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Jesy Nelson 'Blackfishing' Controversy: How to Appreciate, not Appropriate, Black Culture

Former Little Mix singer Jesy Nelson has found herself at the centre of 'blackfishing' allegations after releasing her first solo music video, Boyz. The video – featuring Nicki Minaj – shows Nelson with what some people are calling a darker skin tone than usual and big curly hair, as well as wearing another style with braids.

During a recent Instagram Live the 30-year-old credited her tan to a recent holiday in Antigua and added: "I personally want to say that my intention was never, ever to offend people of colour with this video and my song because like I said, growing up as a young girl, this is the music that I listened to. "These are the videos that I watched and thought were the best. For me personally, '90s/2000 hip hop, R&B music was the best era of music. I just wanted to celebrate that. I just wanted to celebrate that era of music because it is what I love." The comments came after reports Nelson's former bandmate Leigh-Anne Pinnoch warned her about blackfishing.

Kubi Springer, CEO of SheBuildsBrands (shebuildsbrands.com), describes blackfishing as "where somebody who is not of the ethnicity they are replicating, and do not give enough kudos and credits to its origins, and try and mimic it rather than being inspired by it". Blackfishing is often reduced to having a dark tan, but it's wider reaching than that. "If we take it to Jesy's video, one could argue it's the braids in her hair, it's the Afro extensions," explains Springer. "She's not in the video as a pale-skinned, brown-haired white lady – she's in the video as a tan-skinned, Afro-haired white lady."

Nelson's song also strongly draws on hip hop and R&B – genres created by black musicians. For Springer, who has worked with P Diddy, Beyoncé and Mariah Carey over her career, blackfishing can be damaging "because historically, particularly in the music, entertainment and fashion industries, blacks and ethnic minorities who have maybe been the birth of the art form don't get the credit necessary", she says. "We have seen this time and time again, where it's on the fringes of pop culture when it's a dark-skinned person – but it becomes mainstream when it's [someone who is] lighter-skinned and definitely commercially successful when it's somebody who is white that does it." Springer gives the example of Elvis Presley bringing rock and roll to the mainstream, when it originated from black musicians.

Another issue Springer raises is how black culture can get misrepresented when not championed by black people. "It is generally seen that the more overly sexualized side of black art is picked up and then commercialised," she explains. "It could be argued that's because that is what it's believed R&B and hip hop is all about, but actually R&B – whilst there are music videos with people booty shaking, which is what we see at the beginning of Jesy's video – R&B also had people like Jazmine Sullivan, Snoh Aalegra, Lauryn Hill, Nas and Common – who are very conscious in their lyrics, and very thought-provoking in their lyrics, and it's not about flashy cars and Rolls-Royces and booty shaking."

For Springer, it's "frustrating when black art is taken, and that's the side that is seen as a representation of black art, and the side that then becomes commercially successful". She suggests things are different for the younger generation, who have all "grown up on R&B as mainstream culture – for a lot of them, they don't necessarily in their experience see it as a black thing, because they've experienced it from birth and therefore see it as their thing".

However, Springer still has advice for the younger generation on how to appreciate black culture – instead of appropriating it. "I would encourage young people growing up to just respect the origins of it," she says. "You can enjoy it, you can utilise it, you can work with it, you can recreate it – but respect the origin. "And when you do it, be true to your authentic self. I think if Jesy had created an R&B song and just been true to her authentic self, being in the video as she is and as her personal brand should be represented – one, she would inspire white girls everywhere, rather than now making white girls feel like they need to wear Afros to be sexy and cool. And secondly, she would be respecting black girls who have Afros naturally. I think in this day and age, we just need to stand in our truth."

Source: The Independent

This article has been edited for exam purposes

The Moral Panic Engulfing Instagram

In testimony before a Senate subcommittee, Frances Haugen, a former Facebook employee turned whistle-blower, raised a number of important and complex policy questions about how society might better regulate the wayward social-media giant. But she also raised a very basic question, one for which neither the hearing nor her leaked internal documents provided a clear answer. The question is: Is social media a danger to teenagers? The answer is: We have no idea.

Nobody really does — not child-development experts, not technology companies, not teenagers and not, alas, hapless parents like myself. And in jumping to the conclusion that Facebook's Instagram platform and other social-media services will be the ruin of the next generation, we — the news media and society generally — may be tripping into a trap that has gotten us again and again: A moral panic in which we draw broad, alarming conclusions about the hidden dangers of novel forms of media, new technologies or new ideas spreading among the youth. Comic books, television, rock music, rap music, disco, video games, Ebonics and political correctness are among the subjects that have generated mass panic in the past. You'd think that this litany of media jumpiness would prevent new scares, but we remain as panicky as ever — note our culture's current preoccupation with the supposed scourges of critical race theory and cancel culture.

