to join the next generation of scientists, scholars and artists who are equipped to meet the challenges ahead with fresh and innovative ideas."

For students, the showcase represented the culmination of months—even years—of data collection and analysis. Political science major **Hope Ledford** began investigating her project on the impact of small-dollar contributions to political candidates of color after interning with a Washington, D.C., advocacy group for two years. Second-year art therapy master's student **Brianna Issenberg** spent nearly a year on her project helping an 84-year-old woman with Alzheimer's-related dementia use art to regain daily autonomy. And **Adewale Maye**, a second-year economics master's student, studied the impact of flooding on Southern Nigeria—including on his own family in the region.

Chaitrali Patil, a senior biology and statistics major researching safer pesticide design, said the event "shows how much in-depth student research is happening in so many different disciplines."

TSPPPA RANKS AMONG NATION'S BEST

THE TRACHTENBERG SCHOOL OF Public Policy and Public Affairs (TSPPPA) placed among the nation's best schools in public affairs in the latest *U.S. News & World Report* survey of top graduate schools. In addition, 10 of its specialty programs also received high marks.

TSPPPA tied for 10th best in public affairs among all graduate schools. Its highly-ranked specialty programs included: Global Policy (tied for sixth); Homeland Security and Emergency Management (sixth); Public Management and Leadership (eighth); Health Policy (10th); Public Finance and Budgeting (10th); Overall Public Affairs (tied for 10th); Public Policy Analysis (18th); Non-Profit Management (tied for 15th); Urban Policy (tied for 10th); and Social Policy (tied for 18th).

"This year's impressive rankings for several of our schools and many of our graduate programs show that we are making great strides in fulfilling our academic mission, thanks to the hard work of our university community," said GW Provost **Christopher Alan Bracey**.

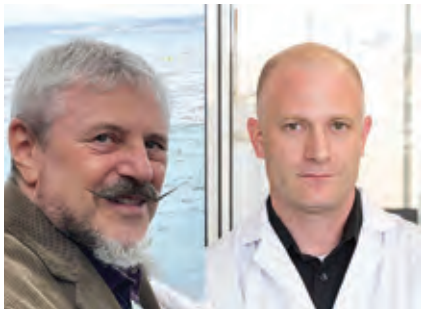
SCIENTISTS NAB INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY **Akos Vertes,** a co-inventor on 19 patents and lauded for his work in creating new analytical techniques for fields such as laser ionization and mass spectrometry, and Professor of Anthropology **Chet Sherwood**, whose research into the brains of primates and other mammals has shaped the study of evolutionary neuroscience, were elected to the 2022 class of fellows with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)—the scientific community's top honor for innovators in the field.

Vertes was recognized "for distinguished and innovative contributions to the field of mass spectrometry, especially as applied to single-cell analyses." Throughout his more than 30-year career, he has garnered major research grants totaling millions of dollars from agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Energy to support his work.

Sherwood was honored "for distinguished contributions to the field of biological anthropology and evolutionary neuroscience, particularly using comparative approaches to understand the evolution of the human brain." He has also been elected to the National Academy of Sciences, which recognizes scientists for their distinguished and continuing achievements in original research.

Past CCAS faculty members receiving the lifetime AAAS honor include University Professor of Human Origins **Bernard Wood**, Professor of Physics **Chryssa Kouveliotou** and Professor of Chemistry and International Affairs **Christopher Cahill**.



Akos Vertes (left) and Chet Sherwood

'MIGHTY' WGSS PROGRAM TURNS 50

THE WOMEN'S, GENDER AND Sexuality Studies (WGSS) program, the first graduate program focused on women's studies in the U.S., celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2023 as a home for scholarship and activism. Among its commemorative events, past directors reunited for a day-long celebration of the trailblazing program. They joined alumni, students and fellow faculty members for conversations on five decades of changes and challenges in the field, and reflected on the legacy of a community that current WGSS Director **Ashwini Tambe** called "scrappy, but mighty."

Over 50 years, the program has expanded to include an MA in public policy with a WGSS concentration, undergraduate majors and minors in both women's studies and LGBT studies and joint degrees with GW Law. It also broadened its focus on gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality studies and emerged as a leader in a field that challenges inequality and re-imagines social justice.

Former WGSS directors (from left) Daniel Moshenberg, Jennifer Nash, Cynthia Deitch and Kavita Daiya with current director Ashwini Tambe

Offline Events Spike Online Hate

Racist posts spiked 250 percent during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests.

REAL WORLD EVENTS ARE OFTEN followed by surges in several types of online hate speech on both fringe and mainstream social platforms. A study led by Political Science Professor **Yonatan Lupu** discovered that not only did racist rhetoric constitute the overwhelming majority of bigoted remarks online, but expressions of hate toward other groups with little connection to a trigger event abounded as well.

Looking across six interconnected online platforms—from mainstream sites like Facebook to websites notorious for hosting offensive content, such as 4Chan and Gab—the study analyzed seven types of online hate speech: racism, misogyny, anti-LGBTQ, antisemitism, anti-religion, anti-immigrant and xenophobia. In all, the researchers collected 59 million English-language posts from approximately 1,150 online communities.

The team—which included Physics Professor **Neil F. Johnson** and **Richard Sear**, a physics data analyst—found that racist posts skyrocketed by 250 percent during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. Other types of online hate speech, especially anti-LGBTQ and antisemitism, also increased, despite those targets not being directly connected to demonstrations for racial justice. Facebook experienced the largest increase in racist content during the George Floyd demonstrations, outpacing even some unmoderated web forums.

"Our evidence suggests content moderators on mainstream platforms should be keeping an eye on how discourse and narratives evolve on fringe platforms," Lupu said.

ADDRESSING ONLINE HARASSMENT OF JOURNALISTS

A TEAM LED BY **REBEKAH Tromble**, an associate professor in the School of Media and Public Affairs and director of its Institute for Data, Democracy & Politics, is developing a rapid response system to aid journalists facing coordinated campaigns of online harassment. A cohort of the National Science Foundation's Convergence Accelerator, the project was awarded more than $5 million in grants to build upon insights gained through research, investigation and in-depth interviews with women journalists.

The project's initial focus was creating a technical platform to address needs such as cybersecurity. But the stories the researchers collected from journalists on the need for support in the wake of online harassment shifted their thinking.

The team is now working with software developers to build a platform where journalists can report abuse and tap into an array of support, ranging from technical services to secure data and online accounts. Journalists also would be able to match with peer advocates equipped with tools and resources, such as connecting them to a community discussion group, providing assistance with communicating to newsroom managers or even counseling the journalists' family and friends directly.

The goal is to help journalists in crisis "build up a resilient community around them," Tromble said. In the future, the plan is to extend the system of care to include academics, researchers, public health officials and other experts.

BRINGING HIV INTERVENTION INTO FOCUS

A NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY training program supported by a nearly $1 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health will prepare the next generation of community-engaged researchers to develop and lead intersectional approaches to promote health equity and improve HIV prevention, treatment and care. Led by **Lisa Bowleg**, CCAS applied social psychology professor and founding director of GW's Intersectionality Research Institute, and **Deanna Kerrigan**, Milken Institute School of Public Health professor of prevention and community health, the project will focus a cutting-edge social, structural and community-driven lens on HIV.

"Typical HIV interventions are focused on things that individuals can or should be doing, but there's this larger context that constrains the ability of people to engage in health prevention behaviors," Bowleg said. "There are these larger social structural factors that explain why HIV is so disproportionately concentrated in historically oppressed groups."

The project will involve 18 multi-disciplinary faculty conducting both global and domestic research on HIV, mental health, substance use and violence. Trainees receive instruction and mentorship in social, structural, critical and intersectional theory; community-engaged research design and methods; multilevel intervention development and evaluation; and grant writing, publication and presentation skills.

A PIECE OF INKA CULTURE

CAN A SCRAP OF CLOTHING OPEN a window into an ancient empire?

A study co-authored by Assistant Research Professor of Anthropology **Jeffrey Splitstoser** examined the Inka Empire's instruments of culture and control through a well-preserved article of clothing discovered in a centuries-old Chilean cemetery. Researchers excavating the burial site along Caleta Vítor Bay in northern Chile found a tunic, or "unku," which would have been worn by a man who commanded respect and prestige in the Inka Empire.

Unkus were largely standardized attire meeting technical and stylistic specifications imposed by imperial authorities. The Caleta Vítor unku, however, goes beyond the strict mandates handed down by Inka leaders. While the artisans who fashioned this unku adhered to imperial design standards, they also included subtle cultural tributes unique to their provincial homeland. The weaver employed the techniques and unique style and imagery of an Indigenous culture that existed long before the Inka conquest, creating a tangible symbol of provincial life in pre-colonial South America.

"It represents a study of a rare example of an excavated Inka unku tunic, whose context and technical features are providing an unprecedented understanding of imperial Inka influence in the provinces," noted Splitstoser.

A tunic or "unku" excavated in Chile

Salamanders Shed Evolutionary Light

The *D. gvnigeusgwotli salamander*

THREE NEW BLACK-BELLIED salamanders once thought to be a single species were discovered in the southern Appalachian Mountains by a research team led by **R. Alexander Pyron**, the Robert F. Griggs Associate Professor of Biology. The discovery sheds light on "cryptic" species, which lack obvious differences separating evolutionarily distinct populations. According to the researchers, black-bellied salamanders were known as a single species for more than a century, but nonetheless have subtle differences between them.

"Black-bellied salamanders have been commonly studied for over 100 years," Pyron said. "In 2002, a cryptic dwarf species was discovered, and, in 2005, DNA evidence began to suggest there were still more. It wasn't until our National Science Foundation-funded [study] that we were able to sequence genome-scale data to figure out there were actually five similar-looking species."

The researchers began by observing a species of salamander that has been poorly characterized throughout its history. They noticed that certain morphological, genetic and geographic aspects differed among the specimens, including variations in size, shape and color pattern. After sequencing its genome, the researchers determined the salamander actually consisted of five separate species, three of which are new discoveries.

THE WAY WE LEARN

HOW DO WE LEARN ABOUT other people? It's as complicated as our relationships themselves. But an international research team that included Assistant Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience **Gabriela Rosenblau** determined that humans rely on a combination of previous knowledge and perceptions about a person's characteristics when judging others' personalities.

Existing social learning models often fall short because they typically rely on one-dimensional feedback to describe how people update their notions about others over time. But the new study, published in the journal *Nature Communications*, introduced a computational modeling framework that included insights into how people's learning is affected by whether other people are more or less similar to them.

The research team conducted behavioral experiments in which participants rated the personality traits of people they had never met before. The participants then received feedback about the unknown people's descriptions of their own personalities. Using mathematically specified models, the study described how participants learned during the task. Some models took preexisting social knowledge into account.

According to the findings, the better we know someone or the more similar someone is to people we already know, the more fine-grained our representations become. People initially use snippets of prior knowledge as a starting point to learn about the new people. Over time, as the study participants learned more about new people, they progressed from generalizing based on specific traits to forming holistic impressions.

DOES WHAT WE KNOW CHANGE HOW WE SEE?

Do we perceive "mugs" differently from "plants"?

PEOPLE PERCEIVE OBJECTS differently depending on their prior knowledge and experience with that object, according to a study led by Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience **Sarah Shomstein**. The findings could have important implications in applied settings such as medical displays, cognitive assistants and product and environmental design, according to the researchers.

"Our study shows, for the first time, that if we recognize an object as a tool, we perceive it faster but with less detail," said Shomstein. "If we recognize an object as a non-tool, we perceive it slower but with higher detail."

To determine how the human brain processes an object visually, Shomstein and **Dick Dubbelde**, a recent PhD graduate at GW and co-author on the study, showed participants images of objects that can be manipulated by hand such as a coffee mug, and images of objects that are infrequently manipulated by hand, such as a potted plant. Researchers found that objects usually manipulated by hand are perceived faster than non-manipulable objects. Alternatively, objects that are usually not manipulated by hand are perceived with greater detail.

"The differences in perception between 'mugs' and 'plants' in both speed and detail of perception means that these objects are sorted by the visual system for processing in different brain regions," Dubbelde explained. "In other words, your knowledge of the object's purpose actually determines where in the brain object processing will occur and how well you will perceive it."

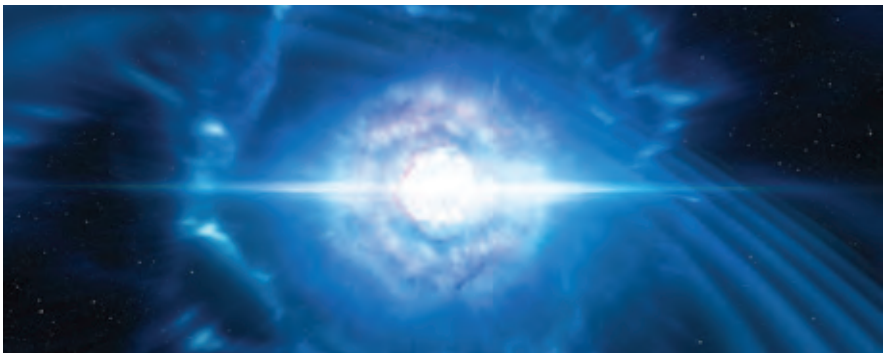
STUDENT BURSTS INTO GAMMA-RAY DISCOVERY

AS A PHYSICS PHD STUDENT AND a graduate research assistant at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, **Brendan O'Connor** played a key role in a breakthrough project that challenged the scientific consensus on cosmic phenomenon. He was among a team of scientists that observed a long gamma-ray burst (GRB) triggered by the collision of neutron stars—an unprecedented astrophysics event.

Long GRBs last up to a minute—as opposed to less than two seconds for short GRBs—and were thought to be caused by supernovae, the explosion of a massive star. But O'Connor, the lead investigator of an International Gemini Observatory program studying a unique explosion known as GRB 211211A, observed that the burst happened far from the center of its host galaxy and in a low-density environment—both atypical for supernovae.

Taking into account the distance, environment and brightness of the explosion, O'Connor deduced that the burst was actually caused not by supernovae but by the collision of two neutron stars, an event that was previously believed to only cause short GRBs.

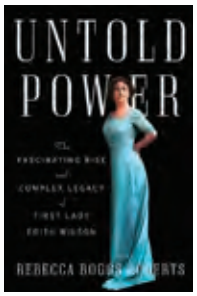
O'Connor's findings also indicated that this was the first GRB of its kind to display kilonova emissions—caused by the merger of two dense bodies in outer space such as neutron stars and black holes. That discovery provided the smoking-gun evidence that GRB 211211A was the first long GRB known to have been caused by the merger of two compact objects.



