

THE PAW



WINTER 2026

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: CUSTODIANS, GAZA, MAKEUP, LOST & FOUND, BLACK@YP, TWEENS & GEN ALPHA, LOGOS, SHORTS, SPOTIFY, ALT-COUNTRY, MOVIES, CARDS, ALMOST MAINE, ON-FIELD SUPERSTITIONS, FALL SPORTS, OFF-SEASON TRAINING, GAMES, PERSONAL COLUMN

Zohran Wins

York community responds to a Mamdani mayoralty



By Halle Maanavi

On November 4, 2025, Zohran Mamdani made history. At the age of 34, Mamdani was elected mayor of New York City, accomplishing a series of firsts: the first Muslim, the first South Asian, the first Democratic Socialist, and the first immigrant to hold the office since 1974. In the Democratic primary, Mamdani defeated former Governor Andrew Cuomo, who then ran against him as an Independent in the general election. Republican Curtis Sliwa and disgraced incumbent Eric Adams, also an Independent, who dropped out in the final weeks of the campaign, joined them on the ballot.

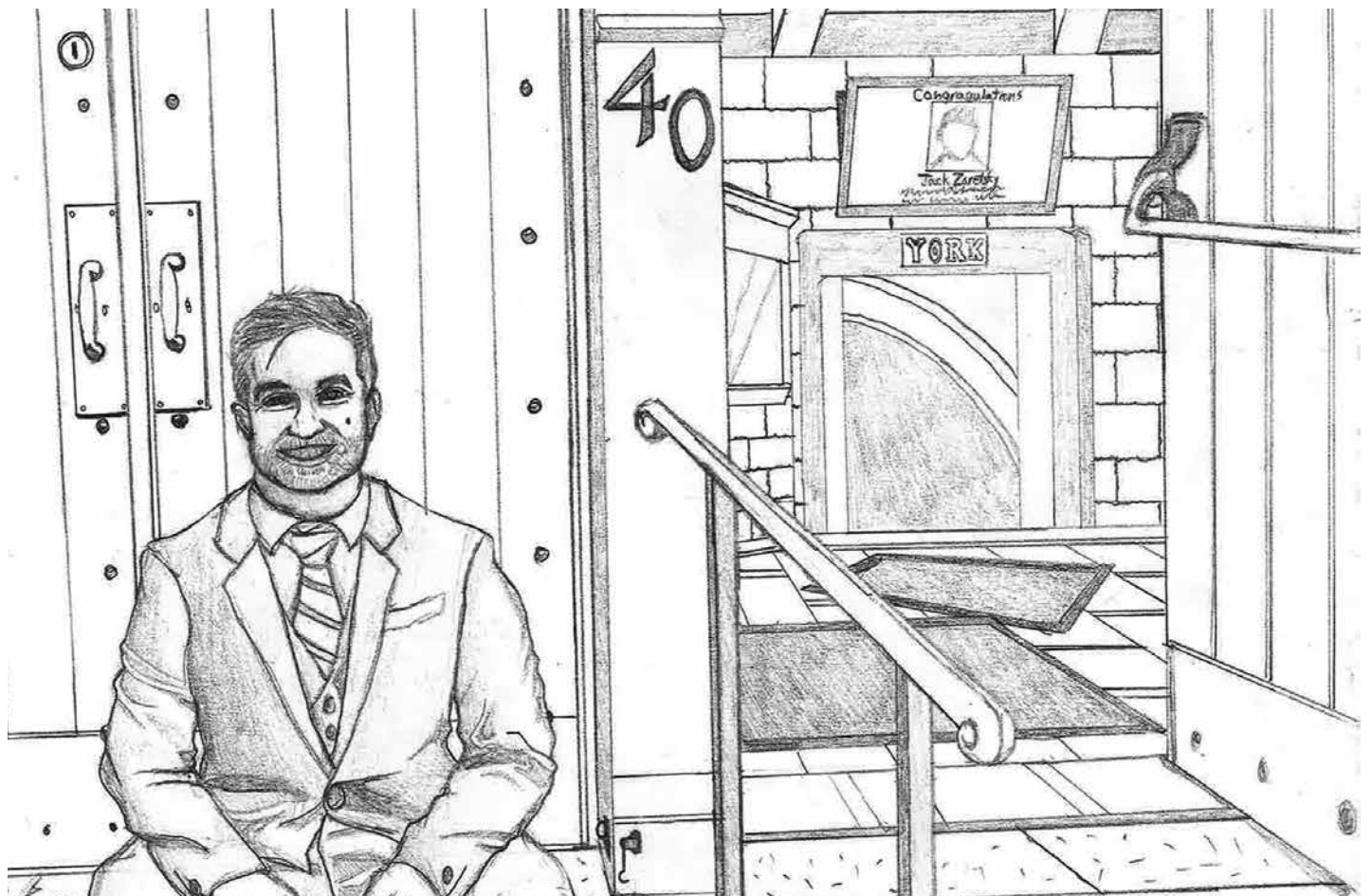
In the midst of a major housing and affordability crisis, a great deal was at stake for New Yorkers in this election, and each candidate campaigned with these issues as top priorities. The candidates promised to lower rents and reduce prices on essential goods and services throughout the city, as well as to increase public safety and improve the public education system.

For history teacher Sam Gordon, affordability is most pressing issue. “I believe we’ve experienced a significant housing shortage for several years, and both the costs of owning property and renting are increasing rapidly,” Mr. Gordon said. “I think that’s pushing people out of the city, making things very difficult.”

Rapid inflation in recent years has particularly affected the cost of groceries. Mamdani made affordability a central focus throughout his campaign, calling for long-term social housing investments and rent stabilization across all five boroughs. Additionally, he plans to establish city-owned and operated grocery stores to provide essential items to New Yorkers at wholesale prices.

As for inflation, “rent and people’s wages and salaries are not keeping pace with that,” Mr. Gordon said. “I think people are getting increasingly desperate; it’s leading to a lot of the secondary problems we’re seeing in the city.”

Mr. Gordon has noticed these issues when he goes grocery shopping:



Zohran Mamdani, the 111th mayor of New York City.

seeing the sticker price is always a shock. Additionally, when he thinks about having a family and owning property one day, those goals don’t seem as achievable within his income bracket as they did for people with similar salaries in the past.

Jump Start and history teacher Lane Choplin is concerned with the opioid crisis.

“The growing number of fentanyl dealers that I see in my neighborhood and the people suffering from addiction dying on the street is my biggest concern,” he said. “I notice it every day while going to work and coming home.”

Although drug addiction did not play a prominent role in Mamdani’s campaign, he has called for expanding emergency shelters and reallocating funds toward permanent housing for those who face homelessness and addiction.

More than anything, 12th grade dean Brian Shure wants to see a mayor who serves the people. “I want a community where whoever is in charge has the best interests of the most people at heart,” he said. “I would like to vote for someone who will fight for working-class people and implement policies that

make the city better for the largest number of people who live here.”

History teacher Tyler Palmese approached the election from the perspective of his family members, who have deep roots in the city, and for whom affordability is a priority.

“I’ll use my grandmother as an example: she’s currently trying to move into an apartment in Staten Island, but she is in a situation where, despite having the capital to do so, she can’t because of income verification requirements,” he said. “It’s ridiculous. She would have to be earning more than I am currently earning here to afford a studio apartment, which is insane.”

Mr. Palmese’s grandmother’s situation is only one anecdote illustrating how severe the housing crisis has become. Mamdani’s platform pledges to freeze rents for the city’s roughly two million rent-stabilized tenants. Throughout the campaign, he argued that this freeze, paired with building new affordable housing and cracking down on bad landlords, is necessary to stabilize New Yorkers’ cost of living.

Though the faculty members interviewed did not disclose their voting preferences, senior Andrew Wallace had a clear preference: Mamdani.

“I think he has great policies with rent-stabilized homes,” Wallace said. “I also think he’ll get a lot done with just making everything more affordable in New York, because we can see the city becoming less and less affordable for your average family.”

Wallace also found Mamdani’s campaign tactics particularly appealing. “Everything he did on social media was great,” he said. “It resonated with the people, and overall, he’s a really good person.”

For Wallace’s classmate, Jeremy Ciment, safety and efficiency are paramount. “The city is very corrupt, as we know, and although it would be easier to ignore that, we can’t,” he said. “I think Cuomo is a horrible person. He has made some big mistakes in the past. Having said that, if we are looking for a better candidate to run a city, Cuomo is the more experienced option. Mamdani has some great ideas, but he lacks Cuomo’s experience in lawmaking and leadership. I just don’t think he is the best option for the city at this moment.”

But Wallace made one point that may have been key to the success of Mamdani’s campaign. “He’s a real New Yorker.”

Who Turns on the Lights?

Custodians support culture of collaboration and care



York Prep's custodial staff, from left to right. Top row: Harold Briceno, Carmelo Cruz Urbano, Fabiola Sandoval De Martinez; second row: Oscar Aldana, Gerardo Ortigoza, Hugo Barrera Figueroa. Bottom row: Beycan Akbulut, Luis Arias, Ramon Francisco.



By Aitan Greene-Houvas

Before any student walks through the large brown doors of York Prep, the hallways are already buzzing with hard work. Bathrooms cleaned, floors swept, classrooms tidied—not by some overnight miracle, but by the hands of a team that few students even know by name.

York Prep's custodial staff is the backbone of everyday life in school, working long hours to ensure a clean, functional, and safe environment for the community at large. However, their essential work often goes unnoticed.

"When I start my day, I replace the guy in the Christian Science Church," Ramon Francisco said. "He will then go to lunch from 11:00 to 12:00, so I will cover him until he finishes lunch. Then, I will come back to York and finish my job."

Covering shifts is just one example of how the custodial staff is able to care for each other while also optimizing efficiency throughout the day. The custodial staff's passion is a testament

not only to their hard work, but to how much they enjoy their jobs. "We are cleaning," Luis Arias said. "We try to make the school nice, to make it beautiful,

"We try to make the school nice, to make it beautiful, so that when people come in to visit, they get surprised."

—Mr. Arias

ful, so that when people come in to visit, they get surprised."

This mission of care is shared by Gerardo Ortigoza, as well.

"In the morning when I get here, I drink my coffee, and then I start work for the day, and see all of the students and teachers," Mr. Ortigoza said. "A typical day is to have a lot of fun with the

students and with my partners."

Having fun with the students is a common theme.

"The students, they are nice, they are polite," Oscar Aldana said. "Good kids."

Polite though they may be, some students feel that the community does not fully appreciate the custodial staff.

"A lot of kids at York admit that they come from wealthier backgrounds and are fairly spoiled," senior Kyle Schwartz said. "I'm in the gym during PE after lunch, and I see trash under the bleachers. It's unbelievable. These kids just leave their trash there and expect someone to clean up after them."