As I watched Haugen's testimony last week, I couldn't help but spot patterns of moral panic. Many of the lawmakers' questions and Haugen's answers seemed to be animated less by data than by assumption. At times the hearing felt like a real-life version of that Simpsons meme, "Won't somebody please think of the children?!" Haugen pointed to Facebook research that suggests that Instagram can exacerbate teenagers' anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and body image issues. Among other suggestions, she proposed increasing the minimum age for any person using social media to 17 years old from 13 years old.

As the psychologist Laurence Steinberg wrote in The Times, the research Haugen cites is quite weak. Much of it is correlational, and the same leaked documents also show that many teenagers appear to think that in many ways, Instagram plays a more positive role in their lives than a negative one.

As a pundit, I find Haugen's proposal to raise the minimum age for using social media to be a reasonable precaution. She also made a strong case for lawmakers and regulators to impose radical transparency on Facebook so that outside researchers can get a much better handle on social media's role in society. But as a parent of kids just a couple years shy of teenagerdom, my concerns are more immediate. Should I (at some point) let my children get smartphones and explore the wilds of Instagram, TikTok and whatever actually cool internet thing kids are using now that I've never heard of? If so, at what age? At the moment, my best answers are: I don't know and I don't know.

There is a potential cost to permissiveness and to prohibition. It's possible, as Haugen's leaked research suggests, that social media could have disastrous impacts on my kids' mental and social well-being; it's also possible that it will have significant positive effects (in the survey Haugen pointed to, many teen boys and girls said Instagram alleviated their loneliness, family stress and sadness, while many also said it had no impact either way). There is also the question of how a lockout from social media may affect my kids' well-being. Today, for better or worse, the world runs on social media; do I want my children to grow up without understanding its dynamics, its risks and its possibilities? Will a ban turn them into social outcasts? If I stop them from using the app where all of their friends hang out, am I acting like the stodgy dad who wouldn't let his kids listen to Elvis?

Earlier this week, Hobbes announced that he would be leaving "You're Wrong About" to work on other projects; the show will continue to run with Marshall hosting. I wish her great luck with it, but I also hope that the show's ethos is widely copied — that the practice of examining how our culture falls into unnecessary hysteria becomes routine in newsrooms. We live in troubling times. But we can't begin to solve our real problems if we keep getting wrapped up in exaggerated ones.

Source: The NY Times

This article has been edited for exam purposes

What does being a 'cultural fit' actually mean?

Job rejections are like breakups – they're never fun, but some are worse than others. *'We were impressed by your resume, but you're not a cultural fit'* is the *'it's not you, it's me'* of job rejections. It's vague, confusing and almost always means there was something about you personally they didn't like but didn't want to say out loud. Of course, candidates understand job interviews are about more than checking qualifications. They're also compatibility assessments – if your working style and behaviours mean you'll function well within an organisation. The problem is that too often, these assessments are subjective – and it's well known that people are biased in favour of people like them.

Being assessed – or dismissed – for 'cultural fit' is an issue that affects workers of all stripes. A rejection leaves certain workers unable to access particular roles or sectors. And research shows it's actually in companies' interests to stop doing it if they want to build better teams. Cultural fit is supposed to indicate whether your working preferences and values match the company you're applying to join. If you want to work from home, for example, you'd fit well in a company with a work-from-home policy. If you're a staunch environmentalist, you won't be a cultural fit for a pro-coal-mining lobby. In reality, however, the definition of cultural fit can vary widely. For some recruiters, it can mean simply: will we get along? Wanting to socialise with new colleagues isn't a bad thing, but it becomes a problem when your opinion of an applicant becomes the deciding factor.

Hiring for cultural fit tends to favour the status quo in the company, whether that relates to race, gender, age, or socioeconomic level. That makes it harder for anyone who doesn't 'fit the mould' to get into sectors where they are currently under-represented. White men still have an overall advantage in terms of cultural fit, as almost 90% of Fortune 500 CEOs fit that demographic. Women, workers from minority groups and gender non-binary individuals have to deal with a different type of glass ceiling. For example, a third of employers say they are 'less likely' to hire transgender workers, according to a 2018 report. Other groups are affected, too. Tech companies in Silicon Valley, for example, reportedly do not see older job candidates as a good fit. Extroverts, meanwhile, are usually seen as more of a 'fit' than introverts, as businesses have a long history of rewarding confident talkers. People with disabilities have to apply for 60% more jobs than those without.