Artist's rendering of a kilonova explosion (Credit: ESO/L. Calçada/M. Kornmesser)

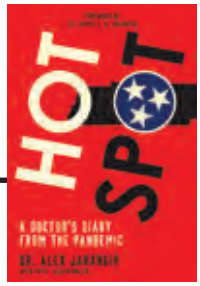
bookcase

A Sampling of Books by Alumni



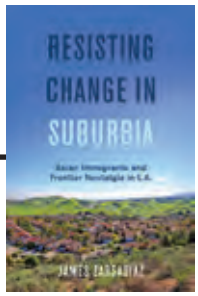
UNTOLD POWER: THE FASCINATING RISE AND COMPLEX LEGACY OF FIRST LADY EDITH WILSON

While the United States has yet to elect its first woman president, just over a century ago a woman became the nation's first acting president. In a nuanced biography, **Rebecca Roberts**, MA '12, (Anthropology) recounts the true story of First Lady Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, who effectively acted as the first woman president—before women could even vote nationwide—when her husband, Woodrow Wilson, was incapacitated. Although history has downplayed her role, Roberts portrays Wilson as a complicated figure whose personal quest for influence reshaped the position of first lady into one of political prominence forever.



HOT SPOT: A DOCTOR'S DIARY FROM THE PANDEMIC

When the coronavirus hit Nashville in March 2020, the city was as unprepared as much of the rest of the world for what was to come. **Alex Jahangir**, BS '99, (Biology), a trauma surgeon and chair of the Metro Nashville Board of Health, unexpectedly found himself heading the city's COVID-19 Task Force and responsible for leading it through uncharted waters. What followed was a year of unprecedented challenge and scrutiny. In *Hot Spot*, he narrates his experiences during the COVID crisis. He reveals how the pandemic laid bare ethnic, racial and cultural tensions that threatened to derail what should have been a collective effort to keep residents safe.



RESISTING CHANGE IN SUBURBIA: ASIAN IMMIGRANTS AND FRONTIER NOSTALGIA IN L.A.

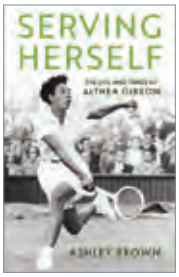
James Zarsadiaz, BA '08, (American Studies, Political Science), challenges myths of suburbia, the American West and the American Dream in this portrait of Asian Americans in the Los Angeles area. Beginning in the 1980s, Asian Americans became a racial majority in the East San Gabriel Valley. Seen as a so-called "model minority," their influence was felt in local politics and neighborhood policies. But to protect that privileged status, Zarsadiaz maintains they often turned a blind eye to affluent white homeowners' efforts to suppress Asian culture in favor of Western agrarian symbols. Zarsadiaz examines this conflict through the lenses of race and belonging.

AFTER STORIES: TRANSNATIONAL INTIMACIES OF POSTWAR EL SALVADOR

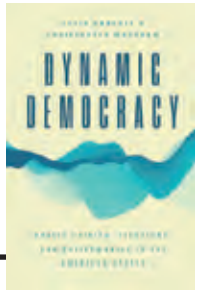
Building on her nearly 25 years of research in Chalatenango, El Salvador, **Irina Carlota (Lotti) Silber**, BA '91 (Anthropology) follows the trajectories—geographic, temporal, storied—of several extended Salvadoran families. Traveling through time and across borders, she narrates the everyday unfolding of diasporic lives amid renewed calls for memory, truth and accountability in El Salvador's long postwar era. Silber particularly considers the "1.5 insurgent generation"— young Salvadorans who were brought up in an everyday radical politics and migrated to the United States after more than a decade of peace and democracy. She examines archives of memories and disputes the often-violent categories that have come to stand for "El Salvador."

SERVING HERSELF: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ALTHEA GIBSON

In this comprehensive biography, **Ashley Brown**, MPhil '15, PhD '17, (American Studies) narrates the public career and private struggles of tennis champion Althea Gibson, the most famous Black sportswoman of the mid-20th century. Based on extensive archival work and oral histories, she follows Gibson from playing paddle tennis on the streets of Harlem as a teenager to her 11 Grand Slam tennis wins to her professional golf career—all against the backdrop of Jim Crow racism and the civil rights movement. Brown offers a revealing look at the rise and fall of a fiercely independent trailblazer and a key figure in the integration of American sports.



A Sampling of Books by Faculty

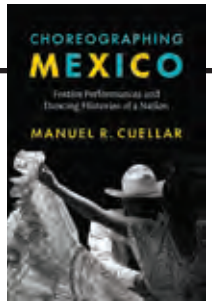


DYNAMIC DEMOCRACY: PUBLIC OPINION, ELECTIONS, AND POLICYMAKING IN THE AMERICAN STATES

Scholars of American politics have long been skeptical of ordinary citizens' capacity to influence—let alone control—their governments. But in *Dynamic Democracy*, Associate Professor of Political Science **Christopher Warshaw** co-authors a powerful challenge to this pessimistic view. Drawing on over 80 years of state-level evidence on public opinion, elections and policymaking, the book reveals that, while American democracy cannot be taken for granted, state policymaking is far more responsive to citizens' demands than skeptics claim. Over the long term, electoral incentives induce state parties and politicians—and ultimately policymaking—to adapt to voters' preferences.

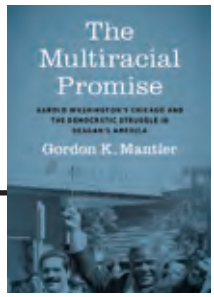
SUSTAINABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—from ending poverty and hunger to ensuring equitable equality education for all—aren't just a list of topics that address the planet's existential problems. They are, according to this innovative textbook by Professor of Geography **Lisa Benton-Short**, the single most important guiding framework for planning and implementing sustainability through 2030. For Benton-Short, the UN SDGs are the perfect groundwork for teaching an introductory course on sustainability. She uses those principles as a springboard for introducing students to sustainability issues, integrating the "Three Es"—environment, economic development and equity—that are the core definition of sustainability.



CHOREOGRAPHING MEXICO: FESTIVE PERFORMANCES AND DANCING HISTORIES OF A NATION

The years 1910 to 1940 were transformative for Mexico—from the ouster of President Porfirio Díaz to the subsequent revolution and the creation of the new state. Amid the upheaval, Mexican dance emerged as a focus of controversy over what it meant to be Mexican. In *Choreographing Mexico*, Assistant Professor of Spanish Literature **Manuel Cuellar** examines written, photographic, choreographic and cinematographic renderings to document how bodies in motion both perform and critique the nation. He details the integration of Indigenous and regional dance styles into festivals and films, and reminds us of the ongoing political significance of movement and embodied experience still seen in Mexican and Mexican American identity today.



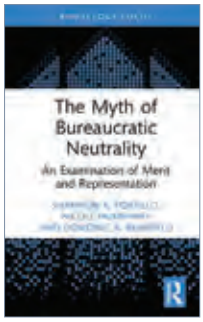
LONER FORENSICS: POEMS

In her third collection of poetry, Assistant Professor of Creative Writing **Thea Brown** dreams up and dissects a city beset by unexplained disappearances, roving silences and climate collapse. Taken together, the poems comprise a series of interviews with denizens of the shifting city, each mediated through the lonely lens of a "Detective" and drawing on parallel universes, 1980s video games and social media pop-speak. Both a study of complicity and a critique of capitalism's distortive effects on human emotional response, Brown questions what happens when our innermost terrains become newly unfamiliar in an unraveling natural world.

THE MULTIRACIAL PROMISE: HAROLD WASHINGTON'S CHICAGO AND THE DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE IN REAGAN'S AMERICA

In 1983, a multiracial political coalition did the unthinkable—electing Harold Washington as the first Black mayor of racially-polarized Chicago when Ronald Reagan and other political conservatives seemed resurgent. The charismatic Washington's victory bolstered Democratic hopes that the party could pull together multiracial urban voters around progressive causes. But as Associate Professor of Writing and History **Gordon K. Mantler** details, the Washington era revealed the limits to electoral politics and racial coalition building. Drawing on a rich array of archives and oral history interviews, he offers a bold reexamination of the Washington movement and takes readers into Chicago's street-level politics.

THE MYTH OF BUREAUCRATIC NEUTRALITY: AN EXAMINATION OF MERIT AND REPRESENTATION



The idea behind "bureaucratic neutrality" was presented during the Progressive era as a strategy to restore legitimacy in government; however, this book—coauthored by **Domonic Bearfield**, a professor in the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy & Public Administration—argues that neutrality is a myth that has been used as a means to oppress marginalized communities. Using a historically grounded approach, the book traces the myth of neutrality back to its origins and highlights how it has institutionalized inequity, both legally and culturally.

Assistant Professor of History Timothy Shenk

Whatever Happened to Coalition Building?

Why can't modern American political systems build consensus? History's Timothy Shenk explores how visionaries once forged majorities—and how polarization tore them apart.

TO ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF History **Timothy Shenk**, America's current political landscape too often resembles "the worst of both worlds."

He describes a system that appears to be falling apart—at the same time that voters complain nothing ever changes. The gulf between elites and ordinary people is widening, polarization is at a highpoint and no one seems to agree if our institutions need defending or dismantling.

Into this maelstrom, Shenk, coeditor of *Dissent* magazine, authored the book *Realigners: Partisan Hacks, Political Visionaries, and the Struggle to Rule American Democracy*. It's a biography of American democracy told through historical figures who succeeded in something that seems impossible today: Building coalitions that bind millions of people together in a single cause.

Shenk focuses on profiles of the famous (James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, who worked together to forge a constitutional consensus) and the footnotes (anti-slavery Senator Charles Sumner and anti-feminist firebrand Phyllis Schlafly, who both reshaped the Republican Party more than a century apart). But as he recounted in this interview, each portrait tells a story about how to maintain popular majorities—and how to lose them.

Q: What is the central question you address in your new book?

A: I'm grappling with the question of how you build a majority in our democracy today. Neither party has been able to put together an enduring majority since the collapse of the New Deal coalition. It's easy in the United States to assume that every country faces that problem. But in parliamentary systems with many different parties—like, say, Israel—you have the election first and then you build the majority after. Here, you have to build majorities at the polls ahead of time. So the United States is unlike most countries because we need big majorities. And American politics today is unlike the historical norm because neither party can build a dominant coalition. That's a problem.

Q: Why tell this story through individual lives?

A: The type of history that I do emphasizes the importance of ideas, including the ways they change over time. Concentrating on individuals is a great way to bring both of those dynamics into focus.

For instance, in this book, my main character for talking about Jacksonian democracy—a major electoral coalition—is Martin Van Buren. He's the intellectual architect of Jacksonian democracy, but he's also a key figure in the mainstreaming of anti-slavery politics. After serving as a Democratic president, he ran on a third-party ticket as the first nominee of the Free Soil Party, which was a crucial forerunner to Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans. So how do you get from an avowedly white supremacist Jacksonian democracy to an anti-slavery political revolution? By watching those changes unfold over one person's lifetime, you can pull back to think about how much was changing within the country.

Q: What other figures in your book would surprise us?

A: Some are obvious, like Madison and Hamilton. I had a whole chapter on Lincoln that I tossed out. But that's the thrill of history. You never want to write a book that says what we already know.

The book really came together for me when I realized the deep kinship across the ages between Charles Sumner and Phyllis Schlafly. That's not a comparison that readily comes to mind. He was an anti-slavery leader at the time of the Civil War and most people know her as an anti-feminist who fought against the Equal Rights Amendment. But both had visions for building Republican majorities—in the 1850s and the 1950s. Both cared more about coalition-building than the activists of their time. Both were saying, "Hey, if you want to accomplish what you're aiming for—whether that's abolitionism in the 1850s or a populist right-wing agenda of the 1950s—then you're going to have to win elections."

The work of gaining power by mobilizing millions of people behind a common vision is distinctive. Today, by contrast, we have a sort of permanent activist class that is invested in politics as a way of defending their worldview and doesn't care quite so much about winning elections.

Q: So why can't even the most influential figures maintain coalitions now? Is it just because we are so polarized?

A: That's the story of American politics over the last 60 years. And, yes, polarization is certainly part of that story. Look at how the structure of the parties has changed over time. In the 1950s, Democrats were the party of the AFL-CIO and Republicans were the party of the Chamber of Commerce. Today, Democrats are the party of MSNBC, and Republicans are the party of Fox News. There are some connections between the parties over the decades. But it's important to think about the ways that Republicans and Democrats today have become mirror images of each other—and how that makes our politics worse.

In this highly-charged, fever-pitch atmosphere, it seems like everything is always at stake all the time. Compromise is inherently more problematic when you're fighting cultural wars or denying election results than when you're haggling over marginal tax rates or the wonkish intricacies of the federal bureaucracy.

Q: Where do we go from here? When you look at the political landscape, are you optimistic?

