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Yes, You Can Be an Ethical Tech Consumer. Here's How.

It has never felt worse to be a technology consumer. So what can you do about it? That's the question of the year after many of the biggest tech companies were mired in scandal after scandal or exposed as having committed necessary evils to offer the products and services that we have so blissfully enjoyed. Those instant Amazon deliveries? They sure are convenient, but Amazon warehouse workers in Europe protested the company during Black Friday, describing their working conditions as inhuman. You might have considered deleting Facebook after the social network confessed that Cambridge Analytica, a political consulting firm, had improperly obtained the data of millions of users. If that didn't convince you, maybe the security breach exposing the data of 30 million Facebook accounts did.

All of this bad behavior circles back to you. We are the buyers, users and supporters of the products and services that help Big Tech thrive. So what do we do at this point to become more ethical consumers? "I think this is an incredibly powerful question to ask," said Jim Steyer, chief executive of Common Sense Media, a nonprofit that focuses on technology's impact on families. "It's a very important moment where consumer behavior can have a transformational impact." I talked to a broad range of people — ethicists, activists, environmentalists and others — about how to become a more empowered, socially responsible tech consumer. Here's what they agreed on.

Boycott and Shame: First and foremost, when tech does you wrong, one of the most powerful ways to protest is to take your business elsewhere and ask your friends and family to go along. Last year, hundreds of thousands of customers abandoned Uber in favor of alternatives like Lyft after the ride-hailing company's many scandals, including repeated accusations that it turned a blind eye to sexual harassment. That choice became a movement known as #DeleteUber. Damage to a brand may have plenty of repercussions because it motivates the company to change its behavior, Mr. Steyer said. Both Uber and Facebook, facing enormous pressure, have modified some of their practices and committed to improvements. "Sometimes shame is one of the most important arrows in your quiver," Mr. Steyer said.

Give Up Convenience for Independence: We can also take the path less traveled — that is, take our data and money to products made by more ethical vendors. Pulling the plug on Facebook is a hassle, but not impossible. Taking on the challenge of finding alternatives is an example of how people can give up some convenience in exchange for individual empowerment, said Shahid Buttar, a director of grass-roots advocacy for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital rights nonprofit.

Slow Down: You can do the world a favor by simply slowing down your consumption. When ordering from Amazon or other online retailers, think twice before you opt for same-day or overnight delivery, even if it's free. Other than the human toll of fast service, which has included miscarriages by pregnant workers at Verizon warehouses, there is an environmental impact. A rush shipment could involve multiple vehicles and various facilities before it gets to your door. So pause and ask yourself if you actually need that smartphone or scented candle tomorrow. If you can wait, choose no-rush delivery, which could take about a week.

You can reduce your environmental impact further by delaying how often you upgrade technology. That can be achieved by regular maintenance of devices, including smartphones, laptops and tablets. Vincent Lai, who works for the Fixers' Collective, a social club in New York that repairs aging devices, said people could become more empowered by repairing, maintaining and modifying products to escape the upgrade cycle that tech companies impose. "One of the things you can do to be more responsible is to take greater ownership of your stuff," Mr. Lai said.

But how can you be more conscious of your actions when technology is so confusing in the first place? Education is key. Mr. Buttar said a network of 85 groups that make up the Electronic Frontier Foundation Alliance hosted workshops across the United States that taught people more about issues like digital privacy and data protection. The bottom line is that you are not alone. And if a company makes it too difficult for you and your friends to stay safe while staying connected, you can leave. "If you're really uncomfortable with the values of a company, don't use their product," Mr. Steyer said.

The New York Times, 12 December 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

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In Praise of Mediocrity

I'm a little surprised by how many people tell me they have no hobbies. It may seem a small thing, but — at the risk of sounding grandiose — I see it as a sign of a civilization in decline. The idea of leisure, after all, is a hard-won achievement; it presupposes that we have overcome the exigencies of brute survival. Yet here in the United States, the wealthiest country in history, we seem to have forgotten the importance of doing things solely because we enjoy them.

Yes, I know: We are all so very busy. Between work and family and social obligations, where are we supposed to find the time? But there's a deeper reason, I've come to think, that so many people don't have hobbies: We're afraid of being bad at them. Or rather, we are intimidated by the expectation — itself a hallmark of our intensely public, performative age — that we must actually be skilled at what we do in our free time. Our "hobbies," if that's even the word for them anymore, have become too serious, too demanding, too much an occasion to become anxious about whether you are really the person you claim to be.

If you're a jogger, it is no longer enough to cruise around the block; you're training for the next marathon. If you're a painter, you are no longer passing a pleasant afternoon, just you, your watercolors and your water lilies; you are trying to land a gallery show or at least garner a respectable social media following. When your identity is linked to your hobby — you're a yogi, a surfer, a rock climber — you'd better be good at it, or else who are you?

Lost here is the gentle pursuit of a modest competence, the doing of something just because you enjoy it, not because you are good at it. Hobbies, let me remind you, are supposed to be something different from work. But alien values like "the pursuit of excellence" have crept into and corrupted what was once the realm of leisure, leaving little room for the true amateur. The population of our country now seems divided between the semipro hobbyists (some as devoted as Olympic athletes) and those who retreat into the passive, screeny leisure that is the signature of our technological moment.

I don't deny that you can derive a lot of meaning from pursuing an activity at the highest level. I would never begrudge someone a lifetime devotion to a passion or an inborn talent. There are depths of experience that come with mastery. But there is also a real and pure joy, a sweet, childlike delight that comes from just learning and trying to get better. Looking back, you will find that the best years of, say, scuba-diving or doing carpentry were those you spent on the learning curve, when there was exaltation in the mere act of doing.

In a way that we rarely appreciate, the demands of excellence are at war with what we call freedom. For to permit yourself to do only that which you are good at is to be trapped in a cage whose bars are not steel but self-judgment. Especially when it comes to physical pursuits, but also with many other endeavors, most of us will be truly excellent only at whatever we started doing in our teens. What if you decide in your 40s, as I have, that you want to learn to surf? What if you decide in your 60s that you want to learn to speak Italian? The expectation of excellence can be stultifying.

Liberty and equality are supposed to make possible the pursuit of happiness. It would be unfortunate if we were to protect the means only to neglect the end. A democracy, when it is working correctly, allows men and women to develop into free people; but it falls to us as individuals to use that opportunity to find purpose, joy and contentment.

Lest this sound suspiciously like an elaborate plea for people to take more time off from work — well, yes. Though I'd like to put the suggestion more grandly: The promise of our civilization, the point of all our labor and technological progress, is to free us from the struggle for survival and to make room for higher pursuits. But demanding excellence in all that we do can undermine that; it can threaten and even destroy freedom. It steals from us one of life's greatest rewards — the simple pleasure of doing something you merely, but truly, enjoy.

The New York Times, 29 September 2018

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Truth and power: Should the tech giants be liable for content?

Google marked its 20th birthday this week. It celebrated in fitting style—being lambasted¹ by politicians in Washington. Like Facebook and Twitter, Google wields too much influence to avoid public scrutiny. A vital debate is under way over whether and how tech platforms should be held responsible for the content they carry. Back when Google, Facebook, Twitter and others were babies, the answer that politicians gave on the question of content liability was clear.

Laws such as America's Communications Decency Act (CDA), passed in 1996, largely shielded online firms from responsibility for their users' actions. Lawmakers reasoned that the fledgling online industry needed to be protected from costly lawsuits. They were to be thought of more as telecom providers, neutral venues on which customers could communicate with each other.

That position is hard to maintain today. Online giants no longer need protection: they are among the world's most successful and influential firms. Nearly half of American adults get some of their news on Facebook; YouTube has 1.9bn monthly logged-on users, who watch around 1bn hours of video every day. To complaints about trolling, fake news and extremist videos, the old defence of neutrality rings hollow. The platforms' algorithms curate the flow of content; they help decide what users see. The pendulum is thus swinging the other way. Lawmakers are eroding the idea that the platforms have no responsibility for content.

Earlier this year America passed the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA), which has the worthy aim of cracking down on sex trafficking; the Department of Justice this week said it would look into the platforms' impact on free speech. In Germany the platforms have strict deadlines to take down hate speech. The tech giants themselves increasingly accept responsibility for what appears on their pages, hiring armies of moderators to remove offending content. This new interventionism carries two big dangers. One is that it will entrench the dominance of the giants, because startups will not be able to afford the burden of policing their platforms or to shoulder the risk of lawsuits.

The other is that the tech titans become "ministries of truth", acting as arbiters of what billions of people around the world see—and what they do not. This is no idle worry. Facebook and YouTube have banned Alex Jones, a notorious peddler of conspiracy theories. Loathsome as Mr Jones's ideas are, defenders of free speech ought to squirm at the notion that a small set of like-minded executives in Silicon Valley are deciding what is seen by an audience of billions.

The weight given to free speech and the responsibilities of the platforms vary between countries. But three principles ought to guide the actions of legislators and the platforms themselves. The first is that free speech comes in many flavours. The debate over the platforms is a mix of concerns, from online bullying to political misinformation. These worries demand different responses. The case for holding the tech firms directly responsible for what they carry is clear for illegal content. Content that may be deemed political is far harder to deal with—the risk is both that platforms host material that is beyond the pale and take down material that should be aired.

The second is that it is wrong to try to engineer a particular outcome for content. Tech firms would be forced to act as censors. It would be better to make platforms accountable for their procedures: clarify the criteria applied to restrict content; recruit advisory bodies and user representatives to help ensure that these criteria are applied; give users scope to appeal against decisions. They also need to open their algorithms and data to independent scrutiny, under controlled conditions. Only then can society evaluate whether a platform is discriminating against content or whether material causes harm.

The third principle is that small firms should be treated differently from large ones. The original rationale of the CDA made sense, but the firms that need protection now are those that seek to challenge the big tech platforms. If rules are drawn up to impose liability on online firms, they ought to contain exemptions for those below a certain size and reach. Google and its like have achieved extraordinary things in their short lives. But their bosses would be getting a lot less heat from Capitol Hill if they had more competition.