Opinions differ as to how the student body treats the custodial staff. But one thing is guaranteed: the custodians put in essential work that allows both students and teachers to operate smoothly each day. From early-morning cleaning to late-night prep for the next day, the custodians' work directly impacts the learning environment and community at York Prep—often without even being seen. ☐

After October 7, Calls for Peace

Students reflect on the War in Gaza



By Saige Moodie

Two years ago, on October 7, 2023, a terrorist group known as Hamas attacked Israel's borders and massacred over 1,200 people, many of them civilians. Millions around the world were shocked, and in the months that followed, solidarity with Israel was apparent as far away as York Prep. It only took a couple of days for the hallways to start buzzing with updates and calls for action. But as Israel's war in Gaza wages on, a shift in public opinion can be felt globally as well as at our school.

Among the student body, 11th grade representative Halle Maanavi stands out for the boldness and passion of her political views.

"I felt deeply for the Jewish people, especially my Jewish friends in New York, but as news of the conflict dominated the media, I realized the story was more nuanced."

against the Palestinians as a people."

Freshman Marta Schachter, a member of the Jewish Heritage Club, remembers October 7 vividly.

"It was the Simchat Torah holiday, a really joyous holiday for the Jewish people," she said. "All of a sudden, a lot of Jews and Israelis were scared and started to fight. Everyone was supposed to be celebrating, and now they were crying. I think that led us all to be very confused. Israel is used to being attacked a little bit, but all of a sudden there was this huge massacre that caught us off guard."

Schachter disputes the notion that Jewish people who remain loyal to Israel don't want the people of Gaza to be happy or safe.

"The truth is, we want to share, and have peace for the majority," she said. "My family personally believes that both are equal. Has my view changed? No. Will I die

ing cry of the pro-Palestine movement, "horrifies" Schachter, "because, to me, it means that they want all the land," she said. "There have been many mistakes on the side of Palestine as well; we're just trying to keep our country. It's horrible, it's really something else. Everyone in Israel knows someone who died or got seriously hurt."

When Schachter walks the streets of New York and sees people wearing keffiyehs or waving Palestinian flags, she feels that "they don't see the full picture. Hamas has created an explosion."

While the broader shift in public opinion has mostly derived from the actions of the Israeli military, and the view that the IDF has abused the horrors of October 7 to conduct military operations in Gaza which the United Nations has determined to constitute genocide, the divisiveness of the subject has inhibited



Wheat spikes and olive trees represent Israelis' and Palestinians' deep connection to their homeland.

As she educated herself on the subject, Maanavi's perspective started to change.

"I think the Israeli government has gone too far," she said. "Too many civilians have been killed to simply call it self-defense." The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the nation's military, "should also be held accountable," Maanavi said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "doesn't enforce long-standing laws of war and is driving the IDF to treat many innocent Palestinians inhumanely. Schools, hospitals, and homes being destroyed instead of just targeting the responsible terrorists caused my opinion to shift toward believing that the war is now

a Zionist? Absolutely. Almost all of my mom's side is in Israel, and many of them serve in the reserves. My family hosts Palestinians, we do care about both."

But like many Zionists, Schachter's support of the Israeli government is not unconditional.

"A lot of the people in Israel don't like Netanyahu," she said.

For her, many of the actions by the Israeli government and military are unjustified.

"We need to learn that we have to share the land," she said.

As much as she disagrees with Jewish settlers in the West Bank, the phrase "from the river to the sea," which has become the rally-

members of the York community on both sides of the issue from speaking publicly or on the record about it.

Despite this, there are some who feel for Israelis and Palestinians alike as victims of the war. Like Schachter, Maanavi thinks that a two-state solution is still the most promising path.

"When I see people supporting the Palestinian cause in New York, I see Palestinians, Americans, Jewish people, and Israelis standing against prolonged violence," Maanavi said. "Our world will always see conflict, but it takes courage to recognize when things have gone too far." ☐



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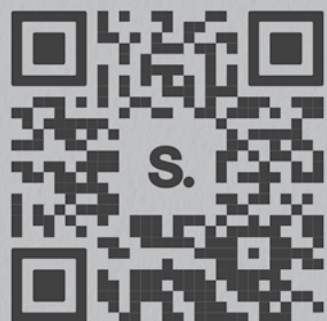
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Makeup Tutorial

How to apply concealer



To avoid cakeyness and breakouts, it's important to use concealers that are hydrating and safe.



By Gabby Haus

Do you ever end up with cakey concealer and wonder why it looks dry or unsmooth on your face? I have the solution! Many of you use primers or lotions before applying concealer, which could be the problem. Is it our primer, or are lotions making our skin unsmooth? The real question is: what's the best routine to get a clean look? Concealer!

It's easy to lose confidence when you see a pimple on your face, which is a good reason to use concealer. It is mostly used to cover up insecurities or highlight best features. Some concealers clog pores, which can actually make skin even more red and cause a breakout. This is why it's important to buy concealer that is hydrating and safe.

But how can you avoid cakeyness and breakouts? The first step is to wash your hands. People often use their phones, which can harbor bacteria, before touching their faces, leading to breakouts. Therefore, make sure your hands are nice and clean. Second, apply lotion all over your face. It can be any kind you want, but I recommend CeraVe. It was made by dermatologists, so it's less likely to cause acne. Next, get any primer that appeals to you, and put on as many layers as you need. Personally, I would recommend three layers of the blue Elf Stick. Then, use a lightweight formula foundation. This should absorb

quickly, leaving no greasy residue. A lightweight formula I recommend is the Westman Atelier Vital Skin Care Complexion Foundation Drops. It looks completely natural if applied the right way, and will give a radiant boost to your skin. Afterwards, grab your concealer and make one to three dots, depending on what you like; follow that up with a beauty blender, dip it in water, and rinse it out. Damp beauty blenders will give a hydrated look to your makeup routine. Gently tap the concealer into your skin until it's fully absorbed. To finish off the look, let the makeup marinate on your skin for a few minutes. In order to avoid oily skin, add small amounts of setting powder using the same damp blender. Lastly, for a long-lasting makeup look, use a setting spray. This process should give you a nice, un-cakey, and clean look.

Instead of putting four dots of concealer directly on your eye bags, try placing concealer on your cheekbone, slightly farther away from under your eye. This gives you a nice highlight and awakens your skin. When the concealer goes directly under your eyes, however, it tends to make you look sick, which isn't what you want. Lastly, remember to use light amounts of makeup first to ensure that it won't look super blotchy.

Using these techniques will ensure your concealer won't crease or look cakey on your skin. Everyone's complexion is different, and perfect skin requires practice and time. ☒

Bermuda Bin

Digging around in the lost & found



By Gabriel Cheng

In a land of exile, resting between the gym stairs and the emergency exit, lies one of York Prep's most notorious landmarks: the blue plastic bin. Known simply as the lost and found, this hungry beast swallows anything left unattended. Once ensnared in its domain, one will be hit with a homogenized smell of detergent, gym socks, and cardboard.

The feeling of peering inside is comparable to that surmised from watching archaeologists dig through ruins, where every layer, instead of uncovering fossils, resurfaces new aspects of teenage life. At the brim of the bin, a black hoodie with a blinding yellow Sun Records logo. Beneath it, a gray uniform sweatshirt, presenting a symbiotic relationship: the heathered fabric offers a home to stale pizza sauce in return for an air of carefree joie de vivre. A single sock, stained (why is there always just one?) lies slanted and wedged between a dusty wiffle ball and a dented Hydro Flask that has held more stickers than wa-

instance, who was once the owner of the hoodie with the bold letters "EM" covered in hearts? Did they outgrow it, or simply lose it due to the inherent clumsiness that comes with adolescence? Who deserted the Hydro Flask? Was it the tragic but all too common case of "I'll just grab it after gym," or did it carelessly roll under the bleachers one too many times?

Once in a blue moon, someone dares to venture into this jungle of forgotten amenities in search of a lost belonging. They dig through the pile with hopeful determination reminiscent of a prospector searching for gold. Most emerge crazed and empty-handed, muttering desperate sighs of resignation—something along the lines of, "It's fine, I'll just buy another one." Little do they know, their lost belongings were most likely already raided by a savvy middle schooler.

Today, the lost and found has likely metamorphosed into its own contained ecosystem, the Hydro Flasks ubiquitous and assuming the role of apex predators, while the



The lost and found is York Prep's unofficial museum.

ter. Below rests a red Arctic Zone lunchbox, a scratched pink pencil case, and what appears to be a pair of sweatpants which seem to exude a sense of resignation, stemming from the deluded hope for a second life that will never come. This abandonment is often unintentional, and unveils a more profound question: what circumstances led these items to this purgatorial wasteland? Each has a unique story in common. For

socks remain overlooked fossils. Then, when June rolls around, whatever remains will either be donated, discarded, or just lurk in its cove forever. But for now, the lost and found remains York's unofficial museum, containing a cluttered display of hoodies, socks, and discarded belongings. Word has it that those willing to listen closely can almost hear a Hydro Flask hissing. "Drink water...and pick me up." ☒

PHOTO BY CÉSAR HADER

Black @ York Prep

Inequities persist five years after BLM



By Gabrielle Bolt

To be Black at York Prep means to balance pride in one's identity with the hard work of navigating a space that often feels indifferent. While the school has promoted diversity through posters, assemblies, and social media statements, those gestures rarely evolve into long-term, meaningful change. Inclusivity is celebrated in theory, yet in practice, representation and understanding remain limited. While certain classrooms and teachers feel welcoming, the school as a whole doesn't always provide a consistent sense of security. As one high schooler told me, "sometimes, emotional support depends on what you support." Too often, the validity of students' ideas is conflated with the color of their skin, and differences of opinion are dismissed as "woke."

Representation in school leadership also plays a major role in that perception. In the absence of many teachers, administrators, and staff who look like her in positions of authority, senior Jayden Sample began to wonder whether her perspectives are truly valued, or simply tolerated.