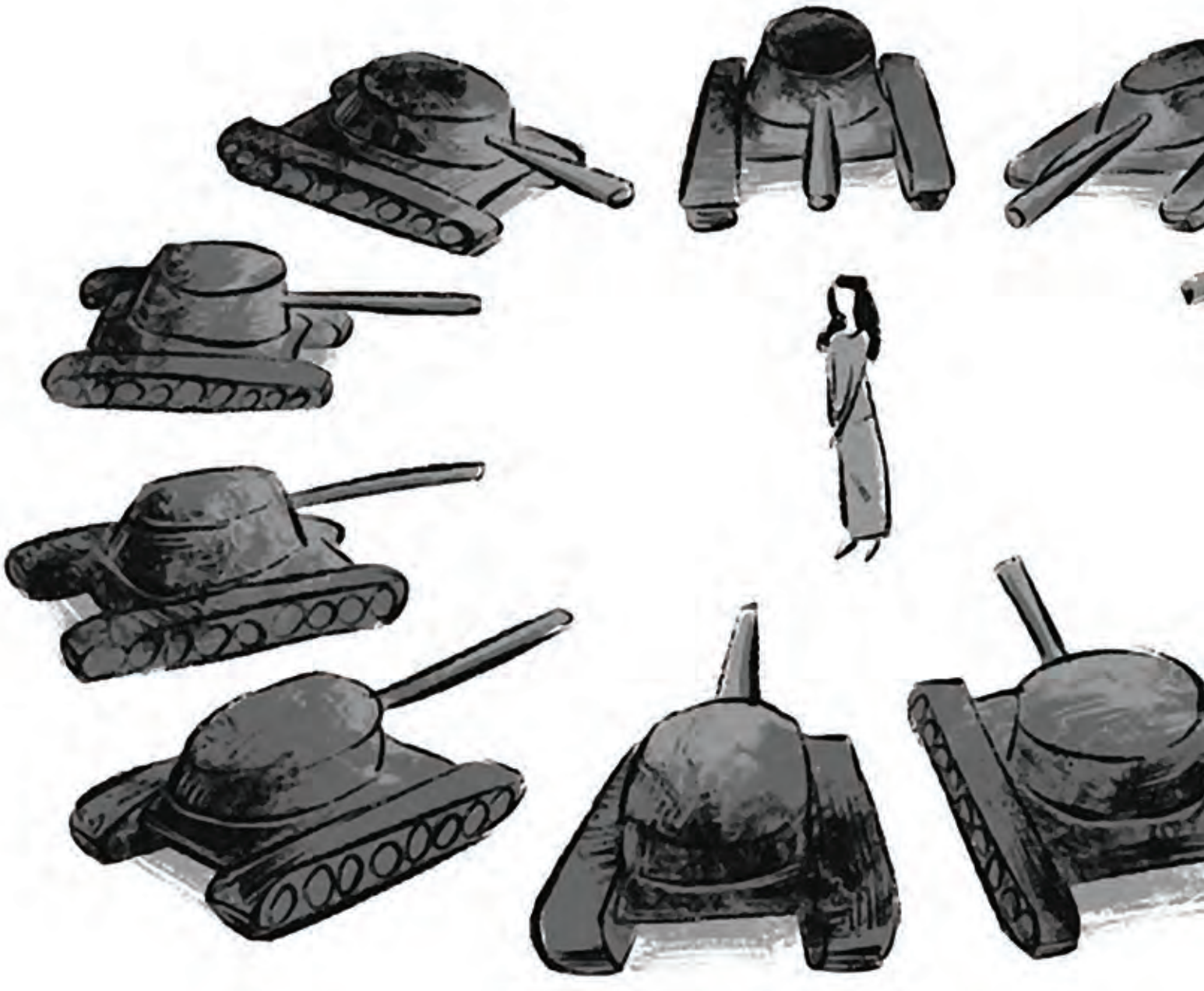
A: On both sides, there are hacks and frauds and malevolent actors aplenty in American politics. But I do think that there are still good faith actors across the right and left who sincerely believe in what they're doing.

So much of democracy is about listening. That's a hard thing for activists to keep in mind, because there's an inevitable tension between trying to impose your will on the world and trying to listen to people. But over the course of writing the book I realized that there's something noble, even beautiful, about listening to ordinary people and working to give them a country they can believe in.

"There's something noble, even beautiful, about listening to ordinary people and working to give them a country they can believe in."

—TIMOTHY SHENK, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

FRIENDS ON THE FRONTLINES: ALUMNUS ILLUSTRATES



UKRAINE WAR

As Russia attacked Ukraine, political science alumnus Gregg Bucken-Knapp, PhD '99, contacted friends in harm's way. In an illustrated book, he honors their stories.

An image in Messages from Ukraine *illustrates one of Bucken-Knapp's colleagues feeling trapped in Mariupol by Russian troops. (Images courtesy Gregg Bucken-Knapp/Joonas Sildre)*

ON THE MORNING OF FEB. 24, 2022, **Gregg Bucken-Knapp**, PhD '99, woke to the reality that much of the world feared and anticipated: Russia had launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

A professor of public administration at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, Bucken-Knapp immediately reached out to his friends and colleagues in Ukraine. In a flurry of texts and emails, he checked whether they were safe.

"If you wind up needing anything—tell me!" he wrote.

Over anxious hours, days and weeks, Bucken-Knapp slowly received replies. Some of his friends were making plans to leave the country, others were committed to staying put. Olga said she would volunteer for the Ukrainian army; Liliana was helping with humanitarian support; Nataliia and her son fled to the Romanian border crossing, only to be turned back; and Katerina, less than 10 miles from heavy bombing in Kyiv, said her sole goal was "to live through the air strike."

Back in Gothenburg, Bucken-Knapp wrestled with worry and his own sense of powerlessness. "This is horrible, this should not be happening," he recalled thinking. "I would give anything to do my bit to stop this."

As the fighting wore on, Bucken-Knapp and his colleagues offered donations, transportation and housing. And as the messages continued to land in his in-box, he thought of a way to bring their stories to life—and bring the war home around the world.

Collaborating with artist Joonas Sildre, Bucken-Knapp transformed the texts and emails into a graphic nonfiction book titled *Messages from Ukraine* (University of Toronto Press, 2022). In illustrated vignettes, the book paints snapshots of the war's impact on everyday people—from Tashiia huddling in a Kyiv basement shelter to Viktoria working at a refugee camp in Moldova. All proceeds from the book, which was named one of the 100 best books of 2022 by *The Hill Times*, are donated to relief efforts.

"The book stems from an awareness that we had one more thing we could do," Bucken-Knapp explained. Their goal was "to keep a public spotlight on the war...to honor the millions who have faced hardships and made excruciating decisions."

Sense from the Senseless

Since earning his PhD in political science at Columbian College, Bucken-Knapp, an expert in migration and integration, has often sought out the perspectives of refugees while integrating new research methods into migration dynamics.

In 2018, he convened a Gothenburg-based training module for young migration professionals, including several from Ukraine. Part of a government-funded program among Swedish universities called the Swedish Institute Academy for Young Professionals (SAYP), the group included scholars from, among other organizations, the United Nations Refugee Agency and the UN Children's Fund. The group stayed close, collaborating on projects and meeting up for chats. "SAYP is a family," Bucken-Knapp said. He and Sildre even discussed a graphic book on SAYP members' migrant work experiences.

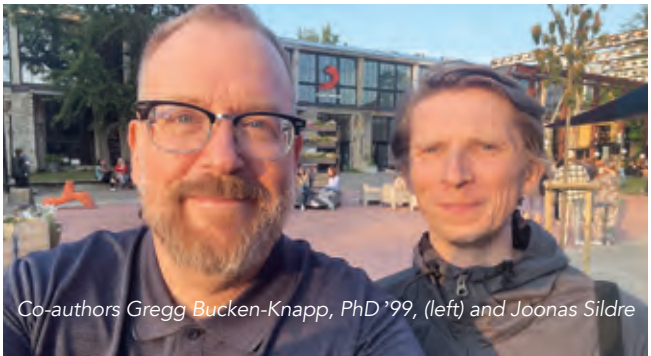
But all their plans changed on Feb. 24. As the Ukrainian SAYP alumni replied to his messages, Bucken-Knapp found himself with as many questions as answers. When Olga said she was volunteering for the army, for example, was she helping procure weapons—or firing them herself? "It's a struggle to understand when you have not experienced a war yourself and you are distanced from this one," he said. "I had friends and colleagues who were in incredibly vulnerable situations—but I didn't know exactly what that meant."

To some extent, Bucken-Knapp said, the book began as an attempt to make sense of the conflict and fill the gaps among his friends' messages. Sildre's illustrations are based on the authors' interpretations of their plight—like drawings of Olga carrying a gun and Liliana bandaging a wound. In a way, Bucken-Knapp said, that format follows the research methods he honed at CCAS. "In my brand of social science, people provide us their interpretations of events—but we as researchers superimpose our own interpretations on top of that," he explained. "I was living those research practices in real time." Likewise, Bucken-Knapp champions comic books in social science to "access emotional knowledge" by graphically illustrating personal experiences.

In two-page vignettes, the authors highlight each person's determination to take agency over their situation and not let themselves be passive victims of war. With her family trapped in Kyiv, Lisa, for example, directed an aid network from Estonia. Okleksii sent Bucken-Knapp a list of badly-needed medical supplies. Sasha, who stayed in Kyiv with her two dogs and her wheelchair-confined grandmother, emphatically refused to be forced out of her own country. "I am too angry to leave my place just because someone has imperial ambitions," she wrote.

Bucken-Knapp remains in touch with his Ukrainian colleagues and reports that all are safe. As a whole, he said, they are enthusiastic about the project and its prospect for keeping global attention on the war. Many offered editorial suggestions. Another colleague named Viktoriia, for example, was silent for weeks as she endured the siege of Mariupol. "The moment her message came through was an enormous relief," Bucken-Knapp recalled. She relayed a story about cooking flatbread with children in an open yard during a lull in the shelling. When a Russian plane flew overhead, one little girl pointed to the sky and yelled, "Stop this!" The book ends with that image.

The authors are working on a follow-up book that takes place a year later. It details how their Ukrainian colleagues marked the first anniversary of the war—from participating in commemorative events to taking time out for dinners with friends. Despite the toll of the last year, Bucken-Knapp sensed no weariness in any of his friends' messages. "Quite the contrary," he said. "They are committed to living active lives, to being emotionally open and to shining a light on their resilience in the face of ongoing war."



Co-authors Gregg Bucken-Knapp, PhD '99, (left) and Joonas Sildre

The book includes illustrations of Bucken-Knapp's colleagues, including Liliana, who stayed in Ukraine to offer humanitarian support.

Another colleague volunteered for the Ukrainian army. But Bucken-Knapp was unsure if she was supporting troops or fighting with them, as reflected in this illustration.

Under heavy bombing near Kyiv, Katerina told Bucken-Knapp she hoped "to live through the air strike."

The book ends with an image of a young girl shouting at a Russian plane during the initial siege of Mariupol.

Exploring the Nature of Evil

In her Dean's Seminar, Laura Papish leads first-year students in philosophical discussions on the nature of evil and its impact across generations.

Associate Professor of Philosophy Laura Papish teaches a Dean's Seminar on the Philosophy of Evil.

For first-year student Millie Wallach, Papish's class discussions were lively and illuminating.

WHEN STUDENTS STEP INTO ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR of Philosophy **Laura Papish**'s Dean's Seminar on the Philosophy of Evil, they quickly learn two important lessons.

First, as the class name implies, they will be discussing difficult questions about the nature of evil—from how atrocities can ever be forgiven to whether the existence of evil casts doubt on the existence of God.

And, second, there will be no easy answers—if there are any answers at all.

"This class is more about figuring out what the questions are than answering them," Papish said. "That's the way philosophy works. We try to leave a lot of things unsettled."

How does a society define evil? Is the term reserved for the Holocaust and other genocides? Do we encounter evil in our daily lives? And how do we account for factors such as a person's intent or the environment they come from?

Those are weighty topics, Papish concedes—particularly for a class that, like all Dean's Seminars, consists entirely of first-year students. Many of Papish's students have never taken a philosophy course before. And along with the complex emotional discussions, the Evil class features challenging texts like Herman Melville, the classic study of Nazi war crime-trials *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the fourth century writings of St. Augustine.

> "I have never had a class that required me to form opinions on things that are so much larger than myself."
>
> — MILLIE WALLACH, UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

Dean's Seminars are designed around focused scholarship on topics that are relevant to our time, and they can often be as edgy as they are engaging. Papish's students said the difficult debates and discussions on provocative topics are exactly what they like about the class.

"The way philosophy makes you stretch your thinking and open up your mind is both interesting and beneficial," said **Kamini Waldman**, who, thanks to her experience in Papish's class, is considering a philosophy minor. "I joke with friends that philosophy is the only subject where it's acceptable to answer a question with another question."

Throughout the class, the 19 first-year students debate questions such as whether acts of genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda can be compared to President Harry Truman's decision to detonate two atomic bombs over Japan. They look at case studies such as the infamous 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment, where normal people were asked to simulate the roles of guards and prisoners—until the citizens acting as guards began psychologically abusing the mock prisoners. Discussions have centered around topics such as morality responsibility, whether good people can do evil deeds and if free will exists at all.

"We consistently drew mind-blowing conclusions that I'd never considered before," said **Millie Wallach**, who plans to double major in human services & social justice and communications. "I have never had a class that required me to form opinions on things that are so much larger than myself."

Working through Ideas

In preparing to teach the seminar, Papish knew that most of her students had little experience with evil events in their lives. "We are very lucky to have sufficient distance from the things floated as meaningful examples" like the Holocaust, she said. Still, many of her students have already considered tough philosophical questions, she explained, like reconciling the concept of a just God with the existence of evil. "They do wonder: How could there be a God when there are, for instance, young people suffering from cancer?"

And while the class discussed acts of evil on an epic scale, it also burrowed into moral quandaries inherent in relationships and professional lives—topics Papish's students can often relate to. "Even if they haven't been privy to something they would call evil, they've been, for example, wronged by friends or partners in various ways. So questions of forgiveness are already on the tip of their tongue."

Students are asked to keep an open mind when discussing volatile subjects and be mindful that philosophy classes involve working through difficult ideas. "People are going to say things they want to take back—and that's totally fine," Papish said. "The point of the class is that we all learn how to do philosophy together." And no matter how serious the topic, the classroom discussions never become overly gloomy. "Believe it or not, a lot of times when we ended up talking about especially grim things, we used humor as a way to make the space more comfortable for everyone," said **JD Palmer**, an English major who enrolled in another Papish-taught philosophy class the following semester. "I don't think there's ever been a time where people were nervous to talk about a depressing topic."

Papish believes that in a class like hers, "the subject matter is a bit subservient to the skillset" as she guides students to learn how to think like philosophers—sharpening their critical thinking skills and articulation of well-reasoned arguments. "The ultimate goal is that I come away from a student's paper and I learn something that I hadn't thought about before," she said.

Waldman said she learned to appreciate the ambiguity inherent in philosophy. "I expected to come out of this class with a clear-cut definition and understanding of what evil is and how it manifests itself in the world—but that's not philosophy," she said. "Philosophy exists because there will always be unanswered questions and we need people who will try to make sense of them—and even if every person will try do it in a different way."

History alumnus and U.S. Marine veteran A.J. Cade

History Restored: The Untold Story of Black Civil War Soldiers

Marine veteran A.J. Cade, MA '21, PhD '23, was inspired by a forgotten Civil War regiment of all-Black soldiers and officers. Now, he's bringing their legacy to life.

LONG BEFORE ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S EMANCIPATION Proclamation abolished slavery in the Confederacy, a band of Black soldiers was already making its mark—winning victories on Civil War battlefields and freeing enslaved people as they marched through the South.