¹ Lambasted: harshly criticized

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The pros and cons of collaboration: Teams can work well, but co-leaders often don't

Collaboration at work is generally seen as a good thing. Production of *The Economist* is a co-operative process. A crack team of editors removes most of the bad jokes before this column makes it into print. Businesses value collaboration. The latest survey by the *Financial Times* of what employers want from MBA graduates found that the ability to work in a team, to work with a wide variety of people and to build, sustain and expand a network of people were three of the top five skills that managers wanted. Practical qualifications like accounting, programming and applied microeconomics were among the least-desired attributes.

But managers always have to balance the merits of teamwork, which help ensure that everyone is working towards the same goal, with the dangers of "groupthink", when critics are reluctant to point out a plan's defects for fear of being ostracised by the group. The disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 was a classic case of groupthink. Sceptics were reluctant to challenge John F. Kennedy, the newly elected American president.

A related phenomenon is the "wisdom of crowds". Large groups are remarkably good, on average, at estimating such things as the number of beans in a jar or the weight of a prize calf. But that accuracy relies on the guesses being independent. When people are aware of the views of others, there is a tendency for them to herd together, as participants are reluctant to look foolish by deviating from the majority view. The same effect may lead to stockmarket bubbles. Modern communication methods mean that collaboration is more frequent. Workers are constantly in touch with each other via e-mail, messaging groups or mobile calls.

But does that boost, or detract from, performance? A new study by Ethan Bernstein, Jesse Shore and David Lazer, three American academics, tried to answer this question. They set a logical problem: devising the shortest route for a travelling salesman visiting various cities. Three groups were involved: one where subjects acted independently; another where they saw the solutions posted by team members at every stage; and a third where they were kept informed of each others' views only intermittently. The survey found that members of the individualist group reached the optimal solution more often than the constant collaborators, but had a poorer average result. The intermittent collaborators found the right result as often as the individualists, and got a better average solution.

When it comes to idea generation, giving people a bit of space to find a solution seems to be a good idea. Occasional collaboration can be a big help; most people have benefited from a colleague's brainwave or, just as often, wise advice to avoid a particular course of action.

Further clues come from a book, *Superminds*, by Thomas Malone of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He says that three factors determine the "collective intelligence" of collaborating groups: social intelligence (how good people were at rating the emotional states of others); the extent to which members took part equally in conversation (the more equal, the better); and the proportion of women in the group (the higher, the better). Groups ranked highly in these areas co-operated far better than others.

Close teamwork may be vital in the lower reaches of a hierarchy, but at the top someone has to make a decision. At this stage, intense collaboration may be less helpful. In their book, *Friend & Foe*, Adam Galinsky of Columbia Business School and Maurice Schweitzer of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania found that fashion houses with co-creative directors were rated as less creative by industry experts over a decade (from 2000 to 2010) than brands that were individually led. They add that co-led teams of Himalayan climbers are more likely to suffer deaths than those with single leaders.

As the authors note, co-leadership "creates uncertainty over who is really in charge". The battles between Sandy Weill and John Reed when they were co-chief executives of Citigroup in the late 1990s were infamous; the arrangement lasted just two years. Less than 5% of companies in the *Fortune* 500 have used a co-CEO structure since 1989. In short, collaboration may be a useful tool but it doesn't work in every situation. Except at *The Economist*, of course.

The Economist, 6 September 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

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Industrial-scale beef production is a sign of crisis in Britain's farming

Pens of bare earth in serried rows, stretching across fields as barren as an urban car park, packed with cattle being intensively fed – this is the vision we have of the over-industrialised, disease-prone, polluting and cruel side of American feedlot beef production. However, as the *Guardian* revealed this week, this has become a feature of the British landscape, in the form of concentrated animal feeding operations (Cafos). Many prefer to remain disconnected from the reality of the processes required to turn those cows into aseptic packages of supermarket meat or fast-food burgers at rock-bottom prices. The idyll has been the city dweller's romantic delusion of rural life since the industrial revolution, but real agriculture has always been dirty and tough, for workers and animals alike.

There is another way to farm cattle – extensively, outdoors on grass for most of their lives (rather than for just a few months) so that they can express their natural behaviour, in mixed farming systems where livestock are part of a virtuous cycle, creating manure that fertilises other crops, and making use of land that would otherwise be unproductive. Vegetarians and vegans disagree, but in so far as there is a justification for eating red meat and other animal produce, it is that ruminants¹ can digest plant material including grass and straw that is indigestible to humans, and thus make available the huge resource of cellulose in that material for feeding people. Beef produced this way looks and tastes different. But it is much more expensive. Supply would always be more limited. That would be better for our health, since high levels of red meat consumption are associated with an increased risk of cancer. It would be better for the planet too, since intensive livestock farming is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. It would undoubtedly be better for the cows.

In one sense, feedlot-style units are not new. Farms that specialise in “finishing” one to two thousand cattle at a time – that is, fattening them up with concentrated feed for slaughter – have been operating in the UK for years. Mostly they have been indoors, out of sight in barns or giant sheds. It is the fact that the new units we found are outdoors, as well as the sheer numbers of animals in a confined space without shelter, that echoes the American way. So far, the Cafos in the UK appear to hold 3,000 cattle at a time at most; in the US, some feedlots already corral tens of thousands together. So we are not talking the same scale, nor necessarily the same conditions, but rather that the pressures of the globalised economy are driving us in the American direction. This is yet another example of a so-called free market that is profoundly dysfunctional.

Even though global demand for beef is rising and prices are relatively high, most British farmers make a loss from rearing beef and depend instead on subsidy from Brussels for their income. The size of the national beef herd is in long-term decline as many give up. Where herds of 30 to 40 beef cattle were common before, the pressure now is to find economies of scale in ever larger herds, with 150 to 200 cattle now nearer a viable minimum. Money is made further up the supply chain by the processors and retailers that work on very high volume and low profit margins, not by farmers. When asked, shoppers say they want the higher welfare standards and environmental protections of locally produced British beef, and supermarkets reflect that demand in their specifications for fresh meat. But the retailers don't pay British farmers the true cost of production, and use the threat of imports that are cheaper to hold prices down. Less than half of beef sold in the UK is actually processed here; in the food service sector only around a quarter of beef is British.

The US has made clear that accepting their agricultural standards has to be the basis for any post-Brexit trade deal. Despite the specific demand for British beef, the money paid to British beef farmers is linked to prices on global commodity markets, supplied by mega-producers in the Americas. They operate to very different standards, using carcinogenic steroid hormones to promote rapid growth, and mass medicating with antibiotics. Michael Gove as environment, food and rural affairs secretary has said that Brexit will enable us to make sure public money only goes to farmers who deliver public benefits. He has said he wants subsidies to reward farmers for preserving soil health and the beauty of the natural landscape while also maintaining high welfare standards. But he has also been a strong proponent of a US trade deal that would open up our markets to cheaper imports of food.

The industry's nightmare scenario is that Gove makes it stick to one set of rules here while opening up our markets to cheaper, dirtier imports from outside the EU. That could be the death knell for British beef. The sight of intensive units on British soil has at least flushed the choices out in to the open. We all need to talk about what sort of meat we want before it is too late.

The Guardian, 31 May 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

¹ Ruminant: A mammal that chews its regurgitated food.

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Black Friday shopping hurts the environment—but you can help

The U.S. Post Office estimates they'll deliver 15 billion pieces of mail and 900 million packages between Thanksgiving and the New Year. Many of these items will be delivered thanks to a purchase made over the popular shopping weekend that follows Thanksgiving. Black Friday is an annual day of shopping that occurs the Friday after Thanksgiving. In the past few years, the holiday has also permeated the U.K. Increasingly, holiday shoppers are also participating in "Cyber Monday," the Monday after Thanksgiving when online shopping deals spring up across the Internet.

"For people who don't have purchasing power, the ability to be able to buy something that is a necessity at a discounted price is obviously a benefit," says Nicholas Ashford, a professor of technology and policy at MIT, where he also teaches environmental law. "For other people with more than enough, it just perpetuates a consumption-oriented society, which has an adverse effect on the environment," he says. According to a consumer survey released by Deloitte, the average shopper plans to spend 20 percent more in 2018 than they did in 2017. Fifty-seven percent of that will be spent online instead of in brick-and-mortar stores, a shift from past years. How consumers choose to ship their online purchases will impact how "green" they are.

An analysis done last year by Vox and the University of California's Climate Lab found that two-day shipping, like that provided for free to Amazon Prime members, left a bigger carbon footprint than slower options that shipped over a week. That's because shipping that gets items to your door faster requires more diesel-using trucks on the ground and less efficient shipping systems. To offset some of this carbon pollution, some companies like Dell computers buy carbon offsets, a system that promotes carbon reduction in one region, to offset the negative impact of polluting carbon in another region. They can include projects that fund renewable energy or promote sustainable forest management.

Once an item arrives on your doorstep, how it's made and what happens to it once it's eventually disposed all contribute to how it impacts the environment. During Cyber Monday last year, electronic items were some of the most commonly purchased. All those new phones, tablets, cameras, and home gadgets will eventually turn into electronic waste, or "e-waste." U.N. findings show that only about 20 percent of e-waste is recycled, and when electronics are thrown into landfills, they have the potential to leak toxic materials like lead and mercury into the air, water, and soil, which poses a health risk.

Readily available and bargain-priced clothing can be a benefit to consumers, but too much can harm the environment, especially when it's rapidly bought and sold. One study from the Ellen Macarthur Foundation estimates that a truckload of textiles is wasted every second. In addition to requiring resources to make and process, and producing carbon emissions, the discarded material used in so-called "fast fashion" clothing often contains microfibers of plastic that eventually pollute the ocean. Plastic is everywhere—used to manufacture everything from toys to home goods and wrapped around many of the items we ship. Billions of pounds of plastic are produced every year, and 91 percent of that isn't recycled. Much of it is ending up in the ocean, where it can smother reefs and choke wildlife.