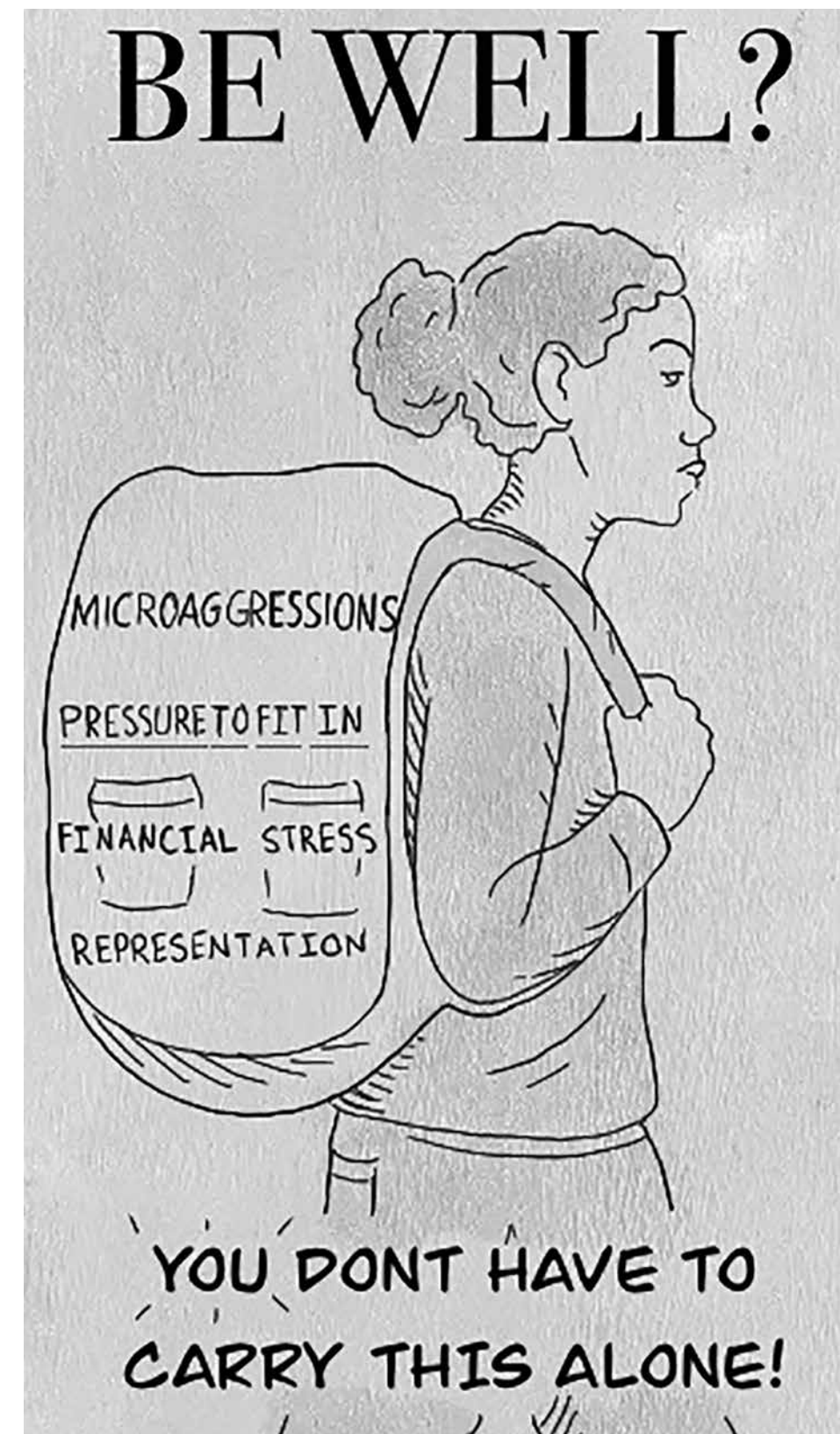
"I don't feel like York's diversity messaging reflects my actual experience as a Black student," Sample said. "I feel like York only shows the bright side of being a student in the day to day."

Without adults who can relate to their experiences, Black students are forced to rely on each other for moral support. This adds an additional burden, as students are not only left to fend for themselves, but also feel compelled to take responsibility for their peers' wellbeing.

In the wake of George Floyd's killing in 2020, schools across the

Black students are consistently reminded of their minority status by virtue of decisions in favor of majority rule.

nation publicly committed to addressing systemic racism. The tragedy sparked protests, curriculum reviews, and campaigns to "do better." But years later, these efforts have slowed. What began with passion feels quieter now, and



Blackness can be a silent burden for students at primarily white institutions like York Prep.

for some, silent. Assemblies are held, yet deep-rooted issues like microaggressions, seemingly uneven repercussions, and other gaps in accommodations and resources remain, in part, unaddressed.

I feel frustrated when conversations about race end before they begin, and instead of being heard, my classmates and I are interrupted or dismissed. "Listening" becomes a buzzword, not a practice. When problems affect certain communities, responses are immediate and visible, but when Black students raise concerns, they feel those same levels of urgency and compassion are lost. Whether this determines which routines the cheer team performs or which national events prompt a letter home from the administration, Black students are consistently reminded of their

minority status by virtue of decisions in favor of majority rule.

Tenth-grade dean Rolanda Brinson is especially attuned to these frustrations, having formerly advised ONYX, the Black student association, prior to stepping back this year. "It is an honor and great responsibility that students of color come to me about navigating a PWI," a common abbreviation for primarily white institutions, "and it is impressive to see how they navigate it," Ms. Brinson said.

She has noticed, in particular, how female students of color are weighed down by both internal ambitions and external expectations. "Black girls are struggling and not speaking up due to burnout and breakdowns over wanting to do everything all the time

and the honor of doing it, while balancing wanting to do it with being asked to do it," she said.

Guest speakers and committees have been positive steps in the right direction, but progress requires more than programming: it demands accountability, transparency, and a willingness to confront personal

Together, we share the unspoken weight of representing our community in every classroom discussion, every performance, and every leadership role.

biases among all groups at York.

Beyond race, the question of equity extends into socioeconomic realities. York's financial aid program opens doors for many students, but it doesn't always erase the barriers that come after admission. Scholarship students describe hidden costs: the pressure of trying to fit in, the quiet embarrassment of not being able to afford lunch or trips abroad, exhaustion from managing schoolwork alongside outside responsibilities. Some even worry that speaking out about inequality could possibly hurt their place at the school. The fear of being labeled "difficult" or "ungrateful" is one of the heaviest loads that students on scholarship carry, and that is not specific to York.

The emotional toll of these dynamics is hard to measure, but deeply felt. While some of us cope by staying silent, others take on the role of an advocate or an educator. Together, we share the unspoken weight of representing our community in every classroom discussion, every performance, and every leadership role.

The legacy of Floyd's death continues to echo far beyond Minneapolis; it has reshaped national conversations about race, justice, and accountability. For schools like York, the persistence of violence and oppression against African Americans offers an opportunity to reimagine what true inclusion can look like. That opportunity still exists. ☒

ILLUSTRATION BY CLEO NEUBERT

Influenced into Adulthood

Social media and the death of the tween



By Emme Cohen

The transition from childhood to adolescence has become virtually nonexistent for young women, especially in fast-paced environments like New York City. In today's society, there is no longer room for children between the ages of nine and 12 years old, also known as "tweens." Why are young women growing up so quickly? In New York, girls are forced to mature prematurely, without proper time to process the changes in their environment or surroundings.

I have experienced this. I remember when, about eight years ago, girls were all about emoji leggings, sparkly unicorn shirts, and anything with sequins. But then, almost overnight, everyone started wearing expensive jeans and tiny crop tops instead. This change doesn't occur slowly; it happens as if in a click. And it's not always easy to predict. Social media affects the ways in which young girls view themselves and who they are "supposed" to be, blurring the lines between adolescence and adulthood through strategic algorithms and targeted ads. Girls are introduced to beauty standards that we'd never think to follow on our own, language that we aren't used to hearing in our homes, and people who can influence us in ways that we never would have expected.

There's no question that young girls wearing make-up, worrying about appearances, and trying to look like celebrities predates social media, but life in the city also introduces teenagers to drugs, peer pressure, physical standards, and certain mannerisms at a particularly early age. Girls conflate their identities with what they see in the



Young girls conflate their identities with what they see in the mirror.

mirror. With the increased pressure of social media to grow up faster come new expectations for behavior, communication, and decision-making that more accurately reflect the age that young girls attempt to imitate than the years of experience they actually have.

As girls are treated as older than they are, the pressure to grow up too fast leaves them caught between who they feel themselves to be and who they think the world expects them to be.

When I think about young girls rushing their pre-teen years, I am reminded of seeing 12-year-old girls at concerts, dressed as their favorite pop stars—women in their twenties, or older, whose personae most of their fans are much too young to emulate. Unfortunately, this leads to pre-teen girls oversexualizing themselves without even realizing it. Young girls tend to find inspiration in what is popular and trending, making it difficult for them to determine where they fit in. With pop stars, celebrities, and influencers setting the standard for how to be an "it girl," many young girls feel immense pressure to mimic styles and behaviors well before they are ready.

All of this is exaggerated within the demographic of Gen Z New Yorkers. This generation has developed an obsession with TikTok and Instagram that has the potential to alter our brains. With little else to

do during the pandemic, tweens turned to social media, which has had an enormous impact on our desire to act older than we really are,

As girls are treated as older than they are, the pressure to grow up too fast leaves them caught between who they feel themselves to be and who they think the world expects them to be.

as well as enabling toxic behaviors, insecurities, and negative self-perception. Even before the onset of puberty, we were taught through media exposure that our bodies should look a certain way, bringing a dramatic end to our childhoods.

The death of the tween reveals a culture that pushes young girls, specifically, to adopt identities that they are not ready for. Social media, city life, and broader societal expectations have made it more difficult for young girls to distinguish who they are from who others expect them to be. While growing up quickly can offer new perspectives and independence, it can also promote self-image issues, confusion, and the destruction of the simple space needed to grow up at a healthy rate.

What young girls need are positive role models who set examples and create environments that value spaces where they can thrive, be happy, and enjoy their youth. Young girls need to be able to pursue who they want to become, but with a growth mindset and plenty of self-love. This period of childhood in a girl's life is immensely important for exploring individual interests and forming meaningful friendships. Pressures to present themselves as adults too soon expose young girls to situations that can be both dangerous and irresponsible. Rather than disappearing altogether, the tween years should slowly unfold into something more substantial. Every girl deserves a period of transition to reflect on what aspects of childhood a woman wants to carry with her into adult life. ☒

Screen Time

How technology is defining a generation



By Haile Fong Choy

If you've ever seen a toddler crying in public and immediately quieting down once they're handed an iPad, it's safe to assume that you're witnessing a member of Gen Alpha. Although there is no official consensus on the exact years of Gen Alpha, they are generally considered to have been born from 2010 to 2025, with technology at their fingertips. Although the previous generation, Gen Z, also grew up with technology, its use in early childhood has skyrocketed for Gen Alpha. A recent study by nonprofit Common Sense, shows that 40% of American children have a tablet by age two, 58% have one by four, and almost one in four kids has a cell phone by age eight. It is no surprise that the latest generation is dependent on their screens, but the real question is why.

There are many debatable factors as to why children of Gen Alpha are so attached to their screens, but the simple fact is that all of us have become increasingly dependent on technology. Technology is everywhere: it's in art, work environments, schools, and throughout our day-to-day lives. Gen Alpha received the short end of the stick simply by being born into this environment. The Covid-19 epidemic also played a massive role in the introduction of screens to Gen Alpha. Many people were on their screens during Covid due to quarantine, but Gen Alpha kids were more or less born into it, not knowing a different



Gen Alpha children average around four to eight hours of screentime daily—nearly half of their waking hours.

These apps thrive on grabbing people's attention for as long as they can, and children, whose brains are still developing, absorb these messages without the ability to critically assess them.

way of entertainment, communication, or overall socialization. For many parents, handing their child

an iPad is a tool for entertainment or distraction, so that mom and dad can finally have some quiet time. Studies show that Gen Alpha children average around four to eight hours of screentime daily—nearly half of their waking hours.

Parents cannot always keep track of what their kids do on their devices, making it easy for these kids to access unsafe or inappropriate websites. Sites such as TikTok, Instagram, Discord, and other social media platforms can be highly dangerous for Gen Alpha children. Social media is ostensibly meant for older demographics, but these companies do not prevent children from downloading their apps. For example, TikTok's endless For You page pushes trends, challenges, and opinions that can leave an impressionable mark on kids. Instagram also pushes things onto children, such as unrealistic beauty standards and adult content, as do Discord servers, where strangers can communicate through chat rooms. YouTube Shorts, perhaps the most popular platform among Gen Alpha, can funnel children into rabbit holes of unpredictable content. Most of these

apps do not have a full-proof way to verify the ages of these children, leaving Gen Alpha exposed to a more mature digital world long before they're ready for it. These apps thrive on grabbing people's attention for as long as they can, and children, whose brains are still developing, absorb these messages without the ability to critically assess them. This widespread use of technology is affecting not only how these children grow up, but also their brains.