They were called the Louisiana Native Guards, and their ranks included free men of color and escaped slaves. They were the first Black men to fight Confederate troops and the only Union regiment with Black soldiers led by Black officers. In his final speech, Lincoln lauded their example as proof that Black people deserved the right to vote.

But today, they are almost completely forgotten.

That's an omission alumnus **A.J. Cade**, MA '21, PhD '23, plans to rectify. A military historian and U.S. Marine veteran who served two tours of duty in Afghanistan, Cade has spent years unearthing the story of the Native Guards in an attempt to bring their overlooked legacy to the forefront of military history.

During his research journey, Cade, who earned both a doctorate and a master's degree in history from Columbian College, has uncovered thousands of guards-related documents in English, French, Spanish and Russian. He's followed their story from the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and historical societies along the Gulf Coast to military records in Massachusetts and Texas. And he's met with the soldiers' descendants to share pictures and memories.

"The Native Guards' significance cannot be understated," Cade said. "Every person of color who has served in the military since the Civil War—including me—owes that heritage to them."

A Lost Legacy

Cade is an Air Force historian who previously worked with the U.S. Army Center of Military History. He's frequently spoken to students at historically Black colleges and universities about educational and employment opportunities.

He first discovered the Louisiana Native Guards while researching African-American regiments in the Union Army for his PhD dissertation. He knew about the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, popularized in the movie *Glory*. But with almost no scholarly material on the Native Guards, even Cade was surprised to learn that they predated the 54th and saw combat months earlier.

"Given what they did on the battlefield, how they solidified the idea that Black people were equal to everyone else, it's actually quite ridiculous how little their story is known," he said.

The guards' lineage begins in May 1861, when the governor of Louisiana approved a militia consisting of free men of color. Confederate leaders were fervently opposed to an all-Black fighting unit. The soldiers were never issued weapons and their wives sewed their mismatched uniforms.

Not long after New Orleans surrendered to Union troops in April 1862, a 1,000-person regiment composed mostly of former slaves and some New Orleans militia members was constituted into the Union Army. For the first time, Black soldiers would be led into battle by Black officers like Captain Andre Cailloux, a wealthy Creole citizen and esteemed veteran of the New Orleans militia.

From its inception, Lincoln knew forming an all-Black regiment was risky. In letters to his cabinet, he acknowledged that the guards' performance would reflect on all Black men in uniform. "If they faltered in any sort of way, it would have been an excuse to justify never arming another Black man," Cade said.

But Lincoln's fears were unfounded. By October 1862—before the Emancipation Proclamation's terms came into effect—the guards were already in combat, fighting so successfully that one Union general told Lincoln the Louisiana sugar tasted sweeter thanks to their inspiration.

In their most celebrated battle, the undermanned guards charged on heavily-fortified Port Hudson along the Mississippi River. As white troops refused to advance, the guards mounted waves of assaults that even impressed their Confederate adversaries, Cade said. They sustained heavy casualties, including Captain Cailloux, but they besieged Port Hudson long enough for General Ulysses S. Grant to win at Vicksburg and spur Port Hudson's surrender.

Inspiring Example

Throughout the war, the guards often freed enslaved people as they captured plantations. Cade recalled one private who confronted white officers for abusing Black women—even

An engraving from an 1863 newspaper shows members of the Louisiana Native Guard protecting the New Orleans, Opelousas and Great Western Railroad. (Images courtesy Library of Congress)

During Reconstruction, the Louisiana legislature drafted a new state constitution. More than half of its members, illustrated here, served in the Native Guards as officers.

"The Native Guards' significance cannot be understated. Every person of color who has served in the military since the Civil War—including me—owes that heritage to them."

— A.J. CADE, MA '21, PHD '23

though it meant being locked in chains and risking possible execution. Their accounts appeared in French and Russian newspapers. And, Cade said, their inspiration paved the way for more than 180,000 Black troops to serve in the Union Army—including 20,000 in Louisiana. On the last day of the war—as Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox—the Native Guards were still fighting in Mobile, Alabama.

"A.J. has completed incredible research to bring the story of the Louisiana Native Guards to life," said Associate Professor of History **Denver Brunsman**, Cade's dissertation adviser. "As he argues persuasively in his dissertation and related work, our understanding of the complexities of race and citizenship in the Civil War era is not complete without accounting for the Native Guards."

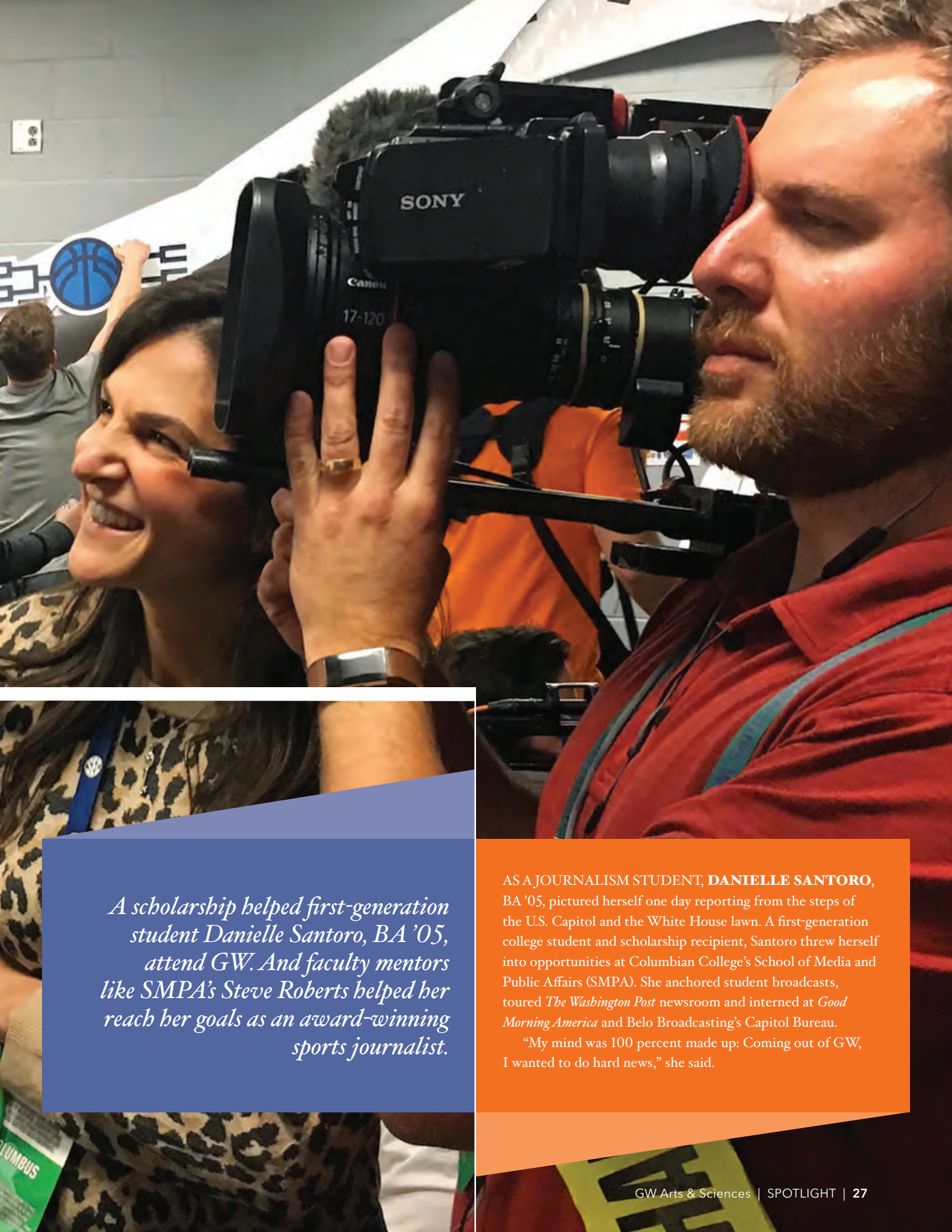
In addition to tracking down documents, archives and letters from across the country and overseas, Cade said he was most moved by meeting with the soldiers' descendants. He visited some in their New Orleans homes, talked to others who moved to France and met with another who now works for the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in D.C. "It was like talking to living archives—hearing personal stories from people who feel a connection to those men," he said.

And Cade isn't done telling their story either. He's working on a book with Louisiana State University Press that he hopes will introduce them to a wider audience. "I have so much admiration for the men of the Native Guards and all they inspired," he said. "Now I feel like it's my job is to keep their legacy alive."

Cade did not participate in this article in his official capacity as a government historian, and all information presented is expressly his opinion and in no way reflective of the federal government.

Alumna Scores in Sports Journalism

Alumna Danielle Santoro has covered some of the sporting world's main events. She reported on the University of Tennessee's men's basketball team during the 2019 NCAA March Madness tournament.



A scholarship helped first-generation student Danielle Santoro, BA '05, attend GW. And faculty mentors like SMPA's Steve Roberts helped her reach her goals as an award-winning sports journalist.

AS A JOURNALISM STUDENT, **DANIELLE SANTORO**, BA '05, pictured herself one day reporting from the steps of the U.S. Capitol and the White House lawn. A first-generation college student and scholarship recipient, Santoro threw herself into opportunities at Columbian College's School of Media and Public Affairs (SMPA). She anchored student broadcasts, toured *The Washington Post* newsroom and interned at *Good Morning America* and Belo Broadcasting's Capitol Bureau.

"My mind was 100 percent made up: Coming out of GW, I wanted to do hard news," she said.

Professor of Media and Public Affairs Steven Roberts was Santoro's faculty mentor.

Santoro (left) and a colleague broadcasted from the floor of the 2019 NCCA men's basketball championship in Minneapolis.

Today, Santoro is indeed reporting news—but not from the halls of Congress. Instead, she's an Emmy Award-winning senior producer at CBS Sports/CBS Sports Network. She has broadcasted from the floor of college basketball's March Madness tournament, the tennis courts of the U.S. Open Championship and the finish line of the Kentucky Derby. And she's made acclaimed documentaries on, among other subjects, the first female football coach at the United States Air Force Academy and Laila Ali's emotional tribute to her father, legendary boxer and civil rights icon Muhammad Ali.

"I love my job and I feel so genuinely lucky to be doing this," she said. "And I owe a lot of it to being at GW."

Ironically, Santoro said she might never have attended GW if not for two major influences—a scholarship and her faculty mentor **Steven Roberts**, the J.B. and M.C. Shapiro Professor of Media and Public Affairs.

Santoro was a recipient of the GW Columbian College Endowed Scholarship, a fund established by contributions from alumni and friends of the university. Raised primarily by a single mother in New York City, Santoro said she could not have considered GW without the scholarship's financial support.

Meanwhile, Roberts helped guide her on her career path.

As she approached graduation, Santoro mulled two job offers—one from news giant CNN and another from the startup College Sports Television (CSTV). She was all but certain she would accept the CNN job. But Roberts offered some surprising advice.

"He told me that if I went to CNN, I would be at the bottom of the barrel, answering phones and getting coffee," Santoro recalled. At the start-up, Roberts suggested, she would gain hands-on experience in reporting. She could always transition back to news, he said. Instead, she ended up carving out a career in sports journalism. "This was never the plan," she said, "but I found an avenue that I really, really love, and I ran with it."

Life-Changing Advice

As a high school student, Santoro's heart was set on attending a sports powerhouse college. She visited GW as an afterthought on a tour of D.C. area schools. "GW didn't have a football team," she laughed, "so it was not on my radar."

But at an SMPA breakfast for prospective students, Santoro first met Roberts, who told her about the benefits of studying journalism in the nation's capital with professors who reported for major media outlets. "He seemed to know my whole life story—I wasn't just someone he was assigned to talk to," she noted. By the time, she reached her car, Santoro told her mother she'd made her decision. "I wrote Steve a handwritten thank-you note—and he wrote me back a handwritten note that said, 'When you get to GW, come find me.' And I did!"

In fact, Roberts became not just a professor who she credits with teaching her how to write a news story—"I still hear Steve saying, 'Don't start that sentence with I' and 'Can you give it more detail?'" she said—but also as a mentor and trusted friend who Santoro continues to consult for career and life advice. Roberts even helped her reconcile with her estranged father, encouraging her to reconnect with him and later write about it for a class assignment.

"A big part of my job is helping young people become grownups—and that's really why Danielle and I bonded so closely," Roberts said. "She was a wonderful student and did very well in my classes. But I think the most lasting thing between us wasn't professional but personal, as a mentor."

After leaving CSTV, Santoro joined a local Kentucky TV station, where she won a Kentucky Associated Press award and broke national news on the firing of the University of Kentucky's head basketball coach in 2009. Most importantly, she said, she became the first female sports anchor in Louisville history.