That means that when companies reject applicants based on cultural fit, they are likely perpetuating racism, ageism and sexism in the process. It's a lot easier to cite 'cultural fit' in a job rejection email than interrogate your own personal biases to ensure they're not clouding your judgement. In fact, there's a significant downside for companies who rely on cultural fit: they can end up very homogenous. Research shows that teams with a diverse mix of genders, races and sexual orientations are actually better for business. They are more likely to improve market share, develop new products and win endorsement from decision-makers.

For many underrepresented groups, the threat of cultural fit pushes them to tone down who they are. Some resort to modifying aspects of how they present or behave in an effort to fit in. Gustavo Razzetti, the Chicago-based CEO of consultancy Fearless Culture, saw this happen when he was working with a tyre manufacturing company. A key member of the leadership team was a very extroverted, aggressive white male, and people were being hired who'd get along with him. But some introverts got jobs by putting on a front. "They were pretending to be someone else just to please the boss, and they were really unhappy," said Razzetti.

The onus should be on companies to evaluate and adjust their practices. "A lot of people still think about culture as if it's static," explains Tara Ryan, director of people experience at London fintech startup Monzo. "But if you try to maintain your culture, and you don't allow people to come and drive your culture forward, then you're not maximising the potential of your business." The other risk is that candidates will self-select out of the hiring process – and look elsewhere, to employers with more inclusive attitudes.

Source: The Guardian

This article has been edited for exam purposes

India's got the next big thing in tech, and it could be worth \$1 trillion

More than two decades ago, India began its transformation into a global IT powerhouse, ushering in an era of wealth and job creation never before seen in the country. Now, Asia's third largest economy is ready for the next big frontier in tech: coming up with a new generation of software companies like Zoom or Slack. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced businesses around the world to make huge investments in digital infrastructure, furthering the influence of companies providing software-as-a-service, or SaaS. Businesses spent an extra \$15 billion per week last year on tech as they scrambled to create safe remote working environments, according to a KPMG survey.

SaaS companies provide web-based applications that take care of everything from how secure the software is to how well it performs. Some of the world's most well-known SaaS companies include Zoom (ZM), SAP Concur and Salesforce (CRM), the American behemoth that owns workplace messaging app Slack. India's software-as-a-service industry could be worth \$1 trillion in value by 2030 and create nearly half a million new jobs, according to a recent report compiled by consulting firm McKinsey & Co. and SaaSBoomi, a community of industry leaders.

While India is a small player in the global SaaS market, investors say the country could eventually dominate the sector because of two things: its vast pool of English-speaking developers, and the relatively low cost of hiring them. Thanks to the rise of India's IT industry, software engineering has become one of the most sought-after career options in the country. "India actually has one of the largest developer communities in the world," Bhatnagar told CNN Business. Many of them have worked at some of the biggest global tech companies.

The low cost of operating in India is a big plus. According to a report by consulting firm Bain & Company, the salary of entry-level developers in India is 85% less than their counterparts in the United States. "If you are building a SaaS company in the US, it is better to have a million-dollar client rather than a \$10,000-client because you need to pay for sales and marketing in that country," said Prasanna Krishnamoorthy, managing partner at SaaS accelerator Upekha. "When you are serving customers from India, you can have these small and mid-sized companies, as well as large ones."

Most SaaS companies focus on global clients, similar to the strategy that was followed by India's IT giants such as TCS and Infosys (INFY). Investors see this as a welcome change, since most of India's oldest unicorns — from Flipkart to Paytm — have focused primarily on the domestic market. Almost 98% of Fortune 500 companies use Postman's products, according to Asthana, while Freshworks' first client was based in Australia. SaaS firms are much better placed to go global than e-commerce companies like India's Flipkart, for example. They write software once, and then are able to use it multiple times. "For a Flipkart you need billions of dollars [to grow internationally], but for a Freshwork you need much less capital to go global," said Mathrubootham, who is also an investor in Postman. This is because e-commerce firms require a ton of money to set up physical operations elsewhere — they have to hire delivery drivers, rent warehouses and buy inventory.

Despite the euphoria, there are some hurdles Indian companies have to overcome before they can deliver on the \$1 trillion promise. Indian engineers trained in the IT services industry may find it hard to develop the discipline required to build a product-focused company. In IT services, "you are selling bodies and you say yes to everything the customer says," said Krishnamoorthy. SaaS companies, on the other hand, have to say no to 99% of [potential] customers, he added. And India's startup ecosystem is still relatively immature when compared to Silicon Valley. Despite the massive size of some homegrown unicorns, Mathrubootham said that the country does not have a "global tech powerhouse product brand." But he hoped that future SaaS companies can change that.