The excessive amount of screen time is affecting both how children conduct their day-to-day lives and, more troublingly, their brains. Universally, studies have shown that the rise in short-form content videos has rapidly decreased attention spans, as well as increased extensive screen time, affecting the frontal lobe, a part of the brain that impacts critical thinking and social skills. Research from Harvard and the National Institutes of Health shows that extensive screen use is linked to the thinning of the cortex. The frontal lobe, the part of the brain responsible for critical thinking and social skills, is extremely vulnerable during childhood. The difference between old-

er generations and Gen Alpha in terms of how screen time affects them physically is that older people can have an easier time detaching from screens because they weren't raised with them. But Gen Alpha depends on their screens because growing up with them from a very young age increases their dependency and affects their actual brain structures. The bright colors, fast movements, and instant feedback coming from these screens releases dopamine, and getting so much dopamine for hours straight increases their dependency.

We know that screens are having a profound impact on the youth, but what does this mean for their future? Gen Alpha is a relatively new generation, and due to this novelty, it is challenging to predict their prospects. From what we've seen thus far, it's tempting to conclude that this is a generation that lacks social and critical thinking skills, relying heavily on their screens to make up for the lack of these skills. But what can we do to help them? It would be unwise to completely take away their screens; they depend on them too much. It's an unrealistic approach because we are living in an increasingly digital world, but establishing boundaries is a good way to balance the world of tech with that of lived experience. Finding ways to incorporate beneficial elements within their screens, such as educational apps or games, is a promising way for parents to give kids what they want. Occasional screen detoxes can also help detach kids from the internet. Even simple things like playing outside can show kids that there's more fun in their backyard than on their iPads. Researchers are still working on finding ways to help children disconnect from their devices and reconnect with the real world. For now, simply showing children that they can have fun without screens is the most reasonable approach.

As Gen Alpha continues to grow, so will technology and its role in their lives. In the ways that they communicate and see the world, technology is a force that won't be stopped. But screens aren't the sole factor defining this generation. Finding a balance between real-world experience and online usage is key to helping this generation progress, because the simple fact is that technology isn't going away. If used correctly, Gen Alpha could become the most informed, tech-savvy, and creative generation yet, but not if they let technology consume their lives. ☒

Free the Knees

The case for dress code shorts



By George Pertuz

With temperatures on the subway exceeding 100 degrees, sweaty, restricted legs are all too familiar at York Prep during the warmer months of the year. Even though New York City is located in the northeast, hotter weather has become increasingly common, to the point that the average daytime temperature last August was 80 degrees. While the climate is inarguably changing, our school's dress code is stuck in the past.

Historically, wearing shorts to school has not been an option for students at York except on dress-down days. However, environmental realities call for administrative action. Instead of overheating, students in shorts would be relieved of an unwanted distraction, with promising benefits to focus, attention, and behavior in class. I already own a plethora of khaki shorts, the dressy type that are the same material and look nearly identical to regulation pants, except that they only go to the knee. Other private high schools in New York City offer students the option of wearing shorts, and recent efforts at rebranding have



Junior George Pertuz models his proposed update to the dress code.

leaned into catching up with the times. But why stop at a new logo?

If for no better reason than appealing to the spirit of innovation that has defined the school's current administration, children should

be allowed to wear shorts. Though the details of the school's partnership with Tommy Hilfiger remain inaccessible to the student body, the company offers shorts on its website, in colors that conform to the

The hour for change is now—not only for students, but for any member of the York community oppressed by the tyranny of long pants.

school uniform. As a business, Tommy Hilfiger's only interest in partnering with York is to make money, and for this reason, expanding the dress code to include shorts would result in a win-win situation: students would have a more comfortable alternative in warmer weather, and the school would satisfy the terms of the deal, perhaps increasing Tommy Hilfiger's revenue by means of the availability of additional op-

tions. They can even slap the logo on there somewhere, if they want.

And what of the fact that female students have long been permitted to bare their legs in skirts? Does this not smack of hypocrisy, or worse, dare I say, sexism? It is true that boys are not banned from wearing skirts, and some do, but must I open myself to accusations of gender nonconformity or subversion simply in order to bring some relief to my sweltering lower appendages?

Although administrators may fear that authorizing shorts in the dress code is a slippery slope towards other, more unruly forms of self-expression, it wouldn't be too hard to notice if someone were wearing mesh basketball shorts, hotpants, or—heaven forbid—jorts rather than those provided by the uniform website. For all of these reasons and more, the right to bare calves must be inalienable, even if only in September, May, and June. The hour for change is now—not only for students, but for any member of the York community oppressed by the tyranny of long pants. We deserve to be more comfortable in the place where we spend the majority of our days. It's time to free the knees! 🍌

Brand Identity Crisis

Against the oversimplification of logos



By Griffin Rome

Logos used to be cool and unique. Remember the old Firefox logo, or the YouTube logo that looked like a TV? Those were special and eye-catching, unlike many of the logos that companies have been launching for the past seven or eight years. To me, these new logos are stale and corporate. Any semblance of individuality is gone. The Starbucks girl lost her mermaidness, the Firefox fox is now a cloud, and the cracker is no longer next to the barrel. Why is this happening?

Shareholders are my best guess. Profits require customers, and making everything sterile and corporate is a strategy to offend no one. What's next? Tony the Tiger is an offensive representation of big cats? Toucan Sam is “woke” because his rainbow nose reminds people of the pride flag?

Logos deemed politically incorrect are not the only ones being simplified: the newly bald Pringle man and Microsoft Internet Explorer (now Edge) are other recent victims of this shift. The widespread adop-

tion of minimalism suggests that big corporations no longer allow people to think outside the box. Instead of

in making it stand out, which leaves innovative design a thing of the past.

If things continue in this way, the

loom. Imagine York Prep rebranded once again as “YP,” with not even a clover, and certainly no panther. It is essential for any business, no matter how successful, to make money. If that requires replacing a recognizable logo with one that looks worse, management will jump at the chance. In truth, no one in the boardroom cares whether a logo is too complicated or controversial until it begins to harm business. Noble as it may appear to right past wrongs and use branding to increase minority representation, for instance, all that really matters to customers is the quality, convenience, and cost of a company's products.

In short, increasing political polarization and the interests of shareholders have transformed simple, fun, and inventive logos into bland, boring, and inoffensive carbon copies. Maybe one day we can have fresh and exciting logos that aren't harmful stereotypes and don't get dismissed as woke. Don't give up hope, though; perhaps the kids of today will revive creativity and make visual appeal interesting again. 🍌



If things continue in this way, the iconic McDonald's logo will eventually just be a red void with a drawing of a sad, singular French fry.

creative advertising, brands lock in public loyalty by manufacturing dependence. When customers already depend on a service, there is no point

iconic McDonald's logo will eventually just be a red void with a drawing of a sad, singular French fry. Fruit of the Loom will have neither fruit nor

The Cost of Streaming

Spotify and the devaluation of music



By Lucas Masi

Streaming services have been in hot water recently due to a variety of factors, but a peculiar affair has been developing around music streaming giant Spotify. Numerous independent artists have voluntarily removed all of their music from Spotify and are urging others to do the same. This comes after Spotify's CEO, Daniel Ek, made an investment of almost \$700 million into a German AI military technology startup named Helsing. Helsing aims to incorporate powerful AI tools into military air strike and missile technology for use in global warfare, all in the name of “Protecting our democracies,” as is stated on the company's website.

This strange use of the company's profits has caused indie and mainstream artists alike to withdraw their music from Spotify, including Massive Attack, Cindy Lee, King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard, Xiu Xiu, Godspeed! You Black Emperor, Deerhoof, and more. In doing so, these bands are taking a bold risk that prompts a question: is it even viable in this day and age to make a living off of music outside the goliath of music streaming?

The answer is bleak. Towards the start of the 2000s, the music industry began to face a crisis in the form of piracy via the internet. From home, computer users could download and upload music through applications such as LimeWire and, most prominently, Napster. Imagine streaming,



Is it even viable in this day and age to make a living off of music outside the goliath of music streaming?

try, as people began downloading music for free, instead of buying it. This pandemonium went on until Napster and other file-sharing services were forced to shut down due to copyright infringement. Music piracy persists, but perhaps more significantly, it planted the seed for the invention of music streaming services like Spotify, which have come to dominate the market.

It would be foolish to dismiss the utility of streaming services like Spotify and other major streaming platforms like Apple Music in the contemporary music landscape. Much like the internet, never before have we had such access to an overabundance of music at the click of a button. In just a few clicks, you can be listening to a playlist dedicated to and designed for you. There is no need to seek out music to match your current mood when you can have the algorithm choose for you.

When was the last time you sat down and listened to an album? No scrolling socials, no phone; just listening to what you've put on. According to a survey taken in 2020 by streaming service Deezer, around 73% of listeners prefer to consume music through playlists and individual songs rather than full albums. While it's easy to point the finger at shortening attention spans, which is a factor, in reality, it's the overwhelming accessibility of music via algorithms deciding what listeners consume that

has given rise to the phenomenon known as “passive listening,” which has largely overshadowed the act of actively engaging with music, reducing it to mere background noise.

Diminishing returns for artists have rightfully been a highly publicized topic, as musicians have lobbied against streaming services since their inception. While the number is not set in stone, sources estimate that artists earn about \$0.003 to \$0.005 per stream, with revenue only becoming meaningful for songs streamed more than 1,000 times a day. This system works well when you have millions of listeners tuning in every day, but for most artists, that translates into pennies for their hard work. A 2023 survey taken by Musicians' Census, a group dedicated to documenting industry data via artist testimonies, reported that “nearly half (44%) [of UK artists] lack sustainable income,” with these artists making an average of \$27,000 per year. This is substantially less than the UK's median income (around \$50,000 per year after conversion). Prior to streaming domination, small artists could still scrounge up enough to keep a roof over their heads through a combination of merch sales, concert tickets, and physical media like CDs. But now, with streaming's endlessly available library and minimal pay, artists have to rely on a fraction of what they used to get from fans. The current system

in place for streaming is meant to bring success to those who already have it, forcing those who try to make a living to weather the storm.

Ek has proposed a solution for these frustrated artists: “You can't record music once every three to four years and think that's going to be enough...It's about creating a continuous engagement with their fans. It is about putting the work in.” Ek's answer to fixing a business model that profits off of others' hard work while giving them little compensation is to simply work harder and make more music. This practice of releasing more songs as soon as possible has led artists to work overtime, cranking out shorter, catchier songs in the hope of grabbing attention and being endlessly replayable.