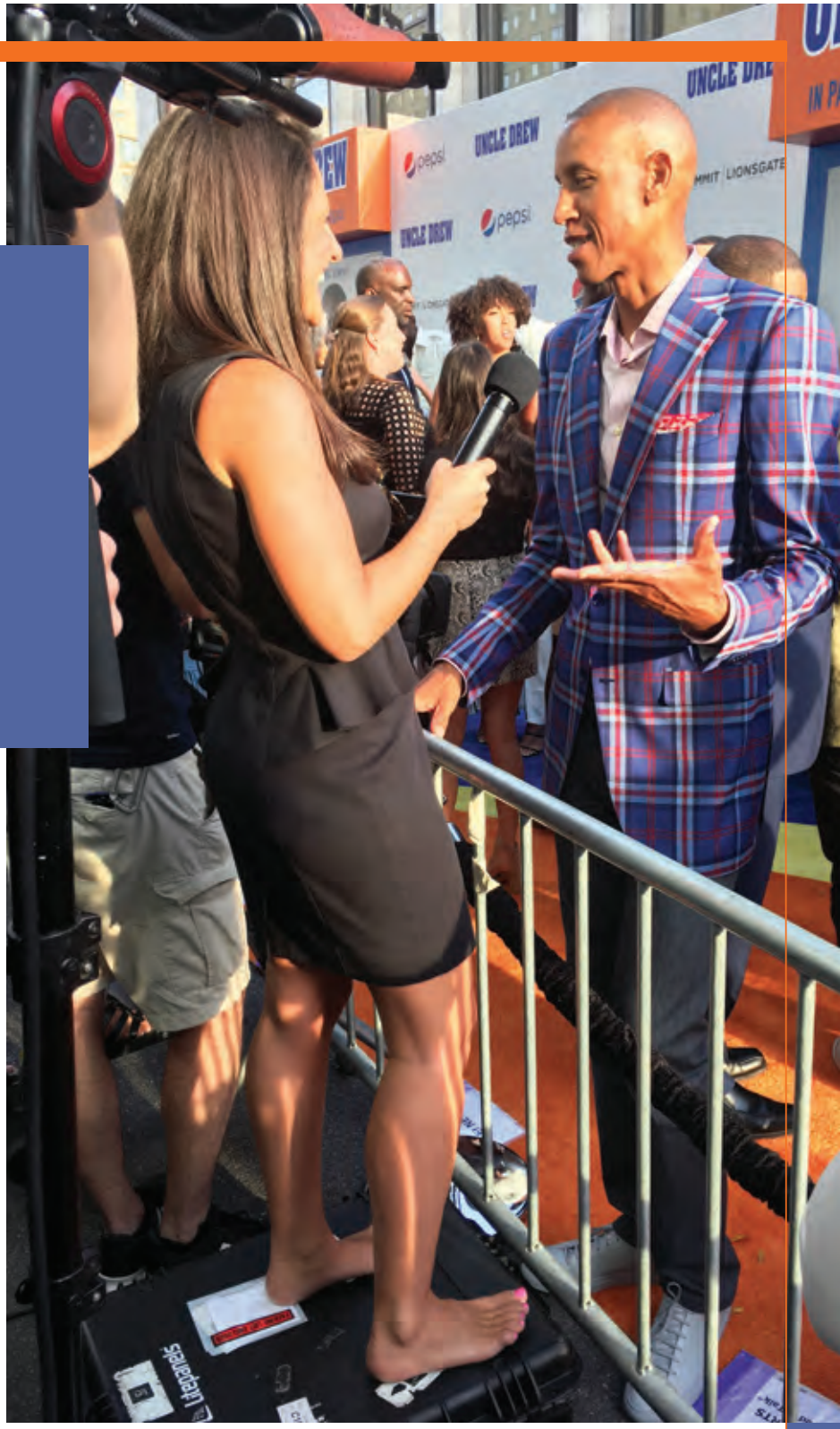
"Little girls wrote me letters saying that because of me they were inspired to pursue different careers," she said. "I like to think that if my story touches just one person, if one person is inspired by my work, I'm doing a good job."

At CBS Sports, Santoro has reported from championship games in several sports. Her favorite assignments involve telling personal stories of athletes and their families. For one award-winning feature, for example, she accompanied Laila Ali to her father's Louisville childhood home and the gym where he first learned to box, before placing flowers on his gravesite. "When you tell a feature story, when someone opens their home to you, they leave a place in your heart," she said. "I feel very fortunate that I get to meet all these amazing people and they trust me with their stories."

"I like to think that if my story touches just one person, if one person is inspired by my work, I'm doing a good job."

— DANIELLE SANTORO, BA '05

Behind the scenes: Santoro interviewed Chip Woolley Jr, trainer of the upset 2009 Kentucky Derby winning horse Mine That Bird, for a documentary she wrote and produced.



Santoro stood tall to interview 6'7" NBA Hall of Famer Reggie Miller at a 2018 red carpet event.

A Novel Approach to Stuttering: Listening

Researchers like CCAS' Shelley Brundage are reimagining what people who stutter need from therapists.

NBA star Michael Kidd-Gilchrist spoke about his stuttering experiences with a class of graduate speech students and his daughter Mya (left).

"The person who stutters is the expert on their stuttering. We need to listen to what they want from us."

— SHELLEY BRUNDAGE, PROFESSOR OF SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND HEARING SCIENCES

PEOPLE WHO STUTTER HAVE LONG ENDURED stigma and stereotypes while undergoing treatment regimens from fluency drills and breathing strategies to electronic aids. For the 3 million people who experience stuttering, the brief interruptions in speech can lead to hardships like bullying and anxiety, struggles with personal relationships and discrimination in the job market.

But a growing wave of clinicians and activists are shifting focus away from stuttering as a hindrance and more toward "stuttering identity and acceptance," noted Professor of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences **Shelley Brundage**.

Co-author of the seminal text *A Handbook on Stuttering*, Brundage said the speech pathology field is reimagining the therapeutic relationship to meet the most pressing concerns of clients who stutter—whether it's adults who want to establish a confident voice or children coping with teasing at school.

Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences Professor Shelley Brundage

"Stuttering is more than just speech," she said. "The person who stutters is the expert on their stuttering. We need to listen to what they want from us."

Brundage characterizes stuttering as "a neurodevelopment disorder that begins in childhood and may remain into adulthood." Each person's stutter manifests in a different way, such as repeating words or halting on sounds and syllables. While its roots are complex, she said that research suggests the brains of children who stutter process speech and language differently.

"Stuttering involves interactions between behaviors, thoughts, feelings and attitudes about communication—coupled with speech being a highly precise, highly fast process," Brundage said. "It's no wonder we still have so many questions."

Filling the Knowledge Gap

As many as 75 percent of children will stop stuttering with little intervention. In fact, Brundage said speech therapists often have scant experience treating stuttering—particularly in schools where, she estimates, an average annual caseload may include no more than one young person who stutters.

To help fill that knowledge gap, speech, language and hearing sciences major and CCAS Luther Rice Undergraduate Research Fellow **Julia Kerrigan** studied how young people who stutter relate to their therapists. Kerrigan, president of the GW chapter of the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association, analyzed data from interviews with children aged 8 to 17. Many expressed frustration with treatment techniques—"A lot of speech therapists are obsessed with tools," one person said—and were eager to design their own therapeutic goals. One advised therapists to be more supportive and "try and find out what that person needs by listening to them."

"These young people have layers of insight gained from moving through a world that wants to change them," said Kerrigan, who received her BS in speech, language and hearing sciences this spring. As therapists, "we need to do a better job of listening and connecting with them on the basis of their personhood."

A Personal Story

During the spring semester, Brundage invited former NBA basketball star Michael Kidd-Gilchrist to her graduate seminar on Fluency Disorders to discuss his personal challenges with the condition. The founder of an advocacy nonprofit called Change & Impact, Kidd-Gilchrist lobbies Capitol Hill for expanded health care coverage and regularly speaks at colleges and universities. But, as he shared with Brundage's students, he was once so anxious about stuttering that he'd hide in his elementary school restroom when his class read aloud. Always sure handed with a basketball, he shied away from microphones and public speaking during his college and NBA careers.

"I'm a person who stutters," he said. "I'm always going to stutter. That's just who I am."

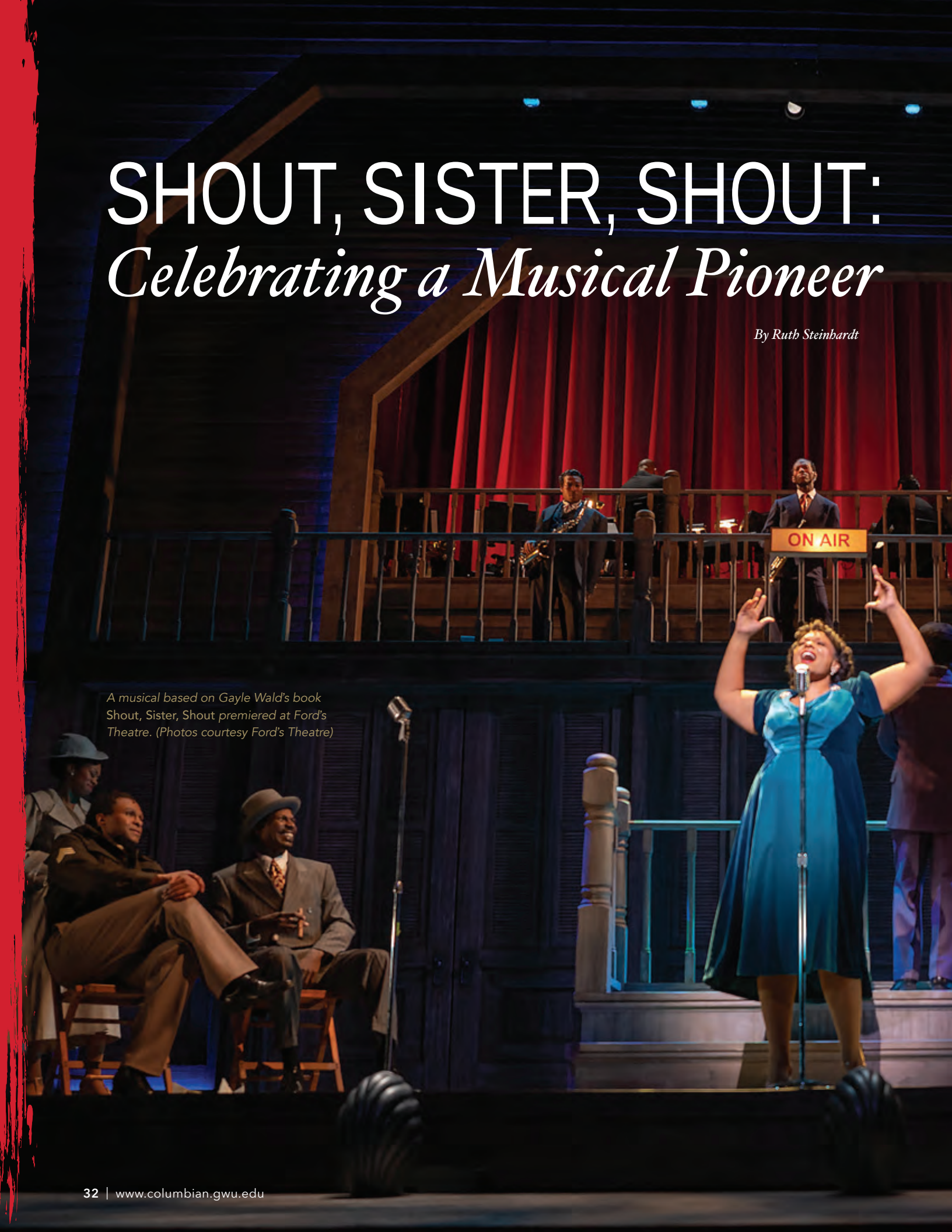
Kidd-Gilchrist hopes to give the next generation of speech pathologists insights into the lived experiences of their future clients. "I want people to see that, even if we stutter, we aren't dumb or stupid. It just take us time to get our thoughts and our words out," he said. "We want to be accepted for who we are."

"There's nothing like hearing personal anecdotes from somebody who is a member of the community that we will serve," said **Emily Donahue**, a second-year graduate student. "We can read the textbooks and the research. But hearing him say, 'This is how I look at my life,' that hits home."

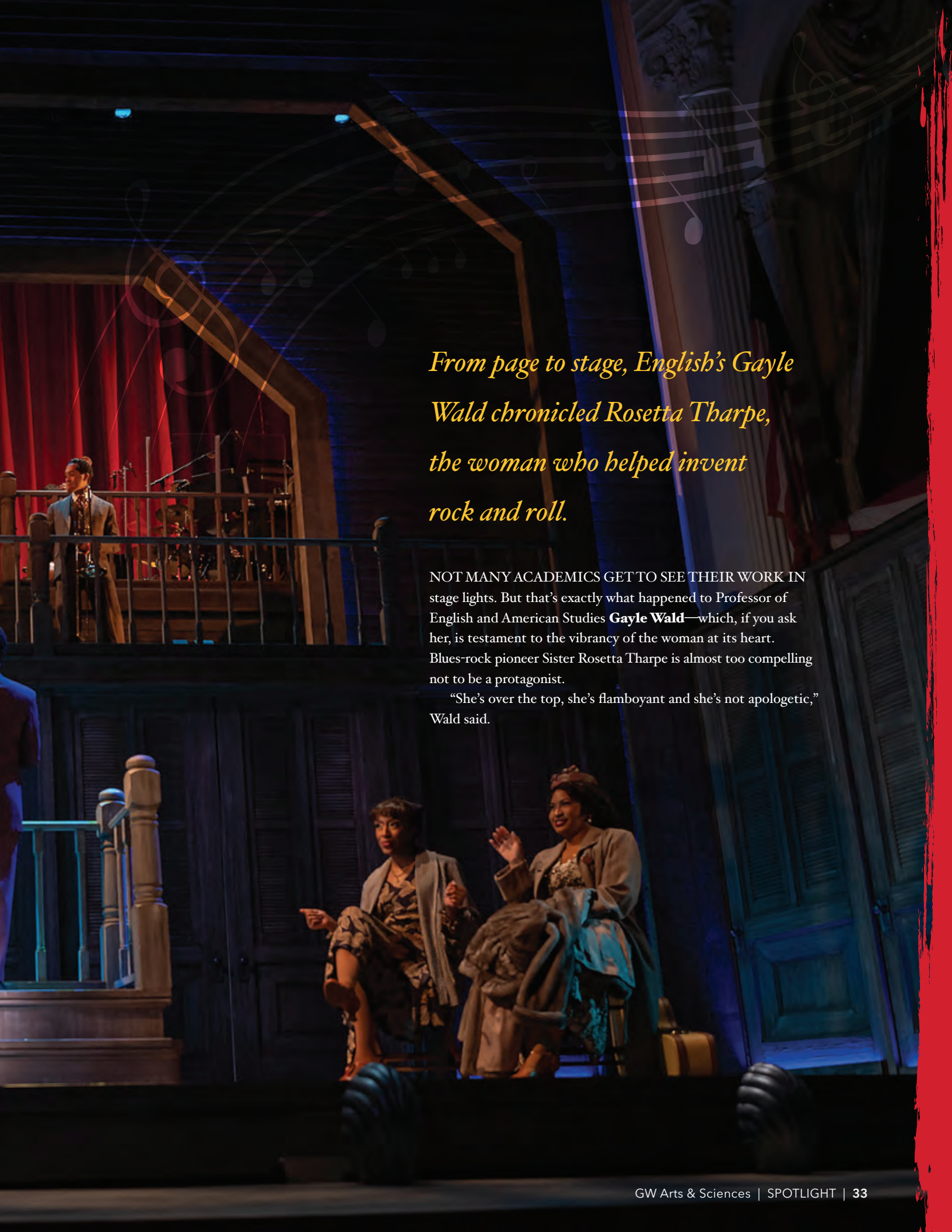
With the support of family, teammates and therapists, Kidd-Gilchrist said he has become more accepting of his stutter as part of his identity. Watching with Brundage's class, his 10-year-old daughter Mya said she's never even discussed stuttering with her father. "We don't question it. It doesn't matter," she said. "To us, he's just our dad."