While Ashford notes that our current consumer culture often encourages waste, there are steps people can take to cut back on how much their holiday shopping might cost the environment. Jarett Emert, an investment manager at the Carbonfund.org Foundation, a group that manages carbon-offset projects, says choices that reduce the number of cars and trucks on the ground can have a positive impact. "This can be accomplished by, for instance, requesting bundled shipping when purchasing multiple items or by reducing the number of trips you make while shopping," he says. *Carbonfund.org* also allows individuals to buy carbon offsets.

Environmental groups like Greenpeace also encourage consumers to think long-term when purchasing an item. Buying used products or those made from "upcycled," or recycled content, helps decrease the resource inputs. Gifting experiences or time can also serve as alternatives to physical items. Consumers can also take their own reusable bags shopping, to eschew disposable ones, and wrap gifts in cloth bags or recycled paper.

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High consumption by some nations puts all of us at risk

The world's richest countries, such as Luxembourg and the United States, have average incomes per person about 100 times higher than in the poorest countries, such as Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That's a tragedy for poor countries. Is it also a looming tragedy for rich ones? Until recently all those poor people elsewhere were no threat to rich countries. "They" out there didn't know much about our lifestyle—and even if they did and became angry, they couldn't do anything about it.

But today, poor remote countries are able to create problems for rich ones, and the reasons can be summed up in a word: globalization. As a result of the increased connections among all parts of the world, people in developing countries know more about differences in living standards, and many of them can now travel to rich countries. Globalization has made it untenable for such dramatic inequalities between high and low living standards to persist. I see evidence of that everywhere, but three examples stand out.

The first is health. The spread of disease is an unintended result of globalization. Feared diseases now get carried to rich countries by travelers from poor countries where the diseases are endemic and public health measures are weak. The diseases include old ones like cholera and flu, plus new ones like AIDS, Ebola, and Marburg.

Second: terrorism. Global inequality itself isn't the direct cause of terrorist acts. Religious fundamentalism and individual psychopathology play essential roles. Every country has its crazy, angry individuals driven to kill. But in poor countries today, people are barraged with media visions of lifestyles that are available elsewhere in the world and unavailable to them.

The third result when inequality and globalization collide is that people with spartan lifestyles want affluent ones. In most developing countries, increasing living standards is a top policy goal. But millions of people in those countries won't wait to see whether their government can deliver higher living standards within their lifetime. Instead they seek more affluent lifestyles now by immigrating to developed countries, with or without visas. Whether immigrants are seeking economic opportunity, a haven from violence, or political asylum, it's proving impossible to control recent waves of migration around the world.

But it won't be possible for everyone to achieve the dream of the developed-world lifestyle. We promise developing countries that if they just adopt good policies such as honest government, they too can enjoy affluence. The world doesn't contain enough resources. We can't sustainably support today's developed world at its current level, let alone raise the developing world to that level. Does that guarantee that we will end up in disaster? No! We could have a stable outcome in which all countries converged on consumption rates below what developed nations enjoy now.

Should we be depressed by the consequences of inequality? Again, no! While problems are getting worse, potentials for solutions are getting better. Multinational or world agreements have already succeeded in solving some big problems. Hence I view our world as being engaged in a horse race between a horse of destruction and a horse of hope. The race isn't a normal one, in which both horses run at a constant speed. Instead it's an exponentially accelerating race in which each horse is running faster and faster. Within a few decades we shall know which of those two horses has won the race.

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Don't blame women for leaving fields like engineering. Blame bad attitudes.

There are reasons why feminists use the slogan "the personal is political," especially when men make arguments using the age-old idea that "biology is destiny." Manglin Pillay, the CEO of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering, recently resorted to these types of arguments about the dearth of women in engineering. Citing some research Pillay essentially argued that women were better suited to care for children than to work in the Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) field. He said this explains the under-representation of women in the engineering field. He wrote that: The fact that more men occupy high profile executive posts is tremendous not because of gender but because of appetite for workload and extreme performance requirements at that level.

He further noted that women do not occupy high positions in the engineering fields because they choose to have the flexibility to dedicate themselves to more important enterprises like family and the raising of children. The article caused an uproar. Pillay has since apologized for his sexism after an outcry from many women including the Minister of Science and Technology, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, also a woman. Regardless of the apology, we need to understand what kinds of attitudes inform Pillay's thinking.

The results of a study on the experiences women face as engineers in the workplace in the US sheds light on the factors that explain the situation. The study, published in *Frontiers in Psychology* in 2017, involved a sample of 1464 women engineers who had left the field. It showed that their decision to leave jobs in the engineering field was related to a number of key factors. Firstly, poor and unfair working conditions. This included inequitable compensation as well as inflexible work environments that make work-family balance difficult. Secondly, dissatisfaction with the effective use of their math and science skills, and lastly the lack of recognition at work and adequate opportunities for advancement.

These findings show that work-life balance and the glass ceiling for women are indeed the problems – not a lack of ambition or a biological need to mother children. The problem, therefore, is not with women, but with the workplace and fairness in the family. If companies attend to these problems women will stay, and progress. While reproductive rights apply to both men and women, pregnancy is often viewed only as a woman's "problem." It's left to women to fight for maternity leave, often against incredible odds given that many companies see it as a costly imposition. Labour legislation in South Africa now provides for paid maternity leave—six weeks paid leave and a total of four months unpaid. But many companies adhere only to the prescribed minimum, and also often make it difficult for women to take this leave. But research shows that companies that take a more generous approach reap the rewards.

There is, therefore, a business case to be made for maternity leave. Young couples now look at what companies offer when it comes to childcare arrangements and those with good maternity leave policies are more attractive. Flexitime is another important way of keeping women in certain professions and making it easier for them to combine childcare responsibilities with work. Forbes magazine calls flexible working conditions a non-negotiable for engineers. Important lessons can be learned from successful companies that have achieved high retention rates of women and increased staff morale and productivity.

Apart from increasing paid maternity leave, these companies have successfully developed policies that support women when they return to work. They have done this by developing values that recognize the long-term gain of having women stay, and move up the management ladder. But these values have to be modeled at the top management level, such as the position in which Pillay is an incumbent. What shouldn't be happening in 2018 is that men in Pillay's position continue to send the message to women engineers that they can't measure up because they are women.

Quartz Africa, 25 August 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

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‘That’s not who we are’? Sixty Nazi-saluting boys in Baraboo suggest otherwise.

This week’s dose of societal deterioration arrived early, in the form of freshly scrubbed teenage boys. The boys, students at Wisconsin’s Baraboo High School, were apparently at prom last spring when they decided — more than 60 of them — to pose for a photo. Many of the grinning boys further decided, dressed in their dinner jackets and boutonnieres, that their communal pose would be to extend their arms in a Nazi salute. On Monday, this photo surfaced online and immediately went viral. The photographer later maintained he’d merely asked the boys to wave, though the gesture didn’t resemble a wave made by any hand-possessing human. In response to an outpouring of outrage, the superintendent issued a statement: “We want to be very clear. The Baraboo School District is a hate-free environment.”

“Hate is not an American value,” said then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, following the deadly 2017 white-supremacist rally in Charlottesville. “America is better than this,” wrote Joe Biden on Facebook this summer, in response to migrant children being separated from their families. “This type of hate has no home here,” insisted a New Hampshire alderman just this weekend after a public gazebo was desecrated with swastikas. In response to various acts of racism, sexism, bigotry and violence, President Barack Obama used the phrase “That’s not who we are” so often — at least 46 times, as compiled in one video montage — that it had the unintended result of upending his assertion. Maybe that’s exactly who we are: a country that is frequently racist, sexist, bigoted and violent.

So, to the Baraboo superintendent: If your defense is, “We’re a hate-free environment,” but there’s a photo of 60 of your students Sieg Heil-ing on the steps of the county courthouse, then maybe you should consider the possibility that you are, in fact, a hate-filled environment. A useful response wouldn’t be to deny it but rather to interrogate it. Maybe something like: Our students did an awful thing. We’re trying to figure out why, and how we can have the conversations to help make sure they never want to do it again.

In the photo, only one boy seems visibly uncomfortable with the jovial salute happening around him. His name is Jordan Blue, and he stands in the top-right corner of the photograph, a combination of anxious and horrified. He explained to a journalist on Monday that he would have left the photo if there’d been time to step away. Blue also provided a little context: “These classmates have been bullying me since middle school,” he said. “I have struggled with it my whole life and nothing has changed. These are the boy[s] of the Class of 2019.” He didn’t specify whether there was a nature to the bullying — if he’s Jewish, or gay, or nerdy, or any number of identities that adolescents have often turned into targets — but it hardly matters.

In a separate interview, Blue suggested that his classmates saw the Sieg Heil as a joke, which may well be the case. Still, what he described made it sound like this kind of callous attitude wasn’t an isolated incident at Baraboo. It wasn’t a wart on an otherwise unblemished student body but part of the central nervous system. (The last time Baraboo was in the national news, it was because students at this school 300 miles north of the Mason-Dixon Line were driving around with Confederate flags on their cars. A tribute, they said, to a deceased classmate.)

Of course, this isn’t just about 60 high school students in Baraboo. A 2005 poll found that over half of Americans didn’t know or responded incorrectly when asked what Auschwitz, Dachau and Treblinka were. Discrimination is baked into the country’s DNA, from founders supporting the enslavement of black people, to police beating women who were marching for the right to vote in 1917, to 1980s politicians choosing to ignore a fatal epidemic because most of the victims appeared to be gay men.

The shame over an incident like Baraboo’s shouldn’t be merely over the fact that it happened. It should be felt over the fact that when it happens, we pretend like nobody could have seen it coming. If anything makes our country worthy of pride, it’s the fact that in the grand sweep of history, we do try to put events like those in the past tense. We pass better laws, elect different people, expand human rights instead of contract them. For that to happen, though, we need to clearly and loudly and without excuses diagnose the problem: This is who we are. Now let’s try to make it who we were.