As Liz Pelly reports in *Mood Machine: The Rise of Spotify and the Cost of the Perfect Playlist*, top playlists, such as “Chill Pop,” “RapCaviar,” “Sad Indie,” and others, dictate what gets recommended to listeners. With most users listening to music through playlists, being featured on one not only grants artists exposure, but also generates immense revenue by reaching those who listen to the playlist. Thus, artists who aim to be featured are pushed to follow the demands of songs that fit the prescribed rubric in the hopes of gaining traction in the first place. Artists who don't want to follow this algorithmic formula are often forced to compete with songs tailored perfectly to the algorithm rather than traditional music, creating a system that values metrics over artistry. Of course the song that is meticulously crafted to be the most accessible and replayable will outperform the variety of musicians not chasing a streamable sound in their art.

A system that values engagement rates and statistics above all else will only leave those in the margins unexposed to the mainstream spotlight. How we consume media today is significantly different from how we did twenty years ago, and while the convenience of music streaming is undeniable, it has devalued the role of music in the lives of our generation. No longer are those who put in the work to create art able to get a fraction of the attention they deserve, let alone money, that they could have had only a decade or two ago. If the industry continues this cyclical trend of valuing what's popular and generating excessive revenue for the higher ups, then it's unlikely that we'll see many grand, new ideas in music within the years to come. 🍌

A Beginner's Guide to Alt-Country

Enough about cars and girls: let's talk about heartbreak

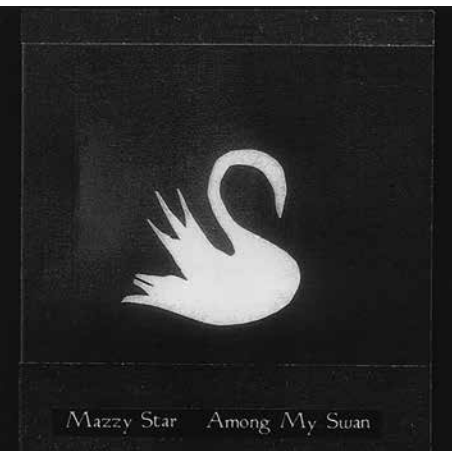


By Lucas Masi & Weller Ranson



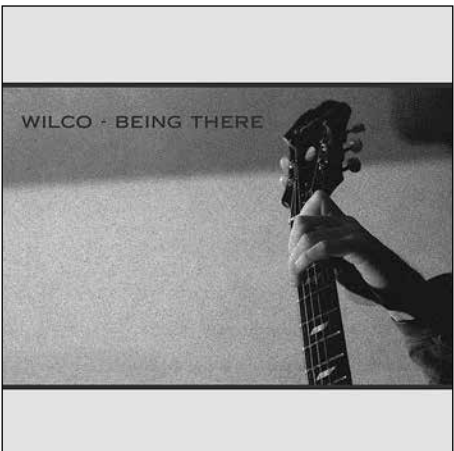
Silver Jews, American Water (1998)

The third album from late songwriter David Berman is as witty as it is poetic. Influenced by country rock and the heartland, American Water is an album for the slackers of the world—those who relax and make the best of what they have. This concept of slacker rock Americana lends itself well to the self-deprecating lyricism of Berman, who was a poet first and foremost, and a musician second. From the opening lines on “Random Rules,” (“In 1984, I was hospitalized for approaching perfection”) Berman paints verses worth a thousand words with mellow, deadpan vocals. Despite existential themes of longing and a slightly defeatist philosophy, American Water remains playful in its instrumentation and ironic delivery.



Mazzy Star, Among My Swan (1996)

Best known for their 1993 hit “Fade Into You,” Mazzy Star goes alt-country in their third album, Among My Swan. The Santa Monica band creates a close and intimate feel that is mainly acoustic, but also implements electric guitar and harmonica to create a singular, dreamy atmosphere. Songs like “Cry, Cry” and “Still Cold” use slide guitar to lean into an unfamiliar sound. The folky vibe is pared down compared to their earlier, higher energy albums. Singer Hope Sandoval sets a reflective mood with soft and caressing vocals that feel as if she is whispering a beautiful secret. Throughout, confronts loneliness and nostalgia, making Among My Swan the perfect soundtrack for a rainy day or late night.



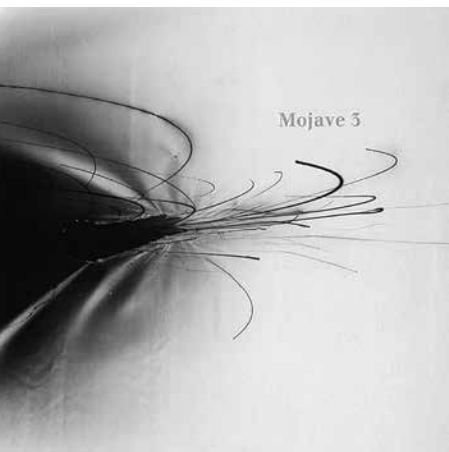
Wilco, Being There (1996)

While artists such as Morgan Wallen and Luke Combs seem to tower over the mainstream country music landscape, acts like Wilco have continued to pioneer new sounds in alternative country. Hailing from Chicago, Wilco's second album, Being There, blends country and rock elements. The double album ranges from spacious acoustic ballads to full-bodied Americana and country-rock tracks. The band's use of layering is unique. Tracks such as “The Lonely 1” and “Sunken Treasure” have an atmospheric sound while also sounding surprisingly sparse. Wilco achieves this by using organ and plenty of reverb. The album explores themes of connection and nostalgia, and still feels fresh 29 years after its release.



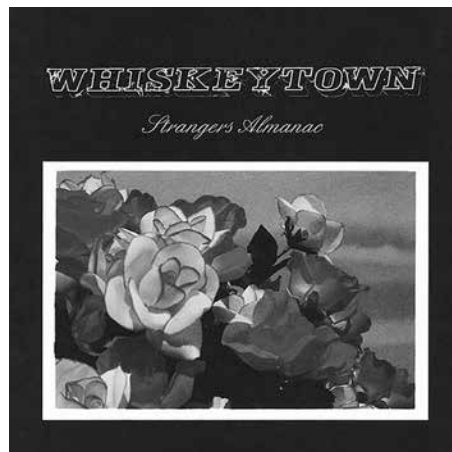
MJ Lenderman, MJ Lenderman (2019)

Before becoming a breakout success with his 2024's Manning Fireworks, singer-songwriter MJ Lenderman saw minimal success with his music. Regardless, the artist's self-titled debut remains his rawest and most personal album. Just 20 at the time of recording, Lenderman managed to write surprisingly mature lyrics for a young adult going through the motions of adulthood. Longing for love, and expressing the pain that follows when it all goes wrong, Lenderman remains sympathetic to his lover, believing he's “Got to figure it out on my own.” All of this, overdubbed with distorted guitars, pinched harmonics, and brass, leaves listeners with the solace of a long, dark car ride—perfect for contemplating where you are in the world.



Mojave 3, Ask Me Tomorrow (1995)

In between recordings of English rock band Slowdive's album Pygmalion (1995), both Rachel Goswell and Neil Halstead began experimenting with more stripped-back acoustic songwriting. After disbanding Slowdive entirely, prior to the band's reunion in 2014, the duo sought to put these songs to use under a new name: Mojave 3. The group's first release would see the two ditch their pioneering shoegaze sound in favor of a bittersweet, dreamy country album. A tale of yearning introspection and unanswered love, all born from the pair's past relationship with each other, Ask Me Tomorrow is a beautifully miserable album born from a failing relationship between two people who still care for each other. Full of swooning guitar chords and melancholic soundscapes, Ask Me Tomorrow is a gentle listen that easily belongs in the alt-country canon.



Whiskeytown, Strangers Almanac (1997)

Although often overlooked, Whiskeytown is a defining force in the alt-country scene. Through blending country, classic rock, and emotional songwriting, Whiskeytown ended up with the gem that is Strangers Almanac. The sound is simple yet beautiful. Ryan Adams as lead singer and Caitlin Cary on fiddles and harmonies add simple yet haunting melodies to their stripped-back sound. Strangers Almanac has an almost messy yet quiet simplicity. Tracks such as “Avenues” are almost entirely acoustic and adopt a traditional country sound. Then there are songs like “Yesterday's News,” which lean heavily into harder rock. Strangers Almanac develops themes of heartbreak, recklessness, and loss—perhaps best felt in “Houses on the Hill” and “Everything I Do (I Miss You).” While Wilco is one of the biggest names in the alt-country scene, Whiskeytown was right beside them in the mid-1990s, pioneering the genre.



Songs: Ohia, The Magnolia Electric Co. (2003)

One of the greatest alt-country albums of all time, The Magnolia Electric Co. is the quintessential mix of country, somber folk-rock, and singer-songwriter magic courtesy of Jason Molina. Borrowing from feelings of regret, failure, and nostalgia for days long gone, The Magnolia Electric Co keeps itself grounded in intimately desolate lyrics and wistfully beautiful instrumentation. Tracks like “Farewell Transmission” are built up with ever-expanding arrangements, all the while Molina's tenor vocals comfort the listener among an escapade of keyboards, slide-guitars, and organs. The Magnolia Electric Co. is an album that can't be done justice on paper, only through sound. This deserves the highest recommendation for those who don't necessarily like country music, as it has the power to open listeners' ears to what they've been missing on the other side of the fence.



Jason Isbell, Southeastern (2013)

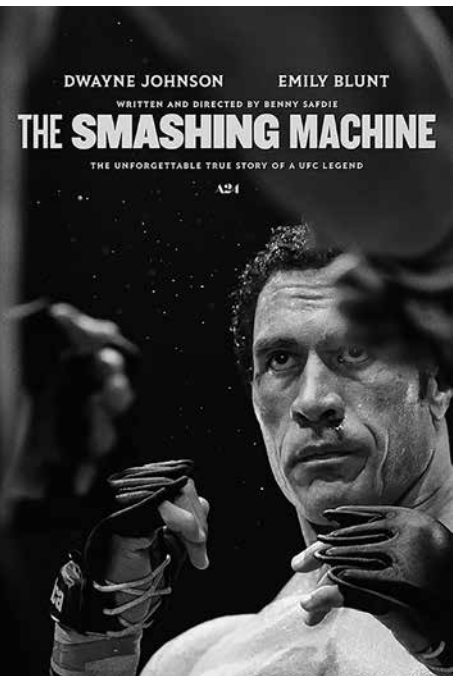
Coming onto the rock scene in 2001 with the Drive By Truckers, Jason Isbell's talent was clear. But it wasn't until his solo career that he fully came to prominence in the alt-country scene. Getting sober in 2012 resulted in his 2013 album, Southeastern, which is widely regarded as his best. Though acoustic guitars and vocals dominate, songs like “Stockholm” and “Flying Over Water” feature a fuller band with pianos, fiddles, drums, and electric guitars. Isbell is a powerful storyteller, and Southeastern explores recovery, love, and loss. It's the kind of album that is amazing to listen to without paying attention to the lyrics, but develops a beautiful yet haunting texture when you take note of the lyrical storytelling and meaning. If you ever forget what it means to be human, Southeastern reminds us of the beauty and the pain that come with the human condition. 🐾

Addiction, Recovery, Abduction, Revolution

Fall 2024 movies in review



By Cooper Stelwagon



The Smashing Machine

I came into this movie with the assumption that Dwayne Johnson wasn't a very good actor, but thankfully, I was proven wrong. I've only ever seen him do average acting jobs in big blockbusters, so you could imagine my surprise realizing his potential as an actor. The Smashing Machine, written and directed by Benny Safdie, is a biopic following the career and personal struggles of professional MMA fighter Mark Kerr (Johnson). Mark struggles with addiction, relationship problems, egotism, and more. All the characters are written and acted convincingly: Mark and his girlfriend, Emily Staples (Emily Blunt), are both frustrating yet understandably human. The soundtrack is fantastic and extremely effective in scoring cinematography that perfectly captures the vibe of the late '90s. It doesn't reinvent the sports biopic genre, but if you're a fan of thoughtfully shot movies with good writing and acting, you'll love The Smashing Machine.