SHOUT, SISTER, SHOUT: *Celebrating a Musical Pioneer*

By Ruth Steinhardt



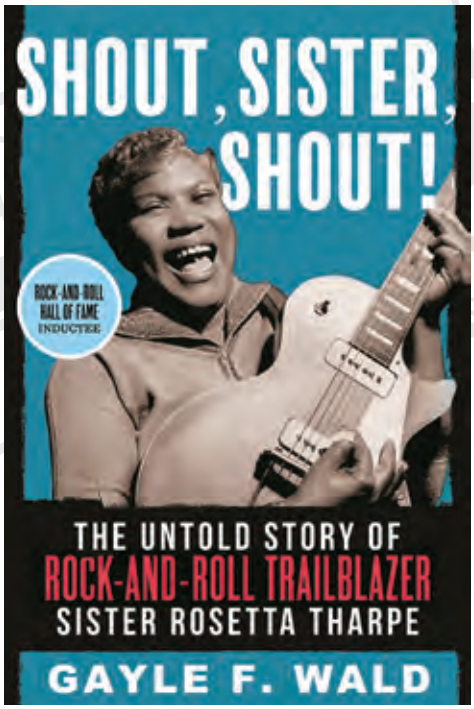
A musical based on Gayle Wald's book Shout, Sister, Shout *premiered at Ford's Theatre. (Photos courtesy Ford's Theatre)*



From page to stage, English's Gayle Wald chronicled Rosetta Tharpe, the woman who helped invent rock and roll.

NOT MANY ACADEMICS GET TO SEE THEIR WORK IN stage lights. But that's exactly what happened to Professor of English and American Studies **Gayle Wald**—which, if you ask her, is testament to the vibrancy of the woman at its heart. Blues-rock pioneer Sister Rosetta Tharpe is almost too compelling not to be a protagonist.

"She's over the top, she's flamboyant and she's not apologetic," Wald said.



A musical based on Gayle Wald's book Shout, Sister, Shout *premiered at Ford's Theatre.*

Professor of English and American Studies Gayle Wald

"Knowing about [Rosetta Tharpe] affects the stories that we tell about American music."

— GAYLE WALD, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES

A musical adaptation of Wald's 2007 book *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*—also called *Shout, Sister, Shout!*—debuted at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., in the spring. Wald's book was the first biography of Tharpe, whose gospel background and electric signature style directly influenced popular music stars like Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Johnny Cash, Isaac Hayes, Jerry Lee Lewis and Bonnie Raitt.

"What Gayle's book does so beautifully is give you a context for Rosetta's life in terms of history and what else was going on during those times," said Cheryl L. West, the playwright who adapted *Shout, Sister, Shout* for the stage.

For decades, Tharpe was almost forgotten by the popular culture she helped shape. But among her fans, she was always well remembered. In his induction speech at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1992, Cash remembered Tharpe as one of his earliest heroes. Chuck Berry, sometimes called the "father of rock and roll," is said to have called his whole career "just one long Rosetta Tharpe impersonation."

Yet in the 1990s, when Wald first saw a video of Tharpe, she was amazed at the dearth of available information about the woman whose performance stood out so forcefully to her.

"How can this person not have come across my radar?" Wald remembered wondering. As a scholar of American music, she was at least aware of most popular music stars of Tharpe's evident star power and contemporary profile. Yet Tharpe herself

was an enigma. Wald assumed there would be scholarship about her, but aside from brief mentions in gospel histories, there was very little. If she wanted to read a biography of Tharpe, Wald would have to research and write it herself.

And Wald knew Tharpe's was a story that needed telling. "The second I saw her, something in me knew," she said.

Rediscovering a Legend

The book *Shout, Sister, Shout* received critical acclaim and sparked a resurgence of interest in Tharpe's music and life. Born in Arkansas in 1915, Tharpe developed her signature style as a child performer at Pentecostal churches and tent revivals across the South. When she later embarked on a secular career, the bluesy gospel of her youth still influenced her performances.

While Tharpe's popularity in the United States peaked in the 1940s, her star continued to rise abroad—particularly in the United Kingdom, where she continued touring successfully for many years. Yet at the time *Shout, Sister, Shout* was published, Tharpe was buried in an unmarked grave in Philadelphia.

"So, so much has happened since then," Wald said.

Wald's book helped raise Tharpe's visibility, and she only needed visibility to become a mainstream icon as well as a niche one. A headstone was finally erected over Tharpe's grave in 2009. She was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2018. In online circles, she became the "queer Black woman [who] invented rock and roll." In a 2020 article, Wald discussed the "meme-ing" of Tharpe and her own struggles writing conclusively about Tharpe's sexuality. And in 2015, Broadway producer Randy Johnson approached Wald about optioning *Shout Sister Shout!* for the stage.

Eventually, playwright West joined Johnson in developing the show. She had read Wald's biography years earlier, and thought Tharpe's story was "a captivating idea for a musical."

But with little direct information from Tharpe about her own inner life—no journal or diary, few personal interviews—the adaptation process was necessarily imaginative. West drew on her own experience as a Black woman and an artist, extrapolated into the world in which Tharpe lived.

"My job as a dramatist is to find an emotional story, an emotional context and story arc," she said. "What would it be like to travel in her skin and be an artist at that time? What might she have felt going through some of the challenges, the conflicts, as well as the joys?"

For her part, Wald was struck by the iterative, collaborative process of building a musical. Though she wasn't directly involved, only making herself available to answer questions from the theatrical team, she loved watching the imaginative process, grounded in history, by which actors, writers, directors and musicians created "behind-the-scenes" moments for Tharpe the character. West's script explores, for instance, whether Tharpe's slight speech affectations might be the attempts of a woman raised in Arkansas to fit in by emulating the East Coast clip she would have heard on the radio.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe, in a 1938 publicity photo

"As a biographer, I had certain guardrails," Wald said. "So to see this creative agency applied to her has been so thrilling and fun."

The show premiered at California's Pasadena Playhouse in 2017, was overhauled for a Seattle Rep production in 2019 and went on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic before coming to Washington.

Seeing Tharpe brought to life onstage was "kind of an out-of-body experience" for Wald. She was embodied by Carrie Compere, a performer *The Washington Post* calls "electrifying" who first played Tharpe in Seattle. And she's happy to see Tharpe's life and art continue to be celebrated. Beacon Press recently published a new edition of *Shout, Sister, Shout*, blurbed by pop superstar Lizzo. Tharpe also appears as a character in Baz Luhrmann's 2022 biopic *Elvis*—a high-profile pop culture shoutout that would have been unthinkable two decades ago.

"I have a friend who's teaching a course on the history of rock and roll, and I guess her students were introduced early on to Rosetta Tharpe, so now any time they read virtually anything written about rock music from before 2020 they're like, 'Dude, where's Rosetta?'" Wald laughed. "Knowing about her affects the stories that we tell about American music."

When Autism Research Hits Home

As a Luther Rice-winning neuroscience major, Mohammed Almarkhan researched the link between autism and dementia. His work may improve the lives of millions, including his own sister.

Neuroscience major Mohammed Almarkhan's Luther Rice research was inspired by his sister Larin, who has autism spectrum disorder.

NEUROSCIENCE MAJOR **MOHAMMED ALMARKHAN,** BS *'23,* remembers his sister Larin as a lively toddler, brightening his family's days when they lived in Saudi Arabia.

But by the time she turned two, Almarkhan began to see his sister change. She stopped making eye contact and calling him by his name. She isolated herself, playing with her toys alone in a corner. By three, she had regressed so much that she lost her speech. Eventually, she was diagnosed with severe level-3 autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a revelation that provided some answers for his family—but also left Almarkhan with more questions.

"How does this happen to a beautiful, perfect child?" he still asks himself about Larin, who is now 13. "What kind of life is she going to have?"

Almarkhan and his family moved to the United States eight years ago in part to have greater access to treatments and therapy. Since that time, Almarkhan said his sister improved. For example, she is now able to change her clothes by herself, and the family continues to guide her toward a more independent life.

But Almarkhan still had questions about both the cause of ASD and what can be done to improve the quality of life for people like Larin. His search for answers led him to Assistant

Professor of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences **Gregory Wallace**, whose research focuses on brain development of individuals with ASD and how the disorder affects their daily lives.

As an assistant in Wallace's lab, Almarkhan investigated an increased dementia risk among people with ASD and other intellectual disabilities. Selected to receive a Luther Rice Fellowship—a CCAS program that supports faculty-mentored student research—Almarkhan hopes his work will have long-term implications for his sister and the one-in-44 U.S. children diagnosed with some form of ASD each year.

"I went into this research asking myself, 'What can I do to improve the future of autistic kids?' That's a scientific question. But it's also a personal one," Almarkhan said.

Quality of Life Challenges

While evidence has linked ASD to an elevated risk of dementia—at least five times higher than the general population of 30- to 64-year-olds—there have been few follow-up studies focused on the challenges of dementia symptoms on people who are already struggling with performing daily life tasks.

"Our knowledge of cognitive aging among autistic adults is very limited," Wallace noted. "If autistic adults, particularly those with co-occurring intellectual disability, experience increased risk for developing dementia, our research will have important public health implications. It could elevate the importance of developing clinical tools and methods to better screen, prevent and treat dementia among autistic adults."

Looking to fill both the knowledge and life-impact gaps, Almarkhan's Luther Rice project—titled "Dementia Risk and Its Functional Impacts in Adults with Autism with Intellectual Disability During Middle and Older Adulthood"—looked at dependent people with ASD who rely on caregivers for daily needs like dressing, cooking and banking.

Using well-established surveys from sources like the World Health Organization, Almarkhan collected data from 150 caregivers—mostly family members—on factors like speech and daily living skills and four quality-of-life indicators: physical and psychological health, social relationships and environment. Another questionnaire was specifically designed to detect dementia symptoms in people with intellectual disabilities.

Together, the combined data is providing a clearer picture of not just the degree of elevated dementia risk for people with ASD but also whether they experience more adverse impacts than the general population.

Almarkhan stressed that while other important research projects are searching for the cause of the raised dementia risk, his relational study is aimed at bringing immediate relief to people currently suffering from the twin disorders of dementia and ASD. "My goal is to make their lives better right now," he said. Indeed, while he hopes his findings will have direct clinical implications—including improved screening and detection—he also wants it to serve as the foundation for strategies that keep dementia from hindering people with ASD in areas like independence and employment potential.

As he prepared his work for potential publication in a peer-reviewed journal, Almarkhan presented it at both the CCAS Research Showcase and the annual meeting of the International Society for Autism Research in Sweden. Among his many activities, Almarkhan works as a medical assistant in a Virginia doctor's office. He was also the president and founder of the Autism Research Club at GW, a campus organization that aims to educate the public on ASD and raise research funds. He plans to pursue his ASD research even as he attends medical school this fall. "This is important to me. I want to finish the job," he said.

At his family's Centreville, Va., home, Almarkhan continues to help his parents care for his sister Larin. He envisions her eventually living independently and hopes his work can keep factors like dementia from getting in her way. "I think about how, for people like her who have come so far, dementia could wipe out the gains they have made," he said. "I'm trying to do something about that."

"I went into this research asking myself, 'What can I do to improve the future of autistic kids?' That's a scientific question. But it's also a personal one."

—MOHAMMED ALMARKHAN, BS '23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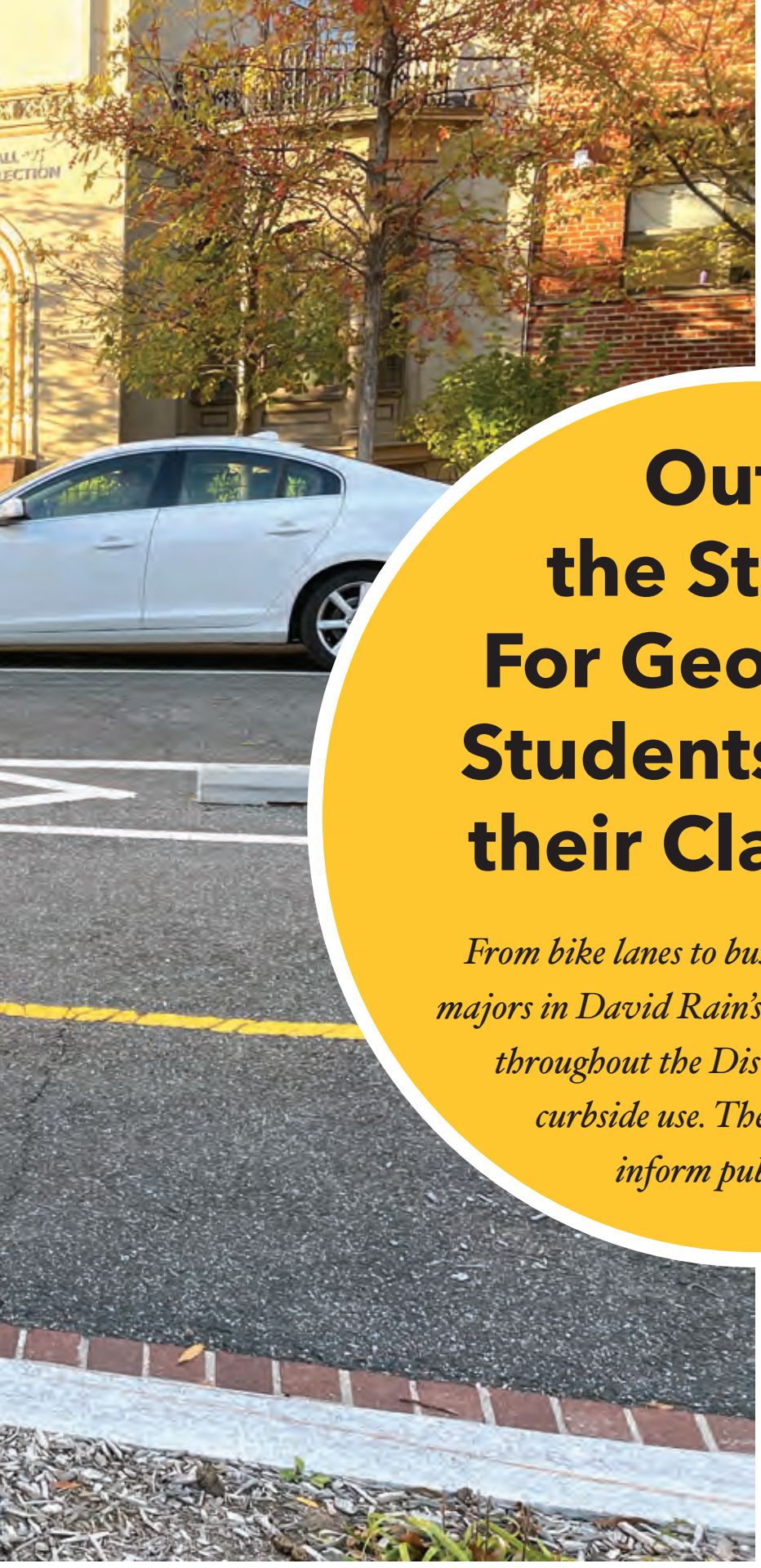


Out in the Streets: For Geography Students, D.C. is their Classroom

From bike lanes to bus stops, the geography majors in David Rain's capstone class traveled throughout the District to understand curbside use. Their findings may inform public policy.