The Washington Post 13/11/2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVI

The Museums of Instagram

Candytopia, the pop-up exhibit with locations in Manhattan and San Francisco, shares some characteristics with Disneyland—a costumed guide, manufactured fantasy landscapes, giddy kids—but there are no rides. In Candytopia, there's very little to do but pose, and that's what everyone's doing.

Candytopia doesn't purport to be a museum, exactly, or an amusement park, or a retail location. It's a combination of all those things, but it's billed mostly as an experience. It's one of the latest in a series of such pop-up "experiences," which are almost certainly coming to a city near you. Some explicitly brand themselves as museums, and others shy away from the term, but they're all exhibits of sorts that are also mostly a series of backdrops for Instagrams.

What the creators of these experiences have realized is that a lot of people want to take pictures of themselves in a museum, without going to a traditional museum. So they've created temporary, overstuffed spaces that are geared toward online aesthetics and I.R.L. consumption. The trend was set with the Museum of Ice Cream, the confusingly successful pop-up "museum" devoted to everything saccharine. It opened in Manhattan, in 2016, and then made its way to Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Miami. The space showcased a particular brand of pink that the company is seeking to trademark. Other pop-up museum experiences followed: Color Factory, Dream Machine, A. Human, the Egg House, Rosé Mansion. Opening soon in New York: Human's Best Friend, a dog-themed pop-up, as well as the Museum of Pizza.

A lot of these experiences are themed around food, or incorporate it somehow. Candytopia is the extreme in this regard, quite literally transmuting artwork into candy, in a mock gallery that filled me with psychic dread. There's a jelly-bean recreation of the Mona Lisa. The candy version of Edvard Munch's "The Scream" is jokingly captioned, "I scream, you scream." There is a reproduction of one of Andy Warhol's Campbell's soup cans, made of red gummy bears, silver sprinkles, white mini jawbreakers, and more. "Just call me Candy Warhol," the caption reads, and now we have people Instagramming photos of a candy reproduction of a piece of Pop art. The pop-ups, above all, are a bright series of backgrounds for photographs, which is what a lot of traditional museums have started to become. Some museums pander to the Instagram habit—or at least unwittingly encourage it—by using splashy technology.

The pop-up museum spaces seem like the logical (if bizarre) extension of this phenomenon. Color Factory, which recently opened in New York after a wildly successful stint in San Francisco, even eliminates the need to take selfies, as cameras installed in the exhibit snap photos throughout it. It's one of the more likeable of these pop-up spaces; it incorporates the work of more than twenty artists, and it's meticulous in its execution. The creators have even crafted a color palette inspired by New York City, with names like "F Train" and "Manhattan Bridge." Nonetheless, the experience of moving through the twenty-thousand-square-foot installation in SoHo has a vacuous quality.

Pop-ups are also almost by definition "hot"; they're installed for a limited time, often pricey, and require being somewhat in the know. There's a growing retail economy built around them, as the Financial Times reported recently. Brands are blending the desirability of a pop-up space with the concept of a museum-like experience. Winky Lux, a makeup brand, raised six million dollars in venture capital for a series of "experience-first retail plans." The founder pitched the Winky Lux Experience as what you'd get "if Sephora and the Museum of Ice Cream had a baby."

The Winky Lux location in the back of a SoHo storefront feels remarkably similar, albeit on much smaller scale, to Candytopia or Color Factory. Each room is designed around a theme and aesthetic—in this case, inspired by one of their products. In the room where their Dream Gelée moisturizer is marketed, puffy clouds hang from the ceiling and are painted all over the walls. In a room themed around their Coffee Bronzer and Coffee Palette, there's a miniature fake coffee shop, in "Alice in Wonderland" pastels. There's even the requisite ball pit. (Who knew that the experience people are craving is an iteration of Chuck E. Cheese.) Instagram or tweet throughout: #winkyluxexperience. Your ten-dollar ticket goes toward the purchase of a product at the end.

The New Yorker 16/09/2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019 ANGLAIS - LVI

Gmail Smart Replies and the Ever-Growing Pressure to E-mail Like a Machine

I don't use the phrase "Will do!" much in daily conversation, but lately it has been creeping into more and more of my e-mails. An editor asks me to get a draft back to her tomorrow? Will do! A friend heading back to Los Angeles from New York sends me a quick note telling me to enjoy living in the "best city in the world." Will do! The hosts of a panel I'm moderating need me to send over a three-line bio? Will do!

"Will do!" is just one of many Smart Replies that Google now provides as a default feature in Gmail, there to assist you in your message composition unless you choose to manually turn them off. In October, the e-mail service, which one analytics firm suggests hosts about a quarter of all the e-mails sent worldwide, made this feature standard on its 1.4 billion active accounts, along with a menu of other innovations. These include Smart Compose, a feature that finishes your sentences for you with the help of robot intelligence, and Nudges, a feature that bumps unanswered e-mails to the top of your in-box, making you feel increasingly guilty with every sign-in.

As with many technological updates that are suddenly imposed on unsuspecting users, the new Gmail interface has been met with much annoyance. When my in-box started offering me Smart Replies, I felt a little offended. How dare it guess what I want to say, I thought. I—a professional writer!—have more to offer than just "Got it!" or "Love it!" or "Thanks for letting me know!" (Smart Replies are big on exclamation points.) I started to resent the A.I., which seemed to be learning my speech patterns faster than I could outsmart it. Just as I decided that I'd thwart the machine mind by answering my messages with "Cool!," the service started offering me several "Cool" varieties. Suddenly, I could answer with "Sounds cool" or "Cool, thanks" or the dreaded "Cool, I'll check it out!" (Spoiler: I'm not going to check it out.)

My greatest anxiety about using Smart Replies, though, was that other people would know I was using them. I worried that my editors would see my "On it!" and feel like I was cruising on autopilot, or that my friends would get a "Perfect!" and feel like I didn't care enough about them to craft a finely tailored response. (This unease runs both ways: Has the editor who replies "This is great!" even bothered to read my fresh story draft?) Answering e-mails started to become more work than it used to be, as I labored to whip up artisanal one-liners. My typical response to a quick work e-mail—a straightforward, if somewhat Wally Cleaveresque, "Gotcha"—now sounded horrifically canned. I became baroque in my punctuation and capitalization ("LET A GAL KNOW!!!"), figuring that sounding like a deranged human was preferable to sounding like a computer server.

At some point, I started giving in to the Smart Reply robots from time to time, and something strange happened. I didn't hate it. I started delighting in how quickly I could get through the cumbersome busywork of getting back to the people who were waiting on me. A publicist wants to send over a galley of a book? Sure! My friends send a birth announcement, and I want to send a quick acknowledgement before taking the time to craft a longer note and send a gift? Congratulations! An old co-worker wants to find a time to catch up? Let's do it! I hadn't realized how many of my e-mails could be satisfactorily answered with only a few words of response. I'd avoided my in-box because I was overwhelmed by all the writing that I thought I had to do. But what if I could hone in on the notes that demanded truly thoughtful responses and slough off the rest?

E-mail is never going to be an ideal platform for self-expression. The medium is too tied up in labor, in the modern demand that we always be working and available to reply. When I asked people on Twitter what they thought of the feature, I got a fascinating range of responses: one woman said that she uses it only to help her avoid "conversational crutches," while another, who works in Silicon Valley, told me that she's found it's often men who have "the swagger to reply with one sentence," and that Smart Replies has helped even the playing field. But the most common response I received was from people who said that the feature was useful for answering e-mails while driving. E-mails have become, for many, indistinguishable from text messages, and not only in their effect on road safety. There are no beginnings, no ends, no formal introductions or sign-offs, just a series of rapid exchanges and the ever-present likelihood that the volley will come back your way, whether or not a robot is there to assist you.

The New Yorker 28/11/2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019 ANGLAIS - LVI

How California's Efforts to Prevent Wildfires Reflect a National Crisis on Climate Change

The California assemblyman Jim Wood spent most of the past week in the Sacramento morgue, analyzing the charred remains of human teeth. Wood is a forensic-dentistry expert, and has worked on some of the nation's most tragic events, including 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. "The numbers are so high, the conditions of the remains so fragmented, and the lack of before-death records is creating a real, real challenge," he told me. "There may be some people who are never identified." Of the eighty-five fatalities, twenty-seven have been identified, thanks in part to the work of Wood's team. The body count will likely continue to increase; two hundred and ninety-six people are still missing. "With this one," he told me, "the numbers of missing are not dropping as rapidly as they did in Sonoma, and I find that to be really troubling."

Wood's proximity to tragedy has influenced his work in the legislature. Earlier this year, he was part of a committee that crafted Senate Bill 901, which set aside a billion dollars for wildfire-prevention and safety efforts over the next five years. The money will come from California's cap-and-trade program, which auctions off allowances to greenhouse-gas emitters each quarter. Discussions on the bill began late last year, shortly after the Sonoma wildfires were put out. The elements to get it passed all seemed present: the state is rich, and the legislature, which has a Democratic majority, largely agrees that climate change is driving the increasing rate of large wildfires. And yet, as the months passed, the arguments over the bill's details only multiplied. "I got a little impatient," Wood said. "People are dying. I don't want us to see, five years from now, millions and millions more acres burned and untold numbers of more people dead."

The battle that Wood and other state legislators in California waged to pass urgently needed climate-adaptation legislation offers something like a best-case scenario for the challenges faced by the entire nation. On Friday, scientists with the federal government released a harrowing and voluminous national climate assessment. Heat waves, heavy precipitation, shrinking glaciers, rising and acidifying seas, coastal flooding, drought, and more frequent wildfires pose a rapidly increasing threat to Americans' physical, social, and economic well-being. By the end of the century, hundreds of billions of dollars could be lost each year, shrinking the U.S. economy by ten per cent. The annual average of billion-dollar disasters from 1980 to 2017 was six, but the annual average for the most recent five years is nearly twelve.