Him

When this movie was first announced, given his love for one-word titles, I thought Jordan Peele directed it, and I wouldn't blame you for thinking the same, as his name is all over the promotional material as the producer. But Him was directed by Justin Tipping, and follows Cameron Cade (Tyriq Withers), an up-and-coming football star who, after suffering a career-threatening injury, is invited to a sports compound by Isaiah White (Marlon Wayans) to recover. Cameron soon finds out that football isn't all that it seems to be. This film is all over the place: the pacing is too fast, with scenes that become overwhelming. Him feels like a failed parody of a Peele movie: some scenes are unintentionally comic, and themes are spoonfed to the audience, lacking the nuance or subtlety of Get Out, Us, or Nope. Don't come into this movie expecting anything life-changing, but if you're looking for a horror movie about football, then this is for you.



Weapons

A few exceptions aside, the horror genre has been kind of boring lately. Weapons is a horror mystery following the abrupt disappearance of 17 school children which evolves into something much darker. The movie follows various characters throughout the fictional town of Maybrook, Pennsylvania: Justine Gandy (Julia Gardener), the teacher whose class goes missing; Archer Graff (Josh Brolin), a parent of one of the missing kids; and Paul Morgan (Alden Einreich), a detective trying to piece together the mystery. Overall, the actors deliver good performances, and Zach Cregger's direction gives the movie a cohesive visual identity. The nonlinear storytelling is engaging and well-executed. Despite this, the plot struggles to connect. Cregger has talent, and I hope his filmmaking will evolve as time goes on. If you like horror movies and don't mind some interesting artistic choices, this movie is for you.



One Battle After Another

It's been a while since I've seen a good new action movie, so this was a breath of fresh air. One Battle After Another, written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, is a thriller that draws you in with the plot and keeps you there with unique characters and complex relationships. The movie follows former revolutionary Bob Ferguson (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his daughter, Willa (Chase Ininiti). The antagonist, Sean Penn, is a military officer trying to stop the revolutionary group. The acting is superb, likely due to the star-studded cast and immersive plot. I enjoyed Anderson's ambition, as well as the fun action sequences. The political themes of the movie feel a little underbaked, and I wish they had been elaborated further. Additionally, the characters' depth remains underexplored, especially considering the nearly three-hour runtime. It isn't a must-see, but if you like the action genre, One Battle After Another is worth your time. 🐾

Binder Boom

How card collecting became a global industry



By Reid Chilkowitz

Over the past decade, interest in trading cards has exploded. From vintage rookie cards to rare Pokémon collections, cards have become a global market where value can rise and fall overnight.

The sports card market is a key aspect of this gradual resurgence. According to Verified Market Research, the sports card market was valued at nearly \$12.6 billion in 2024 and is expected to nearly double to \$23.1 billion by 2031. While in the past, collectors have mainly viewed sports cards as a hobby, many now see them as a lucrative investment, and even a real job. High-end sports cards like a LeBron James rookie card or a Michael Jordan one-of-one can be sold for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars.

But just like the stock market, value fluctuates. A player's breakout season or retirement can drastically change prices. Before a season, collectors review statistics, off-season hype, and trends to determine if a player's card is worth investing in. Also, once a collector receives a card, any damage to it can significantly affect its price. Companies like Professional Sports Authenticator or Certified Guaranty Company determine a card's condition and grade it on a scale of one to 10. The rating of a card can alter its value dramatically; a 10 can sometimes be almost double the price of a nine. Because of this, collectors often spend hundreds of dollars grading and protecting their cards, knowing that the payoff can be much higher for cards in mint condition.

But the trading card market has also rapidly expanded beyond sports cards.

Game franchises like Pokémon and Magic: The Gathering now dominate the global card market. Market Decipher estimates that the international card market was valued at \$21.4 billion in 2024 and could more than double to \$58.2 billion by 2034. Top Pokémon cards, like the Pikachu Illustrator, have sold for over \$5 million due to the age and rarity of the card.

The cause for this sudden rise in card prices is clear: online resellers. Sites like eBay and Whatnot have turned trading into a global market. eBay has numerous active bets ranging from a few cents to thousands of dollars. On the other hand, apps like Whatnot make it easier to buy and sell more cards at a faster rate. Whatnot runs short auctions with an average duration of 20-30 seconds, which can yield thousands of dollars in profit within that

short time. These apps turn card collecting into an interactive experience that encourages consumers to purchase more cards.

However, not all collectors are happy with this evolution of the market. Counterfeit cards, fake grading labels, and scam auctions remain a concern. According to the New York Post, in 2024, federal agents uncovered a \$2 million fraud scheme involving fake cards.

Still, the hype is nowhere close to ending. Trading cards have transformed into a market where gambling, collecting, and technology intersect. When trying to obtain a favorite or a card to resell, collectors can now go to one website to find it all. New problems notwithstanding, trading cards are no longer just child's play: they are now at the center of a global industry where a simple piece of cardboard holds the potential for both excitement and profit. 🐾

Almost Maine Shines Light on Student Talent

Strong performances dominate the drama club's fall play



Seventh graders Cam Mbaye (left) and Eleanor Frankel (right) as Pete and Ginette in *Almost Maine*.



By Faaris Ahmed

From November 17–22, the York Prep drama club, under the direction of performing arts faculty John Viscardi, Fiona Hutchison, Lance Martin, and Thomas Hodges, staged a production of *Almost Maine* by John Cariani. The play takes place in the fictional town of Almost, Maine; each scene, though presented sequentially, is supposed to occur simultaneously at ten minutes to nine on a single night. When the clock strikes nine, a magical moment happens, and all of the characters see the Northern Lights. In this production, brilliant performances from the actors carried the show.

Almost Maine opens with Ginette (seventh grader Eleanor Frankel), who is a bit of an introvert, but has the courage to tell Pete (seventh grader Cam Mbaye) that she loves him. As Pete, Mbaye keeps a serious expression throughout their scene to show how surprised and unwilling he is to love Ginette back. Frankel does a fantastic job of portraying an individual who is friendly and understanding at the same time—a good starting point for how the rest of the production develops. As the Northern Lights created by the tech team shine behind them, the actors sit on an impressively true-to-life park bench wearing coats and scarves that evoke the cold temperatures in Maine during winter, their respective colors reflecting the characters' dispositions.

Each scene of *Almost Maine* introduces a new set of characters. East (junior Griffin Rome) first sees Glory (junior Zoe Sweeney) in his yard. The audience can feel the shock

and despair Sweeney wears on her face as she shows how Glory is struggling to process her husband's death. Rome does an amazing job of embodying East's caring traits, while Sweeney is excellent at portraying Glory's desperation and excitement for the Northern Lights. Here, the set plays a crucial role, as Glory's primary motivation is to see them in person.

Next, Jimmy (freshman Sebastián Whittaker) meets his ex, Sandrine (senior Aspen Wilson) at a bar. Whittaker's expressions of joy help the audience understand the excitement Jimmy feels when he sees Sandrine. However, Wilson's forced smile and reserved stance inform viewers that Sandrine is not so thrilled to meet Jimmy again. She reveals that she's getting married, and Jimmy's heart is broken. Jimmy shows Sandrine his tattoo, which spells "villain" incorrectly, symbolizing his loss and grief over their breakup. Once Sandrine leaves Jimmy, a waitress, played by senior Bella Fong Choy, approaches him and he discovers that her name is Villian. The tattoo now provides Jimmy with a source of hope, as he takes interest in the waitress. Fong Choy's performance brings comedy and a glimmer of optimism to an otherwise bleak scene, which are aided by realistic props and costumes: Jimmy swigs from a real beer bottle filled with water, Villian is outfitted with a notepad and apron.

The first act closes after Gayle (freshman Daniela Audry) enters the home of Lendall (freshman Max Malas) to return all the "love" that Lendall had given her over the course of their relationship, which she has brought over, stuffed into bags. In the smallest, Lendall has

given her an engagement ring. Malas perfectly executes the laid-back but sensitive aspect of his character, while Audry's portrayal of Gayle brings out the character's short temper, despite her appreciation of Lendall's marriage proposal. Malas's robe looks cozy, contributing to Lendall's relaxed demeanor prior to Gayle's entrance, as does the armchair in which he reclines.

The action pauses momentarily during an interlogue, when Pete sits on the bench alone, regretting how he rejected Ginette.

When the play continues, we meet Chad and Randy (junior Ayden Sabino and senior Quinn Johnson). After some conversation, Chad confesses his love for Randy. Randy is hurt at first, believing Chad to have crossed a line, considering the length of their friendship. Chad falls to the ground several times, literally "falling in love" with Randy, who starts to fall as well, representing through movement how they feel about each other. Johnson's anger and harsh tone show Randy's shock as he struggles to comprehend Chad's confession. Sabino remains calm throughout the entire scene, his seamless falls leaving a lasting impression. The couple's sherpa hats help remind the audience how cold it is, while the crates they sit on suggest that they found themselves in this location by chance.

The second act moves on to Marvalyn and Steve (junior Audrey Varley and sophomore Kaiden Vaishnavi), who meet in a laundry room. Marvalyn accidentally hits Steve with the ironing board and apologizes, but Steve is unable to feel pain. His brother Rob, we learn, taught him to fear everything—even himself. After Marvalyn impulsively kisses him, she hits him with the ironing board again, and this time he feels it. Vaishnavi does an outstanding job playing a character who has been sheltered, but also highlights Steve's compassion. Varley's reassurance and warmhearted expressions reveal how caring for others can make someone's day. The stadium seating is effective in giving the impression of an actual laundry room.

Rhonda (sophomore MaKenna Pappas) receives an abstract painting from Dave (sophomore Vishnu Ayyalasomayajula) in the final scene. Dave kisses Rhonda, and she is offended at first. She's skeptical about a relationship, and feels frightened because she doesn't know how to kiss back. Dave is understanding and they kiss again to eliminate the awkwardness. Pappas's facial expressions while taking in the painting emphasize the toughness and vulnerability of her character. Ayyalasomayajula succeeds in presenting Dave as innocent and empathetic.

The play comes full circle in the epilogue, when Pete and Ginette return to the bench; they lie together as the lights go down.