David Rain (left) takes his geography students to survey G Street bike lanes. Pictured are Colin Gilbert (kneeling), Colton Asnes (pointing), Paulina Mnev (back left) and Juliana Schmidt (back right).

WHEN **DAVID RAIN**, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF geography and international affairs, convened his Geography Pro Seminar, his students were as likely to be found in the streets of Washington, D.C., as in a campus classroom. And that's exactly how Rain planned it.

His senior capstone course combined seminar-style discussion with real-world exposure to geography challenges. The 28 students in his class took on the roles of professional urban geographers—city planners, GIS coordinators, outreach specialists—as they investigated the rising demands on D.C. curbsides.

Spurred partly by the COVID-19 pandemic, curbs have become busier than ever, with competing needs from loading zones and bus stops to e-scooters and outdoor restaurant seating. Rain's students, all geography majors, spread out through District neighborhoods—to bike lanes on G Street, parking ramps in the Navy Yard and electric vehicle charging stations in Logan Circle—collecting data on how the city can make better use of its curbs. Their final reports may inform city policy for stakeholders like the D.C. Department of Transportation (DDOT).

"This is a real-world impact class," Rain said. "It's a chance for students to step out into the field—which, in this case, is the street."

For the last few years, Rain noted, cities from Paris to Omaha have asked their streets and sidewalks to do more than handle traffic. While DDOT officially oversees curb usage, the agency is balancing the needs of city stakeholders like shop owners, motorists, pedestrians and bikers—all while complying with accessibility requirements and managing sustainability concerns.

"The curbside is sort of the interface between public and private," Rain said. "The streets are public. The buildings are private. And there are all these competing interests and different users who want something from the sidewalks and curbs."

Meanwhile, cities have turned to geographers—like urban planners and geospatial experts—to design flexible systems that meet the changing needs of their streets. For Rain, that trend makes curbs the perfect place to teach students about how an urban geographer works. His class partnered with Larry Marcus, a D.C. transportation planner and affiliated faculty member, who helped introduce students to city government contacts. Rain also works with Canadian software company IBI, which provided complementary access to its curbside analysis software.

Splitting into five teams, the students traveled throughout the D.C. metropolitan area to collect data, conduct surveys and advise city agencies and stakeholders on best practice solutions. **Allison Abrams**' team, for example, worked with DDOT on a framework to expand Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant parking. "Our work may be utilized to justify and install more accessible parking," Abrams said. "I have never worked on a project that could actually affect planning policy."

Geography student **Paul Faucher**'s team conducted a study for the Fairfax County Department of Transportation that aims to make Tysons Corner, Va., more pedestrian friendly. "This project is a great representation of what geography can do," he said. "An analysis of geospatial data, stakeholders' needs and policy context can transform Tysons into a more livable city."

And **Kai Hall** said his project—helping the National Association of City Transportation Officials design streets for new technologies like autonomous vehicles—was partly inspired by his childhood in Tokyo, where transportation options play a central role in people's lives.

"I'm a strong believer that our built environment affects our happiness," Hall said. "We can build our cities to make us feel happy by providing mobility options, a sense of community and good aesthetics."

Meanwhile, Rain said the skills his students acquire—like teamwork and project completion—can apply to any career. "They collaborate with their peers, they have deliverables, they have timelines," he said. His goal is for seniors to leave his class thinking less like students and more like professionals. "Capstone courses often prepare students for the job market," Rain said. "I hope this class helps them think about what they want to do after GW."

The 28 senior geography majors in Rain's capstone class visited the business district in Rosslyn, Va.

Transportation Planner Larry Marcus (center) talks to Rain's class about how the streetscape at the Rosslyn, Va., metro station increases walkability and provides bus access.

"This is a real-world impact class. It's a chance for students to step out into the field—which, in this case, is the street."

— DAVID RAIN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY

Fear of Failing: Managing Social Anxiety

For the 40 million Americans with social anxiety disorder, even casual encounters can be paralyzing. Psychology's Fallon Goodman helps them make connections.

In her popular TED Talk, Assistant Professor of Psychology Fallon Goodman explained how social anxiety disorder prevents people from "living the lives they want to live."

FOR MANY PEOPLE, SOCIAL INTERACTIONS CAN BE a source of dread. While some of us revel in parties, meetings and lunches, others are planning their exit strategy before they even step into a room.

And for the 40 million Americans who suffer from social anxiety disorder, notes Assistant Professor of Psychology **Fallon Goodman**, gatherings from crowded dinners to one-on-one coffee dates aren't just uncomfortable—they can feel like white knuckle terrors.

More than 12 percent of Americans will have diagnosable social anxiety disorder at some point in their lives, according to Goodman, who studies the condition in her Emotion and Resilience Lab. That number includes high-profile figures like tennis champion Naomi Osaka and Academy Award winner Viola Davis.

Although they are often dismissed as introverts or simply shy, Goodman emphasized their condition isn't harmless or fleeting. While every case of social anxiety looks different, it's linked to elevated risks of alcohol and drug abuse as well as other mental illnesses like depression. Perhaps most alarming, Goodman maintained, is that social anxiety causes people to hide from interactions, robbing them of what she calls their greatest resource: other people.

"Humans are hard-wired to connect with each other," she said. "But social anxiety gets in the way of people living the lives they want to live."

Rejection Response

At its core, Goodman said, social anxiety is tied to the fear of rejection. While rejection rears its head in every life—whether it's being ghosted after a first date or being passed over for a dream job—people with social anxiety disorder intertwine that rejection with their views of

> "Social anxiety gets in the way of people living the lives they want to live."
>
> — FALLON GOODMAN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

themselves. "You believe you were ghosted because you're not lovable enough," Goodman explained. "You believe you were turned down for that job because you're not intelligent enough." And each nerve-wracking encounter makes it harder for them to risk rejection again. "For some people, rejection is so painful, so traumatic, that they systematically avoid social interactions throughout their life," she said.

Fallon, who came to CCAS in 2022, has long worked with young people experiencing social anxiety, such as children who shied away from playing with their peers and teenagers who resisted eye contact. "It's frustrating to see a 6-year-old already intentionally avoiding one of the best parts about being human—connecting with other people," she said.

Goodman herself had never experienced social anxiety "in all its terrible glory," she said, until she took an impulse trip to Australia during her PhD program. Isolated in a Melbourne hostel, she realized that, like people with social anxiety, she was searching for clues to social norms. She scanned every encounter for nods of approvals or scowls of rejection, hyper-focused on how her clothes and speech differed from others around her. "In every social comparison, I missed the mark," she said. She fought the urge to retreat to her room rather than approach fellow travelers. "I learned a lesson about social anxiety," she said. "It feels paralyzing."

In her CCAS lab, Fallon and her team of five graduate student researchers examine how people overcome social anxiety, build lasting social relationships and foster resilience to adversity. Much of her research uses smartphones to capture emotions as they unfold in real time and identify the daily situations that worsen social anxiety. Her work has been featured in national media outlets including CNN, *The Washington Post* and *Harvard Business Review*, and her 2021 TED Talk on social anxiety has been viewed more than 1 million times.

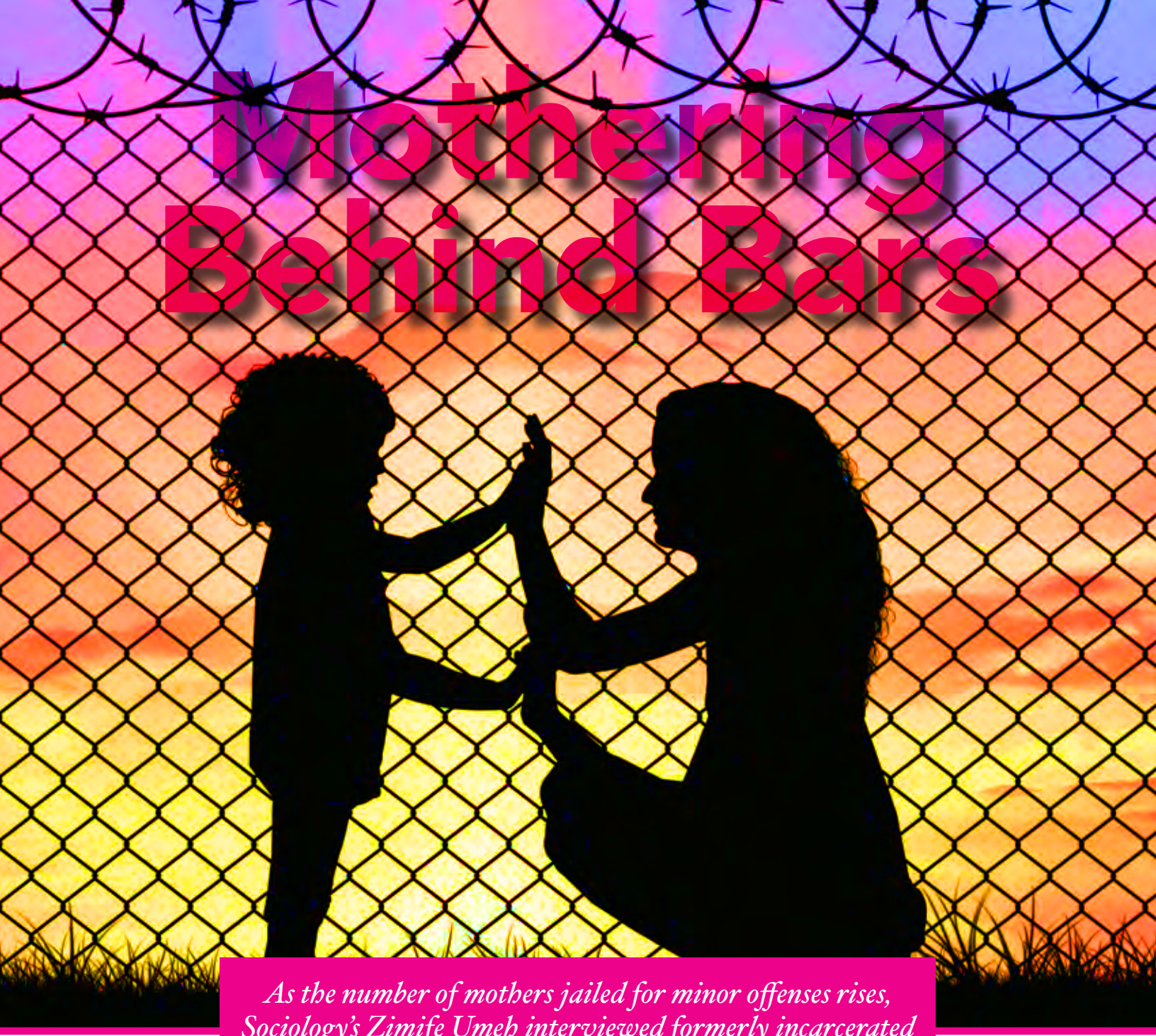
And while social anxiety disorder is one of the most common mental illnesses in the world—and a fairly easy one to detect with just a few diagnostic questions—it's often misdiagnosed and misunderstood, Goodman said.

Goodman frequently dispels common myths about the condition, like the belief that people with social anxiety disorder actually like being alone. "They don't prefer hiding alone in their homes. They desire strong connections as much as anyone else," she said. In fact, participants in her lab often say that, despite their fear of rejection, their spirits are buoyed when they socialize. "It speaks to the power of social relationships and social connection," she said, "when doing the thing they presumably fear most actually makes them feel better." Goodman often recommends engaging in what she calls "social courage." She encourages people to intentionally jump into situations that they would otherwise be too anxious to enjoy. "Most of the time they find their biggest fears don't come true," she said.

Still, she cautions against minimizing the experiences of groups that are disproportionately subjected to rejection, including the LGBTQ+ community. One of her lab's projects, led by clinical psychology PhD candidate **Paddy Loftus**, is examining how discrimination risk perceptions influence LGBTQ+ people's daily activities. "We want to foster social courage and give people the tools to handle rejection when it comes," she said. "But we also need to appreciate that not everyone is equally experiencing rejection in our world."

Meanwhile, Goodman is encouraged by people who harness their platforms to help reduce stigma and correct harmful myths—whether it's Osaka's international celebrity or candid conversations in communities, schools and workplaces. "We've got a long way to go in understanding what social anxiety is and not equating it to some sort of weakness," she said. "But in this hyperconnected world, a single person can have a ton of power. They can use their platforms to create meaningful and lasting change."

Mothering Behind Bars



As the number of mothers jailed for minor offenses rises, Sociology's Zimife Umeh interviewed formerly incarcerated women about the trauma of institutional separation.

WHEN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY **Zimife Umeh** first embarked on researching the experiences of incarcerated mothers, she worried nobody would talk to her.

After all, she was asking women who were recently released from prison to divulge their most personal and painful memories. She would be interviewing them about childhood abuse, their years behind bars and the anguish of being separated from their children.

"I was essentially asking them to unpack their traumas for my research purposes," said Umeh. "That's a very big ask."

But as she met with women in settings from homes to halfway houses, word spread among nonprofit aid organizations that Umeh could be trusted. During the course of a year, she interviewed 40 formerly incarcerated women. And while each had unique stories about their struggles within the criminal justice system, many repeated a common refrain: They were relieved to finally be heard.

"I'm glad I got to tell like my story," Umeh recalled women telling her. "Nobody has ever asked me how I got here."

"The negative and punitive consequences [of incarceration] are devastating.... It touches everything and it feels like it will never end."