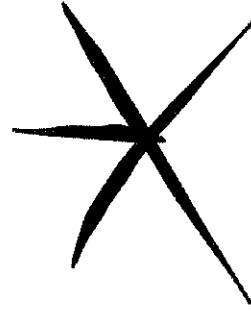
The climate assessment, similar to the United Nations report released last month, describes, in detail, region-specific climate impacts, but it also focusses on the failure of government to successfully adopt adaptation measures to address the devastating changes that are already locked in. Policymakers can no longer use the past climate as a guide. But, by and large, they still do. The weekend before Thanksgiving, Trump toured the ashes of Paradise, the California city destroyed by the Camp Fire, which, during a press conference, he twice referred to as "Pleasure," until Governor Jerry Brown and others corrected him. When a reporter asked if the devastation he had seen changed his opinion on climate change, Trump replied, "No. I have a strong opinion. I want great climate. We're going to have that, and we're going to have forests that are very safe."

California is a wealthy, Democratic state, and it's experiencing some of the most devastating impacts of climate change in the country, but local politics and sparring special-interest groups have been impediments to needed climate-adaptation legislation. Passing such bills will be harder in more conservative states and at the federal level, especially while Trump is in office, and increasingly difficult as climate conditions worsen. "The reality is, we haven't even had a breather between these tragedies," the California assemblyman Ash Kalra, who represents Silicon Valley, told me. "We've been just inundated constantly, one after another. Now we have the worst wildfire tragedy in our history. It's been more dealing with the immediate rather than what comes next."

Wood believes that Senate Bill 901 is a good start but still insufficient. In a report released in April, the California Legislative Analyst Office calculated that two hundred and eighty million dollars will be needed for wildfire prevention each year for the foreseeable future. "In 901, we were able to get two hundred million each year, for five years," Wood told me. "So am I satisfied? No, I'm not. We're well short of what we're going to need."

The New Yorker 26/11/2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.



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Turning the tide: Australia's aboriginals try a novel approach to fighting crime

Every day James Moore meets police at a community centre for aboriginal people in Bourke. He and the officers swap reports of trouble during the previous 24 hours. A local aboriginal himself, Mr Moore says he wants to change the mindset of the town, which had a romantic past as a booming river port but became better known for its rampant crime, especially among aboriginals. The daily briefings are part of a novel experiment aimed at making the town safer.

In its late-19th-century heyday, people called Bourke Australia's "Chicago of the west" because of its wealth from wool. But the white settlers who made it rich treated aboriginals with contempt, grabbing their land and trampling on their culture. Mr Moore blames the high crime rate among aboriginals on these historical abuses. But Australia's state governments have responded to such problems mainly by stressing the need for punishment. New South Wales, the most populous state, last year said it would spend A\$4bn (\$2.8bn) on building more prisons. Its government proudly called it the "largest single prison expansion in the state's history".

More sensitive approaches to curbing crime among aboriginals are unusual in Australia. Frustrated by this, and by the government's failure to reduce crime by jailing large numbers of people, aboriginals in Bourke decided to take matters into their own hands. About two years ago they started Australia's first big trial of "justice reinvestment", a scheme suggested by the Open Society Institute, a think-tank funded by George Soros, an American billionaire. It encourages governments to redirect some of the money earmarked for building more prisons towards projects that help people stay out of them.

The pilot seems to be working—albeit with funding from philanthropic outfits rather than prison budgets. The experiment was launched by Alistair Ferguson, a former civil servant of the Barkinji tribe, who said he was tired of "the constant revolving door of young people in handcuffs" at Bourke's courthouse.

One of the project's aims is to make young aboriginals feel more positive about their future. It offers them vocational training. Mr Moore takes groups of them into the outback* to immerse them in age-old, long-lost cultural practices. His daily meetings with police help him to identify young people who need support to prevent them from turning to crime. He liaises with school heads and social workers to ensure they get the attention they need. Importantly, it is the town's aboriginal people who are running the project. "This concept of allowing the community to be decision-makers has been here for thousands of years," Mr Ferguson says.

Local officials are pleased with the results. At a meeting of project leaders in July, police said domestic violence, as well as crimes committed by children, had fallen. School attendance has risen steadily; the number of students suspended from classes have dropped. Greg Moore, the local police chief, says the project has been crucial to achieving this. In March the Australian Law Reform Commission, a federal agency, said it wanted a national body to be set up to promote similar efforts elsewhere.

A report by KPMG, an auditor, says that the success of the Bourke experiment suggests that governments should pay. Even the prison-loving government of New South Wales sounds keen. Brad Hazzard, its health minister, says Bourke has found "the most likely recipe for success". But his government has yet to agree to put prison money into it.

* Outback is the colloquial name for the vast, unpopulated and mainly arid areas that comprise Australia's interior and remote coasts.

The Economist, 15 September 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVII

Scientific publishing: European countries demand that publicly funded research be free

Many scientists have championed the idea that publicly funded research should be available to all and not locked away in pricey journals. Although this “open access” ethos has become more popular in recent years, most researchers’ work remains fenced off by an online paywall. That may change with a radical European initiative unveiled earlier this month.

Eleven European countries, including Britain, France and the Netherlands, have signed up to what is called “Plan S”. This requires scientists who benefit from those countries’ national-research funding organisations to publish their work only in open-access journals on freely accessible websites by 2020. That would in turn prevent papers from appearing in around 85% of periodicals, including some of the most esteemed, such as *Nature* and *Science*. Plan S was forged under the aegis of Science Europe, an umbrella group of European research funders. Marc Schiltz, its president, takes a muscular stance. “Monetising the access to new and existing research results is profoundly at odds with the ethos of science,” he has written.

Not surprisingly, publishers have given Plan S a frosty reception. The policy “potentially undermines the whole research publishing system,” said Springer Nature, which publishes more than 3,000 journals, including *Nature*. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), which publishes *Science*, said it would “disrupt scholarly communications, be a disservice to researchers, and impinge academic freedom”.

That is not what Robert-Jan Smits thinks. He is the European Commission’s open-access envoy and is pushing Plan S hard (the “S” can stand for “science, speed, solution, shock”, he says). Shock is certainly right. Plan S would, after a short period, also prohibit publication in “hybrid” journals that make papers free online provided the authors pay a fee (a subscription is required for readers to access other papers). Publishers argue that this mixed model has helped to open up established subscription journals and is a useful stepping stone to full open access. Critics say hybrids have simply inflated publishers’ profits by allowing some journals both to charge scientists to publish and libraries to subscribe.

Another point of contention is that the publication fees which scientists pay to open-access journals would be capped across Europe. A figure has yet to be set, but the International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers, which represents 145 publishers, believes this could reduce the level of peer review that journals could afford, and thus undermine quality. Backing up that view, the AAAS argues that a wholesale switch from subscriptions to open access would be “unsustainable” for the group.

Plan S is not yet a done deal. Agreements will be needed for how the terms of future grants will be changed. A middle way might be found. One possibility is that universities will be able to post peer-reviewed papers online as soon as they are accepted for publication, while libraries would continue to pay for the final typeset versions.

In the meantime, momentum is on the side of the reformers. Horizon Europe, the European Union’s seven-year, multi-billion-euro research programme, which begins in 2021, may well have requirements akin to Plan S. Mr Smits is off to America in October to lobby funding agencies there to sign up to the plan. If he succeeds, then the era of the subscription journal, which began with the publication in 1665 of the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions*, may come to an abrupt end.

The Economist, 15 September 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019
ANGLAIS - LVII

Whom should self-driving cars protect in an accident?

The trolley problem used to be an obscure question in philosophical ethics. It runs as follows: a trolley, or a train, is speeding down a track towards a junction. Some moustache-twirling evildoer has tied five people to the track ahead, and another person to the branch line. You are standing next to a lever that controls the junction. Do nothing, and the five people will be killed. Pull the lever, and only one person dies. What is the ethical course of action?

The excitement around self-driving cars, though, has made the problem famous. A truly self-driving car, after all, will have to be given ethical instructions of some sort by its human programmers. That has led to a miniature boom for the world's small band of professional ethicists, who suddenly find themselves in hot demand.

In a paper just published in *Nature*, a team of psychologists and computer scientists describe a different approach. Rather than asking the small band of philosophers for their thoughts, this team, led by Edmond Awad of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), decided instead to ask the general public.

They created the *Moral Machine*, a website which presents visitors with a series of choices about whom to save and whom to kill. In one, for instance, a self-driving car experiences brake failure ahead of a pedestrian crossing. If it carries on in a straight line, a man, a woman and two homeless people of unspecified sex will be run down. If it swerves, the death count will be the same, but the victims will be two women and two male business executives. What should the car do?

The team hoped to gather results from as many people as possible, from all over the world. The website proved a hit. In the end it gathered nearly 40m decisions made by people from 233 countries, territories or statelets. The strongest preferences, expressed by respondents from all over the world, were for saving human lives over animal ones, preferring to save many rather than few and prioritising children over the old. There were weaker preferences for saving women over men, pedestrians over passengers in the car and for taking action rather than doing nothing. Criminals were seen as literally subhuman—ranking below dogs in the public's priority list, but above cats. It is easy to imagine the utilitarian argument for preserving the lives of doctors over others.

Preferences differed between countries. The researchers found that the world's countries clustered into three broad categories, which they dubbed "Western", covering North America and the culturally Christian countries of Europe, "Eastern", including the Middle East, India and China, and "Southern", covering Latin America and many of France's former colonial possessions. Countries in the Eastern cluster, for instance, showed a weaker preference for sparing the young over the elderly, while the preference for humans over animals was less pronounced in Southern nations. Self-driving cars, it seems, may need the ability to download new moralities when they cross national borders.

Iyad Rahwan, a computer scientist at MIT says that many people dismiss the trolley problem as a piece of pointless hypothesising that is highly unlikely to arise in real life. He is unconvinced. The specific situations posed by the website may hardly ever occur, he says. But all sorts of choices made by the firms producing self-driving cars will affect who lives and who dies in indirect, statistical ways.