Overall, the drama club's production of *Almost Maine* is beyond exception. The aesthetic of the lighting and the set are beautiful, transporting the audience to a rural town. The sparkling sounds that conclude each scene train viewers to understand that the clock is once again rolling back to 8:50 PM. The efforts of the actors and the tech crew flourished in collaboration. With this, Mr. Viscardi and company have set a high bar for whatever they have planned for the spring. ☒

Pink Tape & Country Music

On-field superstitions



By Weller Ranson

Since ancient times, rituals have been a prominent part of life. Olympic swimmer Santo Condorelli flips off his dad before every race—though the effectiveness of this ritual is questionable. Many rituals evolve into superstitions that are common in all levels of sports, from NBA players not letting anyone step over their jersey to avoiding lines on a high school playing field.

In sports, the mental aspect is as vital to success as physical skill. Rituals offer athletes a sense of comfort within the unpredictable world of sports. Traditions such as eating a specific pre-game meal or wearing a lucky shirt can help a player feel that they have control over their fate.

Rituals are not only confined to professionals, however, as athletes from the NFL to the York Prep Panthers have superstitions they abide by no matter what. On the boys varsity basketball team, senior shooting guard Kenneth Reyes's pre-game rituals play a crucial role in his on-court performance. Although he doesn't doubt his skills, he still relies on pre-game rituals to quell nervousness.

"I'll stretch and pray and meditate before games," Reyes said. "When I don't, I'm not as prepared for the game as I should be. Preparing for the game gets my mind right and reminds me it's just a game."

Even though some of these routines are simple, for many players like Reyes, they help provide a sense of mental preparedness. Meditation helps control his breathing and keep his cool even when his heart is pounding.

Senior Andrew Wallace, who pitches for the boys varsity baseball team, finds comfort in repetition before each game. By listening to the same genre of music before each game—last year it



Whether on the field or on the court, superstitions like pink wrist tape and country music will always have a place in sports.

was country—he is able to focus and concentrate on winning another ISAL championship. Off the field, his music taste varies, but when preparing

for games, he prefers country every time. As the bus approaches the field, he gets quiet. The timid player is gone, replaced with an athlete who knows what he needs to do to perform at his best.

Some rituals, however, go beyond just warming up and evolve into real superstitions. For example, stepping on the foul line in baseball is widely recognized as bad luck for individual players and the whole team. Every baseball player knows to avoid it, just like they know to avoid a black cat or walking under a ladder. Along with these unspoken rules come individual superstitions that, to most players, make or break the result of a game.

As the bus pulls onto Randall's Island and the field comes into sight, junior Sam Subracko carefully wraps pink tape around his wrist before taking the field as the Panthers' shortstop. Although he can't remember what started this, it's been going on for years.

"I never forget it," he said.

Subracko describes the one day he did forget the tape as "one of my worst games." Routines and superstitions play a significant role in Subracko's success on the field. He even manages to incorporate his uniform into his superstitions.

"I always wear the exact same belt," he said. "No matter what jersey." These superstitions become habits, and although some consider them to have a placebo effect, they give athletes confidence and sharpen their focus.

People love sports because they are an unsanitized competitive dramas: anything can happen. With many uncontrollable factors, athletes strive to control the few variables that they can. Whether on the field or the court, superstitions like pink wrist tape and country music will always have a place in sports, as they do in life. ☒

Fall Sports Recap

2025 season in review



By Weller Ranson

Girls junior varsity volleyball, led by Coach Colin Horn, was overflowing with talent this past season. Standout players include freshmen Grace Kansfield, Elin O'Brien, and Faith White, and sophomores Sasha Droulias and MaKenna Pappas, who set the tone for the team with their hard work and unwavering dedication. The team went from losing 2–1 against the Garden School to advancing all the way to the semifinals. "There was a lot of improvement over the course of the season, but we really struggled on the road," Coach Horn said. Though they ultimately lost to Brooklyn Friends in a close 3–4 match at Pratt Institute, the team secured impressive victories along the way against tough opponents like Bay Ridge Prep and Steiner.

Girls varsity volleyball had a great season despite a host of new challenges. This year, the players faced new competition as Garden, Bay Ridge Prep, LREI and Brooklyn Friends were incorporated into the league. This roadblock notwithstanding, "the girls rose to the occasion,"

Coach Horn said, placing fourth in the league. By the end of the regular season, they finished with a 5–3 record, beating Garden, Bay Ridge Prep, and Steiner—all tough teams. On senior night, the Panthers ended the regular season on a high note, playing an electric game in front of a packed crowd. After battling it out with BWL, the team secured a thrilling five-set victory at home. They lost in the first round of the playoffs to Bay Ridge Prep, where they started down two games and won the next two, just coming short on their fifth game tie-breaker. Overall, the players performed well against substantial competition.

Even after losing 14 seniors last year, **boys varsity soccer**, under the guidance of Coach Paul Curran, still made it to the 2025 playoffs. The team had big shoes to fill after the 2024 squad won the league and competed in state tournaments. This year, however, was a "rebuilding year," according to Coach Curran, with players like sophomore Max Yablon and junior Blake Silverstein helping lead the team to a successful season. Players like Yablon and junior Evan Stein were vital to the team's success, with Coah Curran noting, "A lot of our young-

er players definitely stepped up." As the playoffs approached, the team dominated Brooklyn Friends, Steiner, and BWL, winning each match by three or more points. But eventually injuries took a toll. In their game against LREI, only 11 out of 19 players were available, leaving the Panthers without a bench and resulting in a 6–0 loss. Still, with underclassmen gaining experience and stepping into leadership roles, the team is poised for an even stronger season next year.

Girls varsity soccer, led by coaches Adela Veljovic and Madison Smith, had a strong season with a 6–2–1 record. Even against tough opponents such as FASNY, the "leadership and dedication" of the captain, senior Cleo Neubert, "set the tone for the team's success" Coach Veljovic said. The team had big victories throughout the season, such as a 4–0 win against Brooklyn Friends, but team came up short in their games against FASNY. Still, the Panthers pushed forward with determination to the semifinals, where they fought a competitive game against BWL that resulted in a 2–1 loss. Despite these setbacks, the team played a great season, and hope to get even further in 2026. ☒

Off-Season Training

Student athletes prepare for the year ahead



Senior Bennett Harrison, three-time varsity baseball captain, pressing the 50s in the weight room as part of his off-season training routine.

By Weller Ranson

As the sun drops over the Central Park Reservoir, senior Aitan Green-Houvras starts his warm-up. Despite the temperature hovering around 40 degrees, he still wears his usual short-sleeved shirt and running shorts. After a quick warm-up, he begins his four-and-a-half-mile run around the reservoir. By the time his run is over, the sky is dark, and he heads back home. Like Greene-Houvras, many athletes use the off-season to push themselves and improve their performance. Whether it's in the weight room, batting cages, or on the court, both professional and student athletes take pains to prepare for the upcoming season. At York Prep, Greene-Houvras trains for cross-country and track year-round. For him, the summer is "like the build-up for cross-country, so I ramp my mileage up to about 30-40 miles a week, and basically try to maintain that mileage before cross-country," he said. While practice with the team is vital, Greene-Houvras finds that most of his improvement comes from training independently during the off-season. As soon as the cross-country season ends, Greene-Houvras hands in his uniform and begins training for

the spring, where he runs the 800-meter (half mile) and two-mile events for the track team. Although both sports focus on running, his training changes once track season begins. "For track, it's more speed-based workouts, so I do repeats on a track for 400, 1000, and 800 meters," he said. "The tempos are shorter and quicker, and the distance drops for track." These workouts require a track—something not easily accessible to Greene-Houvras, whose closest option is roughly 40 minutes away—an additional hurdle in an already challenging routine. Because of the solitary nature of the track, he often practices alone. However, like all runners, Greene-Houvras knows what it's like to hit a wall. "I run by myself most of the time, which is not ideal," he said. "A lot of people say that it's much better to run with people to avoid burnout; it's definitely true, but it's not easy sometimes." After all, where do you find a running mate with Greene-Houvras's discipline and commitment? After a long day balancing academics and extracurricular activities, it's easy for a rigorous practice routine to slip. "The hardest part for me is getting out the door," he said. "A lot of the times I come home and I'm tired, and I don't want to run. It's cold out, you know. But what gets me out the door is putting on my running clothes and shoes. From there, it's kind of like I'm forced to." Greene-Houvras knows that in a sport like running, it is very easy to lose months of progress, but a drive for success and a hunger for constant improvement inspire him. Girls varsity basketball player and senior Gabrielle Bolt thinks about practice a little differently. "I'll go to the park to practice on weekends with my dad, so it's a good bonding moment," Bolt said. Being able to turn practice into something enjoyable is what keeps many athletes interested in their sport. "Athletes should think about

[practice] as a time to hone your sport," Bolt said. "It's always a great accomplishment when you get to a game or when you get on the field or court, and you're able to do what you practiced." For Bolt, seeing her training pay off on the court fuels her drive to

To some, practice is an exhausting chore, but for those who love their sport, it is more fun than work.

keep improving. Above all, her love for the game and the sheer joy of playing with others keep her motivated. At Amateur Athletic Union training camp, long before Bolt received her jersey for the season, she was at the courts or in the gym by 10 A.M., training for the season. When she left, the sky was still dark. Checking her phone, she saw that she had been playing for eight hours. Training camps like this are usually intense on top of the many two-hour workouts she has during the week. However, between cheer, volleyball, academics, and a job, finding time to practice is always tough. She had to eliminate some of her activities, so Bolt decided that AAU had to go. Part of this change, Bolt said, came with realizing, "When I was younger, I did want to play in college. I did like the idea of playing professionally, but as I got older, the goal was less and less attainable. It's just not my reality, and slowly I realized I'm not gonna go DI or play pro, but honestly I don't really want to." She still enjoys going to the courts, practicing drills, and working on improving her skills, but the dream has changed. Now, as part of her practice, she goes to nearby parks and competes in pickup games. While finding time and motivation to practice can be challenging, athletes across many different sports push themselves in the offseason to improve. To some, practice is an exhausting chore, but for those who love their sport, it is more fun than work. "Getting yourself to go and practice is hard, but it honestly comes a lot more naturally when you like to do it," Bolt said. "When most people hear practice or workout, they automatically hate the idea of it, but for athletes that enjoy their sport, practice is fun."