—ZIMIFE UMEH, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY

Throughout her career, Umeh has listened to people's stories and fit them into a larger narrative about how interactions with institutions—prisons, foster cares, schools—shape lives.

Her current research—beginning with her PhD studies at Duke University and her postdoctoral fellowship at Brown University and now continuing at CCAS—explores how institutions treat victimized Black women as criminals. Through her work, Umeh traces the pathways to prison for mothers, many of whom have suffered poverty and abuse. And she reveals how their incarceration continues to reverberate throughout their lives long after their release.

"The negative and punitive consequences are devastating and ongoing," she explained. "It affects their ability to parent. It affects whether they find jobs with a living income. It touches everything, and it feels like it will never end."

Severing Family Bonds

Early in her career, Umeh spent five years as a high school teacher in Philadelphia. Too often, she said, she witnessed how student struggles with disciplinarian systems often led to encounters with police. As she saw young people enter the juvenile justice system over relatively minor offenses, she began to look deeper at what she and others have called a "school-to-prison pipeline."

Her research revealed eye-opening facts about families separated by incarceration. Of the more than 150,000 incarcerated women in 2020—a 475 percent increase since 1980—nearly 60 percent are mothers, according to the nonprofit Sentencing Project.

Children with incarcerated mothers face higher risks of an array of adverse outcomes, including dropping out of school and ending up behind bars themselves. Indeed, an Annie E. Casey Foundation report suggested that parental incarceration can have as many negative impacts on a child's well-being as abuse or domestic violence.

Maintaining family bonds can help ease the trauma of separation for both mothers and children, noted an Urban Institute study. But institutional barriers—such as courts and child welfare agencies that oversee custody decisions and prisons that regulate parents' access to their kids—keep families apart, Umeh said.

"How do you look at yourself as a mother when someone else tells you how and when you can see your children?" she said.

Umeh's interview subjects largely mirror the national profile of incarcerated women. Most are African American women sentenced for non-violent offenses, from low-level drug-related incidents to what Umeh calls "economic survival" acts, like one mother who shoplifted children's clothes from a Walmart. And like many women ensnared in the criminal justice system, Umeh said incarcerated mothers often experienced abusive childhoods themselves.

Even from behind bars, however, many of the mothers in Umeh's survey looked for ways to cling to their maternal identity—some even choosing not to have their children visit them. "That may not look like traditional mothering," Umeh explained, "but those women are saying, 'I'm still doing the act of mothering by protecting my children—even if that means protecting them from me and my environment.'"

And for most, their burdens don't end with their release. Umeh recalled one woman who, after a series of misdemeanors, was stripped of both her nursing assistant and bartending licenses. She was forced to lie about her criminal record on a waitressing job application but was fired when her employer found out. "What does reentry mean if you can't reenter the labor market?" Umeh said. "How do you get on with your life?"

The next phase of Umeh's research will focus on mother-child reunions and feature input from institutional actors—social workers, child protective service agents and judges throughout the Washington, D.C., family court system. Meanwhile, she plans to adapt her research into a book project. She already introduced the women's stories into her undergraduate class on Black Feminist Perspectives and Criminal Justice.

The intense interviews can be wearying, Umeh said, often leaving her emotionally drained. "It takes a toll," she admitted. Still, she's been sustained by the resilience of the women who trust her with their stories. Even in their most challenging moments, she noted, most were committed to charting a brighter path for their families' future.

"It's touching to see how determined they are to get their children back, to start new jobs, to stick to their sobriety," she said. "We know they face an uphill battle. But their optimism is inspiring."

Student Research Grows through Digitized Scientific Collections

By Ruth Steinhardt

A $1 million National Science Foundation award supporting course-based undergraduate research experiences, or CUREs, facilitates the use of online natural history collections for students.

A collection of shell specimens at the Delaware Museum of Nature and Science (Photo by Parisa Tabiatnejad)

WHEN **PARISA TABIATNEJAD** ENTERED GW IN fall 2020, it wasn't the easiest time to be a college student. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated remote learning, and Tabiatnejad—who knew she was interested in science but hadn't yet decided on her area of focus—wouldn't have the laboratory or research access she would have under normal circumstances.

Fortunately, Tabiatnejad was part of the Women's Leadership Program (WLP), meaning her introductory biology class was taught by WLP Director and Associate Professor of Biology **Carly Jordan**. Funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), Jordan that year was pioneering an innovative pedagogy for students kept away from campus by the pandemic: a set of four course-based undergraduate research experiences, or CUREs, that help students conduct research using data from digitized natural history collections.

"There are millions and millions of natural history collections records—specimens sitting in a box somewhere that have been photographed and imaged and put on databases that anyone can access for free," Jordan said. "If faculty can understand that these resources are there, get some training on how to understand these massive datasets, and what are some tools that you can use to ask and answer ecological questions with them, then they represent an endless opportunity for research that's completely free and can be done in person or online."

The initiative is part of the Biological Collections and Ecology and Evolution Network (BCEENET), a community of educators, collections managers and data experts who promote undergraduate scientific exploration using free online resources—providing training materials for educators who want to pass this expertise on to their students. Since 2020, the CUREs have been adopted in 33 institutions, reaching more than 2,800 students.

This year, NSF marked their success and continuing impact of CUREs with a five-year, $1 million award to Jordan and GW that will allow the team to assess the impacts of these CUREs on student learning and interest in science.

CUREs were essential at the peak of the COVID-19 era, but their relevance hasn't faded. According to Jordan, CUREs could greatly impact the overall diversification of STEM both because they are accessible to institutions at all levels of funding—several of the participating institutions are community colleges, where on-the-ground research opportunities aren't readily available—and because they provide opportunities for students who might not be able to participate in traditional fieldwork. By lowering the barriers to scientific discovery, CUREs expand the pool of potential scientists.

"A big part of diversifying STEM going forward is making sure that everybody actually has access to that [research] moment that can be so transformative for students," Jordan said.

Through CUREs, Tabiatnejad and her classmates examined thousands of digitized butterfly specimens to investigate how changes in wing pigmentation patterns might be connected to ecological changes over a period of years. Working with these massive datasets in her first college biology class gave her the experience and confidence to continue her research career as her interests evolved. When, the following summer, she joined the lab of Associate Professor of Biology **Scott Powell** to study ant colonies, she wasn't intimidated by the volume and pace of her work.

"I had already learned how to organize datasets and spreadsheets and work with data in a way that was manageable but efficient," said Tabiatnejad, who is now majoring in neuroscience with a minor in biology and is working as a science communications intern at BCEENET. "It made me feel like science was something I could actually do."

The CUREs' purpose goes beyond building research skills to strengthening students' scientific confidence, Jordan said—and that also means getting them comfortable sharing their research with peers. Tabiatnejad and Jordan traveled to Delaware for an Ecological Society of America conference, at which Tabiatnejad presented her work on ant colony-cleaning behavior. The expanded NSF grant includes funding for more students to travel and participate in academic conferences.

Tabiatnejad also got to see firsthand the difference between a digital collection and a physical one when she and Jordan went backstage at the Delaware Museum of Nature and Science with Director of Collections Elizabeth Shea, a co-principal investigator on the NSF grant.

"There is a big difference between seeing a giant number on the collections database itself, and then physically seeing the warehouse full of individuals," Tabiatnejad said. "That was a bit crazy—just rows and rows and rows and rows of these boxes."

Associate Professor of Biology Carly Jordan

Digital collections "represent an endless opportunity for research that's completely free and can be done in person or online."

— CARLY JORDAN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY

PHILANTHROPY-IN-ACTION

Generous philanthropy from CCAS family and friends plays a crucial role in shaping a vibrant culture and community. Philanthropic support—like the examples featured on these pages—has helped showcase student art and research, share scholarly perspectives and discoveries and strengthen an educational experience that impacts the university and the world beyond.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT JOINS STORYTELLING PROJECT

THE MELLON FOUNDATION AWARDED $487,000 in funding to the Department of English to support "Story for All: Disability Justice Collaboratories"—a humanities project focused on social justice and the literary imagination. Led by Professor of English **Maria Frawley**, the project aims to provide marginalized populations with the empowering capacities of storytelling.

"I am so grateful to the Mellon Foundation for its support of this project," Frawley said. "Their generous funding will enable us to mount two humanities labs where undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and faculty will collaborate with local partners on the creation of digital platforms for storytelling, all in the service of advancing the ideals of disability justice."

GW was among 26 institutions of higher learning from across the nation to receive support totaling more than $12 million from the Mellon Foundation, the nation's largest funder of the arts, culture and humanities. The institutions selected were all involved in mounting civic engagement and social justice-related research and projects. The project goals focus on three categories: civic engagement and voting rights; race and racialization in the United States; and social justice and the literary imagination.

"We are proud to be the recipient of this grant from the Mellon Foundation, which serves as a testament to our work in the humanities," said CCAS Dean **Paul Wahlbeck**. "Through storytelling, we can foster both an intellectual and empathetic environment that supports our scholars and equips our students to make a difference in their communities. It is an example of what we call 'the engaged liberal arts' in its truest form."

The NEXT gala at the historic Flagg Building

Former GW President Mark S. Wrighton admired the art on display at NEXT.

Daniel Weiss, BA '79, helped moderate and organize the Vietnam conference.

LESSONS FROM VIETNAM

FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE VIETNAM War, much of the world continues to wrestle with its legacy and consequences—from its tragic human toll to its transformative impact on nearly every corner of American life.

Why does the war still resonate so strongly today? That was the question addressed at "Vietnam: A 50 Year Retrospective," a conference supported by CCAS, the Wallace Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Luminaries in an array of fields—from diplomats, military leaders and politicians to historians, journalists and poets—gathered on campus to reflect on the lessons of the war.

Vietnam "changed almost everything about how we live, what we believe, how we select governance, how we think about the military," said **Daniel Weiss**, BA '79, president and CEO of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and author of the book *In That Time: Michael O'Donnell and the Tragic Era of Vietnam.* Longtime philanthropic supporters, Weiss and his wife **Sandra Jarva Weiss**, BA '80, JD '83, recently endowed a scholarship fund to help students attend GW.

Among the conference panelists, former Nebraska senators and Vietnam veterans Chuck Hagel and Bob Kerrey addressed how the conflict ignited a crisis of confidence in American leadership. Pioneering journalists including Pulitzer Prize winners Frances FitzGerald and David Maraniss recounted reporting from Vietnamese war zones. Corcoran Director **Lauren Onkey** examined the cultural sights and sounds of the war. And dignitaries such as former U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Raymond Burghardt and Columbia University historian Lien-Hang Nguyen discussed the conflict's international ramifications.

CCAS Dean **Paul Wahlbeck** lauded the conference's "mission to explore the deeper meaning and lasting impact of this transformative era in American history."

Conference panelists included former Nebraska senators and Vietnam veterans Bob Kerrey (left) and Chuck Hagel

SUPPORT ENHANCES 'NEXT' ARTS FESTIVAL

THE CORCORAN SCHOOL OF THE Arts and Design celebrated its annual showcase of student talent with an expanded NEXT Festival stretching over 30 days in the spring and capped by a gala extravaganza at the historic Flagg Building.

Donations from Corcoran alumnus **Pat Sheridan**, BFA '99, helped enhance the weeks-long celebration of Corcoran academic programs—from studio fine arts and interior architecture to photography and performing arts. Approximately 100 graduating students displayed work from their senior capstone or master's thesis projects, featuring music, dance and theater performances, art exhibitions and design symposia.

"Together, we celebrate our students' learning, making and experimenting—past, present and future," said Corcoran Director **Lauren Onkey**. "We're especially grateful to Pat Sheridan for providing support that allowed us to design and produce an excellent book that will last as a permanent record of our students' achievements."

Alumnus John Dixon Sullivan, BS '76, MS '83,(left) with CCAS Dean Paul Wahlbeck

ADDING UP: ALUMNUS SUPPORTS MATH DEPARTMENT

A $1.5 MILLION BEQUEST commitment by alumnus **John Dixon Sullivan**, BS '76, MS '83, will create the John Dixon Sullivan Mathematics Innovation Fund to help recruit faculty, bolster research and enhance scholarly work in the Department of Mathematics.

"John Sullivan's generous gift will further our Math Department's mission to provide high-quality education and research that prepares the next generation of analytical problem solvers to meet the demands of today's data-driven world," said CCAS Dean **Paul Wahlbeck**.

The bequest intention from Mr. Sullivan, who earned his bachelor's degree in applied mathematics before going on to a 40-year career with the federal government (30 at the Federal Aviation Administration), will fund numerous initiatives within the Math Department, including recruitment and retention of faculty members and post-doctoral fellows, and faculty research, visitor programs, travel and scholarly work, along with other department needs.

Professor of Mathematics **Frank Baginski** celebrated the fund's future impact on supporting "top-notch faculty, increasing our research stature and enhancing the educational experience for our students." With the bequest's support, Baginski said the department will continue to encourage students as they develop the analytical and technical skills that make them highly sought after by employers and professional schools.

TURNER PROFESSORSHIP HONORS ENVIRONMENTAL VISION

IN REVOLUTIONIZING TELEVISION news, Cable News Network (CNN) founder Ted Turner earned a reputation as a pioneer in global media and journalism. And as a philanthropist, he focused the world's attention on environmental threats like climate change.

And now the GW community and others are honoring Turner's legacy in part by establishing a GW professorship in his name: the School of Media and Public Affairs Ted Turner Visiting Professor of Environmental Media.

At a School of Media and Public Affairs (SMPA) event, **John D. Sutter**, an investigative journalist and documentary filmmaker, was officially introduced as the inaugural recipient of the professorship. The event featured Turner family members and colleagues, including CNN correspondents **Wolf Blitzer**, Hon Doc '07, and Christiane Amanpour; and SMPA Director of Strategic Initiatives **Frank Sesno**, who spent more than two decades working at CNN as a White House correspondent, anchor and Washington bureau chief.

"This is the culmination of a dream to honor Ted, to share his audacious spirit, to teach future storytellers at this powerhouse of a university forever in Ted's name," Sesno said. "This is the perfect place to honor Ted. It's the perfect place to inspire other young, fearless, global citizens to tell stories that inform, engage, connect, motivate and inspire action on behalf of this planet."

Since spring 2021, the Ted Turner Endowment at George Washington University has raised $3.2 million, spurred by a $500,000 gift from CNN, to establish the professorship and support events and activities around environmental journalism.

CNN founder Ted Turner (right) with SMPA Director of Strategic Initiatives Frank Sesno

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Congratulations Class of 2023!