The Economist, 27 October 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVII

Australia's frontier war killings still conveniently escape official memory

Australia has a memory problem. What it chooses to publicly remember through its special officially sanctioned days and events of remembrance illustrates equally its capacity for willful forgetting. This has been a big year for official Australian remembrance: 230 years since British invasion on 26 January 1788, and a century since the end of the first world war, a global conflagration that Australia has nonetheless chosen to mark with a parochial \$600m, four-year festival of commemoration, Anzac 100.¹ No other country has gone so over the top or spent so much money on each dead soldier as part of its first world war commemorations.

Other critical elements in Australian history, meanwhile, conveniently escape the official memory in all its manifestations. This is especially so of the thousands of massacres, shootings and poisonings of this country's Indigenous in the name of European civilisation – an oxymoron on this continent when it came to the devastating impact of colonial “settlement” on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Still, dozens of unofficial monuments have been erected – symbols of community-inspired commemoration of the darkest events in our colonial and post-federation history. On certain days of the year people gather at these places to remember happenings that the Commonwealth would gladly keep confined to memory's outer corners, subsumed into the category of “other” history, overshadowed by Anzac and the myths of benign settlement around 1788.

This weekend it is 180 years since white stockmen murdered 28 unarmed Aboriginal men, women and children at Myall Creek in northern New South Wales. The Myall Creek massacre was part of a pattern of violence against Indigenous people; hundreds of such massacres happened across the continent from 1788 as British soldiers, settlers and pioneering explorers clashed with Indigenous people resisting pastoral expansion. By some credible accounts at least 60,000 Indigenous people – roughly the same number as Australians killed in the First World War – died.

Myall Creek was, however, remarkable for another reason. It was the only time on the colonial frontier that non-Indigenous men were successfully prosecuted for murdering Aboriginal people. Seven perpetrators were eventually hanged. Each year the commemoration at Myall Creek gains more official recognition. One of the event's organisers, Graeme Cordiner, estimates up to 1,000 people will turn up this year from different parts of the country to take part in what is evolving into a significant moment of black/white conciliation and an act of broader remembrance for all killed in Australian frontier conflict.

“For Aboriginal people - and non-Aboriginal people – rather than a site to avoid, it now has become a place of healing, a totally different energy. Myall Creek does not exist in a vacuum. It is prominent in Australian consciousness because it was the one and only massacre brought to book. But there were so many more. As such we have a national responsibility, with others, to tell the story of the Frontier Wars.” The Myall Creek commemoration is emblematic of a broader push for the official recognition of frontier war deaths.

But as yet there is no official Commonwealth memorial to the dead of the frontier wars in Canberra, the capital, whose monuments and institutions also serve as a national memory. But it will happen, just as inevitably as the date of Australia Day is bound to change from the day of invasion, 26 January.

The Guardian, 8 June 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

¹ Anzac Day: Also known as Australia Day, January 26th is the anniversary of the first campaign that led to major casualties for Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVII

You might think there are more vegetarians than ever. You'd be wrong.

The number of Americans who self-identify as vegetarian or vegan has remained steady over the past 20 years — and it's still a pretty small group, according to a recent Gallup poll.

Five percent of Americans identify as vegetarian, a rate that has remained unchanged since the previous survey in 2012. In 1999, when the survey was first taken, as well as in 2001, 6 percent of Americans identified as vegetarian. Rates of veganism have followed a similar trajectory. This year, 3 percent of respondents identified as vegan — a slight increase from 2 percent in 2012.

What's remarkable is how little has changed, even as our food culture and habits have evolved over the past 20 years. In 1999, there were no "Meatless Mondays," no Pinterest, no "Food, Inc.," no fast-casual salad places. Information about a vegetarian diet — at least for middle- and upper-class people who have more dietary choices — has seemingly never been more abundant. But it's not resulting in any noticeable increase in the rate at which people adopt the diet — a fact that may prove either galvanizing or discouraging for plant-based advocacy groups.

It may be bad news for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), but one thing the survey doesn't take into account is how many people are eating less meat, a figure that may prove to be just as important over time. Flexitarianism — the term was coined in the early 2000s — is the practice of reducing the amount of meat you eat or eating meat only with certain meals. A recent British study found that one-third of all dinners in the United Kingdom are meatless. And there are more options than ever before: Market research firm Mintel found that the number of new vegetarian products introduced to the market doubled between 2009 and 2013. According to Gallup, sales of plant-based food grew 8.1 percent in 2017 and exceeded \$3.1 billion last year.

Studies have found that semi-vegetarian diets have a positive effect on weight loss, diabetes prevention and blood pressure. And even though some vegetarians might classify flexitarianism as cheating, the label may help people adhere to a more plant-based diet without feeling as though they are failing if they slip up. "The 'flexitarian,' 'climatarian' and 'reducetarian' movements mean there are three more clubs out there helping people work toward goals to improve the health of their bodies and the planet," wrote Brian Kateman for the *Atlantic*. Still, a separate Mintel survey found that 51 percent of Americans think a meal is not complete without meat. (And, given the hostility toward some of *The Washington Post's* vegetarian recipes — carrot dogs, anyone? — that mentality seems difficult to change.)

People younger than 50 are slightly more likely to be vegetarian or vegan than older people. And people who make less than \$30,000 a year are likelier to follow either one of the diets — a factor that may be related to age, as well as financial decision-making, as meat adds expense to an already-tight grocery budget. People who make more than \$75,000 a year are less likely to self-identify with either diet. And, confirming all of the Fox News stereotypes, Gallup found that there are far more liberal vegetarians and vegans — approximately 1 in 10 liberals don't eat meat — than conservative ones.

The Washington Post, 3 August 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019
ANGLAIS - LVII

Amazon is hiring fewer workers this holiday season, a sign that robots are replacing them

Amazon is staffing up for the holiday rush with around 100,000 additional hires. As big as that number sounds, it's actually fewer people than the e-commerce giant added in either the 2016 or 2017 holiday seasons, when it brought in 120,000 additional workers.

Citi analyst Mark May says he thinks the reduction in seasonal hiring is strong evidence that Amazon is succeeding with plans to automate operations in its warehouses.

"We've seen an acceleration in the use of robots within their fulfillment centers, and that has corresponded with fewer and fewer workers that they're hiring around the holidays," May told CNBC on Nov. 2. He added that 2018 is the "first time on record" Amazon plans to hire fewer holiday workers than it did the previous year.

"Since the last holiday season, we've focused on more ongoing full-time hiring in our fulfillment centers and other facilities," Amazon spokesperson Ashley Robinson said in an email, adding that the company has "created over 130,000 jobs" in the last year. "We are proud to have created over 130,000 new jobs in the last year alone."

Amazon bought robotics company Kiva Systems for \$775 million in 2012, and began using its orange robots in warehouses in late 2014. By mid-2016, it had become clear just how big a difference those robots were making. The little orange guys could handle in 15 minutes the sorting, picking, packing, and shipping that used to take human workers an hour or more to complete. In June 2016, Deutsche Bank predicted Kiva automation could save Amazon nearly \$2.5 billion (those savings dropped to \$880 million after accounting for the costs of installing robots in every warehouse).

Robinson said Amazon has added 300,000 full-time jobs since 2012. "It's a myth that automation replaces jobs and destroys net job growth," she said by email. "Our teams work alongside more than 100,000 robots at over 26 fulfillment centers worldwide and we are excited to continue increasing the technology we use at our sites while growing our global workforce."

The success of robots thus far may also have contributed to Amazon's Oct. 2 decision to raise its minimum wage to \$15 an hour for all US employees, affecting around 250,000 full-time employees and 100,000 seasonal workers. That move is less financially risky if Amazon sees itself rapidly replacing these human workers with robots and other automated systems.

In an Oct. 15 research note, Morgan Stanley analyst Brian Nowak was optimistic about Amazon's ability to offset higher wages through automation. Nowak noted that Kiva robots were already enabling smaller Amazon warehouses to handle the same capacity as other centers, and leading to a drop in fulfillment costs. "We think improved fulfillment efficiency is set to offset the aforementioned wage increase," he wrote. In other words, the 2018 holiday season could be a sign of what's to come.

Quartz, 2 November 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVII

Fake views? What we can learn from the V&A's Cast Courts

The full-scale replica of Trajan's Column that stands in two halves in the Victoria and Albert Museum's Cast Courts¹ has always been an outstanding object to come across indoors. Now its interior is about to reveal a steampunk² secret. As part of the restoration of the Cast Courts, which reopen this weekend, a door has been opened at the base of this monument. What can be in there? The darkness reveals a chimney. It turns out that with typically Victorian practicality the creators of the Cast Courts built two solid brick cylinders like industrial chimney stacks to support the two halves of this ancient – and modern – wonder.

Why did they do it? Why did the Victorians not only create this stupendous replica of one of Rome's most sublime monuments but fill two vast rooms in South Kensington (London) with full-size casts of everything from the ceremonial doors of Santiago de Compostela's cathedral to Michelangelo's David? The answer is all around you as you meditate inside Trajan's Column. The Cast Courts are relics of a cultural Europhilia that's clearly not shared by modern Britain. These loving educational artworks bear witness to a passion to know, to see, and most of all to understand the cultural heritage of Europe: to bring the continent's artistic jewels to these rainy shores.

Just a handful of British monuments are replicated – including medieval effigies of knights from London's Templar Church, which are precious because the originals were badly damaged in the blitz. German art treasures are displayed near the Templar effigies. From Germany we jump to Prague in a black replica of the Czech city's 14th-century statue of *St George Slaying the Dragon*. There are even several copies of wonderful works from Belgium itself, the dreary home and of EU sterility.

Long before the foundation of the EU, the Victoria and Albert Museum was at the forefront of a pan-European cultural movement. In 1867, its first director Henry Cole got 19 European rulers to sign a treaty that committed them to exchanging copies of their countries' art treasures. It's hard to enter the mentality of Cole and his contemporaries. We're tempted to see these casts as postmodern proof that a "fake" is as good as the real thing. Which is in fact the opposite of what the Victorians intended. The point of these casts is to help you learn Europe's art history – to study, from the best examples, the Romanesque, gothic, and Renaissance – so that when, if, you can travel for yourself to Granada or Florence, you will know what you are looking at.