Trivia

Faculty Facts



By Coby Blatt

Answers on page 16

1. Which teacher is a dual citizen of Italy and the United States?

- a. Ms. Luparello
- b. Mr. Palmese
- c. Ms. Salerno
- d. Ms. Fratta

2. Which teacher was a Golden Gloves boxer when they were younger?

- a. Mr. Viscardi
- b. Mr. Ward
- c. Mr. Leventhal
- d. Coach Turi

3. Which teacher has run two half Ironman races?

- a. Mr. Lippman
- b. Mr. Ahern
- c. Mr. Horn
- d. Coach Curran

4. Which teacher swam a mile down the Amazon River?

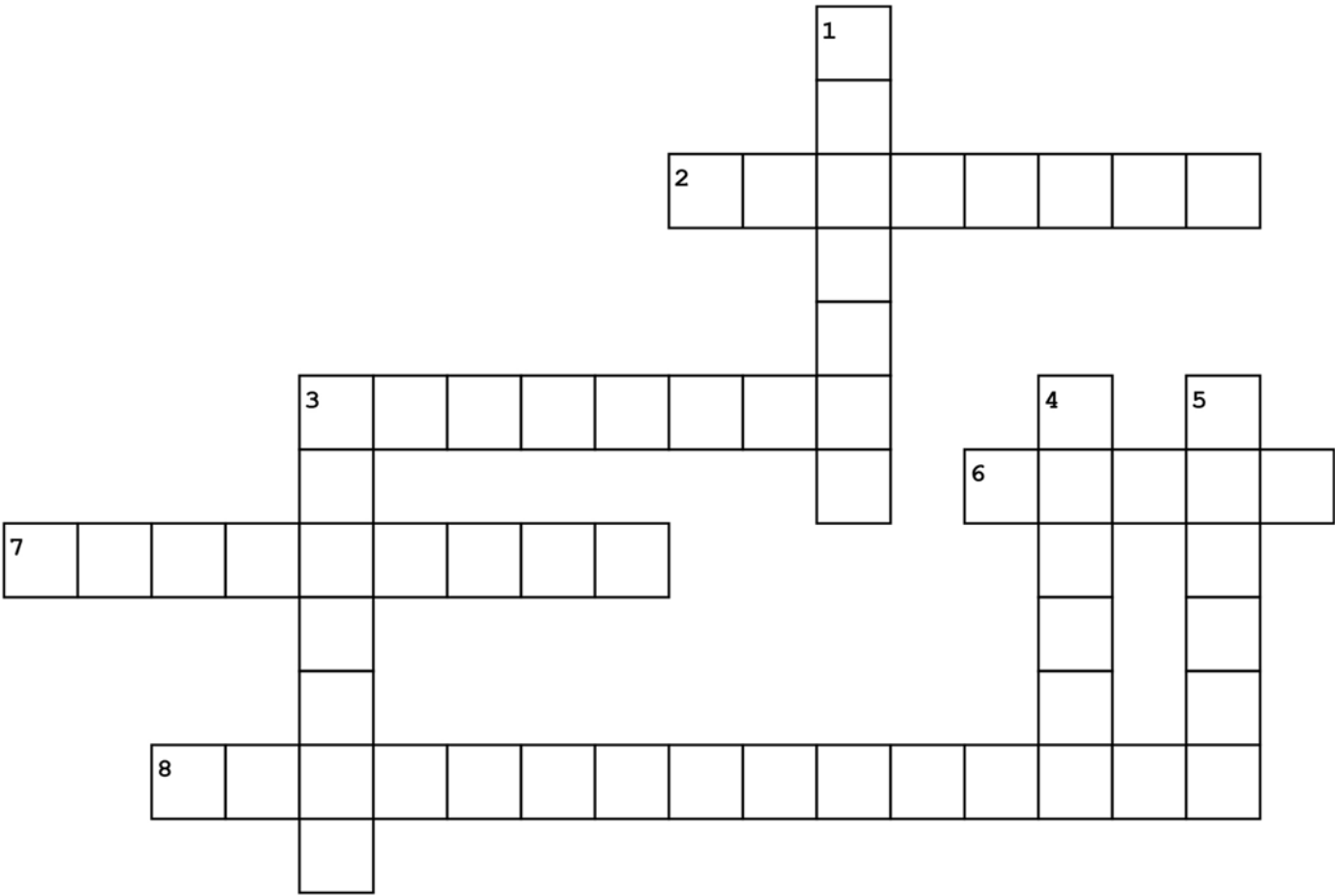
- a. Mr. Beich
- b. Mr. Everett
- c. Mr. Morgan
- d. Ms. Magni

5. Which teacher went to Super Bowl LI?

- a. Mr. Simpson
- b. Mr. Schwartz
- c. Mr. Serri
- d. Coach Fazio

6. Which teacher worked in the houses of two presidents?

- a. Ms. Cox
- b. Mr. Viscardi
- c. Ms. Magni
- d. Mr. Leventhal



Across

- 3. The park half a block away
- 6. This restaurant on West 68th Street is owned by Lady Gaga's father
- 8. Fast food Mexican on Amsterdam Avenue at West 72nd Street
- 9. What students call the deli on West 69th Street and Amsterdam Avenue
- 10. Studio on West 68th Street where dance classes are held

Down

- 1. The name of this diner on Amsterdam Avenue at West 72nd Street means "no place" in Greek
- 2. Italian-American chain at Columbus Avenue and West 71st Street
- 4. App that delivers lunch to the lobby
- 5. ...on the Green
- 7. There are two of these in the name of this pizza place on West 71st Street
- 8. Cookie shop on Columbus Avenue at West 73rd Street

7. Which teacher used to be a competitive ballroom dancer?

- a. Ms. Domenicali-Shah
- b. Mr. Clarke
- c. Mr. Gordon
- d. Dr. Davis

9. Which teacher declined an offer to appear on Dr. Phil?

- a. Dr. Marzoni
- b. Ms. Drake
- c. Mr. Rosado-Gonzalez
- d. Mr. Dahut

11. Which teacher is half-Canadian?

- a. Mr. Yeh
- b. Ms. Borden
- c. Mr. Martin
- d. Ms. Umansky

8. Which teacher has a collection of obscure cookbooks?

- a. Mr. Everett
- b. Ms. Basias
- c. Ms. Chadha
- d. Mrs. Paisley

10. Whose first teaching job was in Hollywood, California?

- a. Ms. Hutchison
- b. Mr. Mancilla
- c. Ms. Singh
- d. Mr. Cockrell

12. Which teacher is a classically trained clarinetist?

- a. Mr. Shure
- b. Ms. Brinson
- c. Ms. Arnao
- d. Ms. O'Donnell

A Tragically Glamorous Burden

Dressing down the illusion of sameness



By Audrey Varley

The grass was still damp from the night before, darkening the soles of designer sneakers. A thin gray mist hung over Central Park, softening the skyline and the edges of the field where students assembled in clusters of color, texture, and taste. It was Field Day at York Prep, September 2022, a rare occasion when uniforms stayed home and everyone revealed who they wanted to be.

By eight-thirty, the air had already shifted. A low hum of competition, half athletic and half aesthetic, moved through the crowd. Hoodies hung like declarations. Thrifted corduroy next to Rick Owens next to Shein; gold chains and ballet flats; ironic slogans and quiet luxury. The supposed equality of education dissolved the instant the dress code did. In its place, hierarchy bloomed: silent but distinct, stitched into fabric, logos, and posture.

The night before, my friends and I had been on FaceTime, planning. Screens glowing, we held garments up to our cameras like offerings, anxious, hopeful, and strategic. The ritual had nothing to do with weather or school spirit. It was about translating the self into something visible, something legible. When the day came, stepping on the wet grass felt like walking onto a stage.

One girl wore a navy pleated skirt and a cropped sweater that could have been thrifted or could have been Miu Miu; that was the point. Another appeared in head-to-toe lululemon, her ponytail a punctuation mark. A boy arrived in pajama pants patterned with cartoon bones, pretending not to care with such precision that it became a production in itself. The field was a gallery of contradictions: wealth disguised as nonchalance, rebellion curated to appear effortless, irony pressed and lint-rolled.

Somewhere between the relay races and the group photos, I noticed how still the air became around those who knew how to hold others' attention. The posture, the tone, the half-smile—each detail so finely rehearsed it seemed innate. The ones more inclined to hide in the shadows had their own language, too: sleeves pulled over hands, eyes scanning the crowd, ex-

pressions neutral but open. Everyone was broadcasting something.

The day moved the way adolescence does: slow, uneven, and heavy with awareness. In the soft chaos of color and fabric, we were all measuring ourselves against invisible scales of belonging, desirability, and taste. Even the teachers, standing on the sidelines in their fleece zip-ups and athleisure, looked slightly out of place, as if the social experiment had extended beyond its intended limits.

By noon, the grass had dried, and so had the self-consciousness. The clothes began to wrinkle, sneakers scuffed, eyeliner smudged. What remained was the heat of proximity,

est choices: what shoes to wear, what color feels most like us today. Maybe that is why dress-down days feel so revealing. Not because they expose who we really are, but because they show how hard we try to find it.

These days, my alarm goes off at 5:30. I rise, brush my teeth, and begin my morning choreography: skincare, bronzer, concealer, blush, each gesture precise and practiced. The speakers in my bathroom hum the same house playlist they have for months. I take my freshly blown-out hair from its silk bonnet and watch it fall in the mirror. My mornings aren't rushed—they're rituals. I rarely skip them. Without the order of these hours, I couldn't think straight, let alone learn.

Beauty, for me, is structure. It is control. It is a habit of self-love disguised as vanity. The tragically glamorous burden of being myself, I carry it faithfully.

Then comes the uniform, the illusion of sameness. There are more choices in it than people think. Gray or navy skirt? Today, gray, to pair with a heather cardigan I bought during a SoHo spree with my friends. Beneath it, a white tank top that just barely reveals my décolletage. On my feet, silver ballet flats with squared toes that mock real pointe

shoes, Bali, from a Fifth Avenue sample sale. Because it is 48 degrees, I add my Ralph Lauren fleece and, the long gray cashmere scarf that makes everything look intentional.

Inside, the uniform suddenly feels alive, multiplying into hundreds of versions of itself. The hallway becomes a parade of silhouettes, textures, and intentions. And the shoes. Always the shoes.

The uniform is never uniform. Every choice—a button, a hemline, a shoelace—reveals our ego ideal. Difference finds its way through texture and gesture. The social hierarchy does not vanish; it only learns to dress in regulation colors. Capitalism has already built its architecture into our instincts. Even our restraint has a price tag.

Maybe that is the real tragedy, or the comedy, of it all: every system built to neutralize individuality only rebrands it with someone else's name. The human impulse to distinguish, to display, to mean something, will always find a way to glitter through. ■



the feeling of having been observed and of having observed in turn.

By dismissal, the crowd had scattered. Hoodies were tied around waists; the field was reduced to a few forgotten water bottles and the faint scent of perfume. The day returned to its usual symmetry, the brief theater of expression folded back into uniform. But something in the air lingered: a trace of performance, an echo of who we thought we were, if only for those few hours.

I walked home still half-dressed in it all: the dampness of the grass, the weight of my clothes, the tacit exhaustion that comes from being looked at.

When the uniforms come off, everyone becomes a version of who they think they are, or how they want to be seen. We unconsciously deploy what we wear as rhetoric, persuading others of the story we want to tell about ourselves. Yet the story keeps changing. My sense of self fluctuates every millisecond, and it drives me crazy sometimes. Whether we know it or not, we are all trying to find who we truly are, even in the small-

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The Paw reserves the right to edit letters containing libelous or obscene material and to omit certain sections for space limitations as long as the original meaning remains unchanged.

Crossword Answer Key

| Across | Down |
|---------------------|-----------|
| 3. Central | 1. Utopia |
| 6. Joanne Trattoria | 2. Parm |
| 8. Chipotle | 4. Wonder |
| 9. Gourmet | 5. Tavern |
| 10. Shuffles | 7. Boots |
| | 8. Crumbl |

Trivia Answer Key

1c, 2a, 3b, 4d, 5c, 6a, 7d, 8d, 9a, 10b, 11d, 12d