The Victoria and Albert Museum's comprehensive restoration of these masterly copies, freeing them from dust and equipping them with modern labels and a new section on the history and technology of artistic reproduction, is true to that original purpose. Henry Cole hoped that visitors to the V&A would be inspired by its cast of David to go to Italy and see the original, so much more alive and powerful than any copy. It's a sad irony that these galleries reopen as Britain stumbles towards exit from the EU.

These galleries are full of monuments to a Britain that understood and acknowledged its European cultural heritage and was full of passion for the continent's art. The Europe we are rejecting is preserved here in a time capsule. If we could truly understand what made our ancestors create this plaster-cast theme park we might start to heal the narrowing of the British mind. There is a melancholy to casts. From death masks to sepulchral sculptures, casting preserves what has been lost. A face, a house – or Europe.

The Guardian, 27 November 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

¹ Cast Courts: Two large halls in the Victoria and Albert Museum that house a collection of reproductions of some of the most famous sculptures in the world.

² Steampunk: A style of design and fashion that combines historical elements with anachronistic technological features inspired by science fiction.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019
ANGLAIS - LVII**Slavery and justice – Redress is the key in addressing the sins of the past**

1838 was a big year in South Africa's colonial history for land acquisition and race relations. It was the year that a bunch of white settlers fleeing "liberal" British rule in the Cape in ox-wagons, fought running battles with and ultimately defeated the Zulu army at Blood River. It was also an important year for education in the United States; the year that the Jesuit Society of Maryland raised a small fortune from the sale of 272 slaves to Louisiana plantation owners to fund prestigious Georgetown University's debts. The descendants of the people involved in events such as these have never recovered the losses their ancestors suffered. As one bright spark at an international conference on the reverberations of history at Stellenbosch University put it: when African-Americans emerged from slavery, poverty and prison cells were waiting.

How should societies fix the cataclysmic consequences of these events? How do societies compensate people – generations later – not only for the physical violence and loss of life and land, but also the losses of dignity and opportunity? In South Africa we believe some of the answers lie in land redistribution and more accessible education. And, of course, a booming capitalist economy creating jobs. But we're not quite sure how far back redress should reach. Dr Linda Mann, of Columbia University, in her presentation on the Georgetown Memory Project to the Recognition, Reparation, Reconciliation – The Light and Shadow of Historical Trauma conference, said racial injustice continued to permeate every aspect of life in her native US, from education to economy to life expectancy.

Since 2003, when Brown University established a "slavery and justice" project to study its past dependence on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, about 40 other universities have begun examining their histories afresh. While enormous progress has been made in acknowledging sins of the past and tracking down descendants of the original victims, answers on appropriate redress remain elusive. Dr. Mann mentioned reorienting history, large-scale oral history projects, generational case studies, developing policies of atonement and reparation, developing new university legacy admissions policies for descendants, and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in a bag of possible solutions.

The Georgetown Memory Project was not tied to any single university or institution, she said. Between 1717 and 1838, the Society of Jesuits of Maryland engaged in large-scale slaveholding to fund, among other things, the establishment of what were then Jesuit Colleges. In its project to identify the descendants of those slaves, The Georgetown Memory Project had embarked on the most extensive genealogical search in US history. Thus far, the movements of 211 of the 272 original slaves had been traced and more than 7,100 descendants identified, of whom 3,100 were alive today. Most of them bore no knowledge of their familial ties to one of America's top universities.

After discovering their family's traceable history a number of descendants had hired lawyers to demand reparations, she said. But what kind of reparations? Memorials and contrition ceremonies at sites of conflicted sentiment wouldn't mean much to descendants living hundreds of miles away today.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019
ANGLAIS - LVII**Facebook is “failing its black employees and users” says a manager leaving the company**

Shortly before his last day as a Facebook employee, Mark Luckie, a manager focused on diversity in its partnerships, sent out a company-wide memo about Facebook’s “black people problem.” In the 2,600-word note, Luckie, himself African-American, outlined how Facebook ignores and mistreats its black users and employees alike, and how its diversity initiatives are lacking. Luckie’s full title at Facebook was “Strategic Partner Manager for Global Influencers focused on Underrepresented Voices” and he was at the company just over a year, according to his LinkedIn page. Luckie, who says he quit the company because he was burned out and frustrated, sent the note Nov. 8 and posted it to his Facebook page Nov. 27.

“In some buildings, there are more “Black Lives Matter” posters than there are actual black people,” he writes, adding that hiring employees focused on diversity is not enough. The company’s culture needs to change in a more fundamental way. He outlines how black employees face discrimination in their day-to-day work. “A few black employees have reported being specifically dissuaded by their managers from becoming active in the [internal] Black@ group or doing “Black stuff,” even if it happens outside of work hours,” he wrote, adding that several times a day his Facebook coworkers instinctively grab their wallets if they happen to walk by him.

Although he touts some of Facebook’s diversity work, he says some of the efforts are under-resourced. For those hired for these initiatives “their work devolves into serving as an address book to add a few names of color to projects,” he writes. “Efforts that promote inclusion, not just diversity, are being halted at the managerial level.”

Facebook reports its diversity numbers every year. The number of black and Hispanic employees this year increased from 2% to 4% and 4% to 5%, respectively, the company says. In an email, Anthony Harrison, a Facebook spokesperson says the company is “working diligently” to include more diverse perspectives. “We want to fully support all employees when there are issues reported and when there may be micro-behaviors that add up. We are going to keep doing all we can to be a truly inclusive company,” he said.

The internal situation at Facebook mirrors how the company treats its black users, Luckie writes. Black communities are some of the most engaged on the platform, but this is not reflected in the company’s outreach efforts. Their speech is suppressed, he says, pointing to examples of activists’ accounts getting suspended. And there’s also a more basic problem when determining where to allocate resources, ranking data such as followers, greatest number of likes and shares, or yearly revenue are employed to scale features and products. The problem with this approach is Facebook teams are effectively giving more resources to the people who already have them. In doing so, Facebook is increasing the disparity of access between legacy individuals/brands and minority communities.

You can see this, for example, in the influencers and creators who appear in the Explore tab on Instagram, or in those who are verified on Facebook’s platforms, he says. At the end of the memo, he enumerates his recommendations, from general to specific, like creating a system for employees to anonymously report microaggressions and organize more focus groups with underrepresented communities.

Quartz, 27 November 2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVII

Walmart's latest hire: Robotic janitors that clean floors and collect data

Walmart's latest custodial tool may look like a mini Zamboni, but it's more like a Roomba, the robotic sweeper sliding across floors worldwide. This week, the big-box retailer announced plans to place 360 autonomous robots inside Walmarts across the country by the end of January. Their job: scrubbing the store's expansive aisles and collecting data in the process. The robot custodians are powered by Brain Corp, a San Diego-based technology company that has partnered with Walmart. The retailer already has a fleet of more than 100 of the devices operating inside its stores.

"We're excited to work with Brain Corp in supporting our retail operations and providing our associates with a safe and reliable technology," John Crecelius, Walmart's vice president of central operations, said in a statement online. "BrainOS is a powerful tool in helping our associates complete repetitive tasks so they can focus on other tasks within role and spend more time serving customers."

The floor scrubbers use sensors that can perceive the surrounding environment. Before the scrubbers can be set free, a Walmart employee is required for an initial "training ride" that creates a map of different routes the machine can follow inside the store, the company said. Once the robot is in use, the machine can scan its surroundings for people and obstacles, the company said, noting that the machines can operate in crowded environments. The robots look fairly one-dimensional in nature, but their onboard sensors allow them to collect useful analytical data, the company said. The data may prove useful, providing the company with information about peak shopping hours or "which shelves are empty," as a Walmart spokesman told NBC News.

In autonomous mode, the scrubber tops out at 2 mph, which is about 1 mph slower than walking speed for the average adult. But blazing speed is hardly the point, Alan Smith, a Walmart assistant manager, said in a video produced by the company. Smith said that the machines — which weigh about 620 pounds each — include yellow "safety guards" that deter shoppers from hopping onboard for a slow-moving joyride that can last up to four hours. Assuming it's free of customer tampering, a flashing yellow light, electronic beeping and up to 165 pounds of brush pad pressure ensue. "The two hours that somebody would have had to walk behind the scrubber is now two hours that they can be doing something else in the store," Smith added.

Automation will allow workers to perform new tasks in some industries, but it won't stop millions of people from needing to switch occupations or upgrade their skills in the coming years, according to a McKinsey Global Institute report released last year.

The report estimates that as many as 800 million people may lose their jobs to robots by 2030. Some of those jobs sound a lot like cleaning floors at Walmart. "Activities most susceptible to automation include physical ones in predictable environments, such as operating machinery and preparing fast food," the report states. "Collecting and processing data are two other categories of activities that increasingly can be done better and faster with machines."

The Washington Post 04/12/2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVII

New gallery will be first in a Smithsonian museum to focus on U.S. Latino experience

The Smithsonian announced Thursday that it will open its first gallery focused on the U.S. Latino experience, in the National Museum of American History. Opening in 2021 on the museum's first floor, the Molina Family Latino Gallery will feature bilingual exhibits exploring the history and contributions of American Latinos. A \$10 million gift from the five children of the late California physician and entrepreneur C. David Molina is funding the 4,500-square-foot space.

The permanent gallery has been a long-term goal of the Smithsonian Latino Center, which was founded in 1997 to work with the institution's other museums and research centers to recognize Latino contributions. With nine staff members, the center supports professional development and education programs for Latino youths, scholars and museum professionals; funds exhibitions and education programs; and creates Web-based content.

Advocates supporting a stand-alone Latino museum welcomed the announcement, saying it represents significant progress in their effort. "It's wonderful. This is exactly the road the African American Museum took. They also had a gallery in the American History Museum," said Estuardo Rodriguez, executive director of the advocacy group Friends of the American Latino Museum. "We run on parallel tracks, and we will point to that in our efforts to fundraise and to pass legislation for [a museum]."

The Smithsonian does not back the creation of a new museum, but there is growing support in Congress for a Smithsonian Latino museum, and members greeted the news of the new gallery with optimism. "I applaud the Smithsonian's efforts to create a space to honor and display the rich contributions that Latinos and Latinas have made to this country since its very inception," Sen. Robert Menendez who introduced legislation last year to create a museum, said in an email. "I am convinced now, more than ever, that the Smithsonian Institution has the capacity to fill an entire state-of-the-art museum dedicated to the American Latino in the near future. This is a great first step."

Rep. Joaquin Castro said the gallery and the donors behind it prove "there is an appetite to showcase the uniqueness of the American Latino experience and strong funding opportunities to make it a reality." At a ceremonial signing of the donor agreement Thursday, Eduardo Díaz, the director of the Smithsonian Latino Center, said the gallery in the American History Museum would allow the center to connect directly with visitors. "Establishing a dedicated space is no small task, and it isn't inexpensive," Díaz said. The five siblings signed the agreement with Smithsonian Secretary David J. Skorton, who said the gallery would help the Smithsonian "do a better job of telling the complete story of America."

The gallery will honor the donors' father, Díaz said, but also propel the center's efforts to educate and inform the world about the Latino experience. "We will recover the past, engage the present and imagine the future," Díaz said of the exhibitions. The inaugural exhibit, tentatively titled "Making Home: Latino Stories of Community and Belonging," will focus on the contributions of Latinos by showing how they "are anchored in United States history," said Randal Woodaman, the center's exhibitions and public programs director. It will begin in Colonial North America and extend to the present day, he said. "We want to expand people's notions of what it means to be Latino," he said. "It's not this homogenous experience. It depends on where you're from. We want to show how we came together under this big label."

The Washington Post 06/12/2018

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ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVII

'Glimmer Of Hope' For Great Barrier Reef As Study Shows Tolerance To Climate Change

The Great Barrier Reef fared better during an oceanic heat wave last year than during sizzling weather a year earlier that caused hundreds of miles of corals to bleach, according to a study published Monday that suggests the massive structure may be growing more tolerant to climate change. The report in the journal *Nature Climate Change* analyzed how corals along the Great Barrier fared in back-to-back mass bleaching events. The reef — a UNESCO

World Heritage Site and the largest living structure on the planet — was cooked by overheated seawater in 2016 and again in 2017, with images of sickly white coral horrifying people around the globe. During the first event, which scientists likened to an underwater apocalypse, almost 30 percent of the reef died.

But the second event last year, which saw seas even hotter than 2016 in many places, didn't harm the reef as badly as scientists expected. They speculated that the structure may be going through a forced evolution that has helped toughen it, at least in part. "The good news is the Barrier Reef glass is still half-full," said Terry Hughes, a lead author of the study and the director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies. "Whether we'll still have reefs in 50 years time ... there's a glimmer of hope that we will."

Hughes noted that many of the corals that fared better last year were tougher species that aren't as susceptible to coral bleaching. Other, more vulnerable species were wiped out in some parts of the reef early on. "Dead corals can't re-bleach," he observed. "That's a bit of a silver lining," Hughes said. "There's a prospect for acclimation, there might be an evolutionary response [among corals] that can make a mix that's tougher." Bleaching happens when coral effectively gets cooked by seawater, forcing delicate algae that live inside the coral's colorful skeleton to flee. That leaves the structure ghostly white. Bleached corals aren't dead, and can recover if ocean temperatures return to normal. But prolonged periods of hot water can kill them and devastate entire reefs.

Hughes and his colleagues, including researchers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, the Australian Institute for Marine Science and James Cook University, said the study shows that time is running out to address the reef's health. A recent report by the United Nations scientific panel on climate change warned of a mass die-off of coral reefs as early as 2040, and a study released last week found the planet emitted more greenhouse gasses — the main driver of climate change — in 2018 than in any other time in history.

Scientists have warned that the world must limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels if the planet hopes to stave off the worst effects of climate change, a prospect that looks increasingly unlikely. Hughes has long warned that the Great Barrier, already knocked on its back by warming seas, may not have much fight left. "Clearly there's no time to lose," he said. "We did lose half the corals in just two years. By any measure that's an incredible loss."

The Huffington Post 11/12/2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019

ANGLAIS - LVII

The EPA Is Planning to Jeopardize the Water Quality for 117 Million Americans

The Trump administration unveiled a proposal on Tuesday weakening federal water protections for millions of acres of streams, wetlands, and waterways that will likely affect the drinking water for more than one-third of Americans. While the Trump administration specifically targeted the 2015 Obama-era rule known as the Clean Water Rule, or Waters of the United States, the proposal goes further in rolling back environmental oversight than has occurred with any president since Ronald Reagan.

The EPA and the US Army Corps of Engineers proposal, now open to 60 days of public comment, dramatically restricts which bodies of water fall under the 1972 Clean Water Act regulations. The 2015 Obama rule expanded the definition to include 2 million more acres of streams and 20 million more acres of wetlands, triggering years of backlash and lawsuits led by agriculture, real estate developers, and other industries. The proposal announced today will limit Clean Water Act regulations to major waterways, their tributaries, and adjacent wetland, but will exempt other wetlands and streams that flow seasonally during heavy rainfall. These would be subject to wide-ranging state and local oversight, if any. Today's proposal also replaces a Bush-era rule that subjected some of these streams to regulations if they are significantly connected to navigable waters—a rule that has been in place for half the country.

Conservative critics have waged a proxy fight against the Clean Water Rule by framing it as government overreach undermining the rights of farmers and local government. A common talking point was to claim the EPA wanted to regulate “puddles” after it rained on farmland. But in some areas, the so-called puddles—now exempt from the Clean Water Act—involved over half the water flowing into major rivers, explains Blan Holman, managing attorney in Southern Environmental Law Center.

Obviously, acting EPA head Wheeler is not bragging that the rule will compromise water quality. “Our proposal would ensure that our water protections—among the best in the world—will remain strong while giving states and tribes the certainty to manage their waterways in ways that best protect their natural resources and economies,” he said in his speech. When the rule is finalized there will be lawsuits challenging him on his claims that it will leave the water protections in the US as strong as ever.

The announcement also marks a recent shift in the Trump administration's deregulatory push, as it is beginning to cement its legacy. Scott Pruitt was only able to kickstart dozens of rollbacks during his tumultuous tenure, since regulations can take as long to undo as they take to promulgate. Given Wheeler's likely Senate confirmation as the head of the EPA, the former coal lobbyist can see that mission through to the end, by replacing Obama-era rules with much weaker versions. Recently, the EPA has moved forward with undoing climate regulations for cars, and new and existing coal-fired plants. Meanwhile, the Interior Department has weakened the Endangered Species Act and is accelerating drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

There are mounting lawsuits from Trump's opponents challenging these decisions, and a handful of wins so far when courts have found agencies violated administrative procedures in their rush to deregulate. The agency's required public comment period often plays another role in the rule's fate—the first 2015 Obama proposal considered more than 1 million public comments. “I've been watching this circus for a while now and I don't hear any mention of science,” Holman says. “They're drawing lines based on political desire.”

Mother Jones 11/12/2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.

ORAL CONCOURS 2019 ANGLAIS - LVII

Researchers Found a Cheap, Surprisingly Effective Way to Get More Low-Income Students Into College

The sticker price of college is increasing, but for low-income students, financial aid programs can make some of the most competitive schools the most affordable. Yet the maze of application forms and fees dissuades many high-achieving, low-income students from applying at all. Studies have found as many as 40 percent of incoming students do not attend the most competitive school they could get into, and that this “undermatching” phenomenon is driven by students’ application choices rather than schools’ admissions decisions. A new working paper suggests that removing those barriers with a promise of financial aid can significantly increase the number of low-income students who apply to and enroll in a selective college. Researchers at the University of Michigan designed an experiment to see how a relatively low-cost intervention could affect where high-school seniors went to college. The school sent personalized mailers to high-achieving, low-income students, their parents, and their principals, telling them that if the students got into UM they’d get full tuition because they qualified for a High Achieving Involved Leader Scholarship.

Of the students who received the letters, 67 percent applied to UM—more than twice the rate of the control group, made up of similar students who only got a postcard informing them of the school’s application deadlines. The group that heard about the scholarship was also twice as likely to enroll at UM; 27 percent of them did. The mailer’s effect stunned the researchers, led by Susan Dynarski, a professor of public policy. Past research suggested that the most effective ways to change a student’s college decisions required “boots on the ground” involvement, like one-on-one mentoring, Dynarski says. The scholarship letters, in contrast, cost less than \$10 each. While many colleges, including prestigious state schools and Ivy League schools, send out information on financial aid to students with high test scores, Dynarski says the scholarship letter’s explicit promise of a full tuition was a new approach.

Beyond the low cost of producing and mailing the letters, Dynarski notes, the program did not require any additional spending. The students who applied through the scholarship likely would have been able to attend UM without paying out of pocket, even without the pre-admissions commitment to cover their tuitions. Ninety percent of students with similar financial and academic profiles at the university are on full-tuition scholarships.

The study also found that the high school seniors who ended up at UM were not poached from other competitive four-year colleges. Instead, the students who were not contacted went to less selective colleges, community colleges, or did not pursue higher education at all. Dynarski cautions that the study’s takeaway is not as simple as “outreach and information make a difference,” but rather that the school committed to offering qualified students a full scholarship that depends only on admission and not additional financial aid forms. Her coauthor, Syracuse University professor Katherine Micheltore, said that while other schools send similar recruitment letters that provide information on scholarships, none are explicit guarantees to students who still might question whether they could afford to attend. “Our letters were personalized, so they think this isn’t just spam. This is us, reaching out to you specifically, convincing the students that this was a real promise,” Micheltore explains.

Dynarski said she hopes to replicate the study in other settings, and noted that both public and private schools could successfully recruit more promising low-income students with an outreach program like UM’s.

Mother Jones 12/12/2018

This article has been edited for exam purposes.