Source: CNN

This article has been edited for exam purposes

Is Facebook the tobacco industry of the 21st century?

Will we one day think of Facebook the way we now think of cigarettes? Or is the company more akin to the gun lobby? Perhaps the alcohol industry is the closer fit. As we shall see, there's merit in all three comparisons, given the lethal harm this company is inflicting. Except those parallels actually understate the problem. For none of them quite gets at the sheer scale and power of this single corporation. Facebook might like to pretend that it's simply a place where friends and family can "connect", but it's much bigger than that – and far more dangerous.

Hence the comparison to big tobacco. In the early 1960s, scientists at one cigarette maker, Reynolds, concluded that the evidence that smoking was linked to cancer was "overwhelming". Meanwhile, researchers at the rival firm Philip Morris were drawing up a list of dozens of carcinogens in cigarette smoke. But guess what – none of that information was made public. On the contrary, for more than three decades, the tobacco industry refused to admit any evidence of harm from smoking, even though its own research told the exact opposite story.

Now listen to the testimony of Frances Haugen, a former Facebook product manager who unmasked herself as the whistleblower behind a series of shattering revelations published initially by the Wall Street Journal. One internal document from 2019 shows that Facebook's own research found Instagram – which brims with pictures of lean, toned bodies – to be psychologically toxic for young women in particular. "We make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls," it read, adding that teens themselves "blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression". Did Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, admit this finding when he came before Congress in March? He did not. Instead, he said: "The research that we've seen is that using social apps to connect with other people can have positive mental health benefits." In other words, smoking is good for you.

Facebook knows about those problems too, and though it always makes the right noises about "learning lessons" and "doing better", it does all too little. Haugen pointed out that 87% of the money Facebook spends combating misinformation is directed at content in English. You can see why, given the media and political pressure the company came under in the US over the platform's poisonous role in the 2016 presidential election. But only 9% of Facebook users are English speakers. Many of the rest live in Africa or south-east Asia, where Facebook is wreaking havoc.

Facebook is so huge, so pervasive, that it's easy to become fatalistic about dealing with any of this: it's a giant too big to wrestle to the ground. Calls for a boycott don't work: consumers find the platform too useful, and advertisers find it too effective. But that does not mean there is nothing to be done. We are not powerless in the face of Goliath. For one thing, there will be more whistleblowers. Clearly the company recruited some ethical people who now feel disgusted by their employer. What's more, Haugen's revelations struck a chord with a crucial group: parents who now fear for their children's safety.

If governments decide to act, there is no shortage of things they could do. A first move is to demand to see inside Facebook's algorithms, to reveal what the company already knows about itself: that its quest for ever-greater "engagement" and growth means it's wired to fuel and feed off the rage. Facebook knows how to turn off that switch. The leaked documents show that executives were offered fixes that would have dialled down the rancour, but they chose not to adopt them.

There are other remedies. Break up the Facebook-Instagram-WhatsApp behemoth under anti-trust laws. Change the rules on data protection and ownership. And if it's found that a Facebook executive lied to Congress, charge him or her with perjury. In the end, the cigarette makers had to bow before the law. But, thanks to decades of dishonesty and dissembling and their determination to put profits before people's safety, it came too late: millions of lives were lost. This time, we cannot wait.

Source: The Guardian

This article has been edited for exam purposes

For millions, the WhatsApp outage could have been a matter of life and death

Regulators in the US, UK and the EU are gearing up to probe Facebook over anticompetitive practices, its impact on the mental health of children and its destabilising impact on democracies. As these investigations begin, we should think of the 4 October global outage as a warning of the dangers that come with piling the lifelines and livelihoods of millions of vulnerable people into a single behemoth.

In 2019, amid heated debates in the west concerning the proliferation of disinformation and mental health issues stemming from social media, a more hopeful side of Facebook's promise to connect the world was witnessed. In Matamoros, Mexico, volunteers were organising Project Lifeline's telemedicine and remote legal assistance project for Central American asylum-seekers stranded in a sprawling border encampment by the migrant protection protocols. There, WhatsApp became a portal for people trapped in the camp to access lifesaving medical care and legal aid. The lengthy queues of people waiting to charge their phones snaked out of every restaurant and convenience store, testament to the indispensable role of social media in a refugee camp. For hundreds of millions of people outside Matamoros, WhatsApp is much more than a messaging platform: it is their main avenue for generating income and seeking government and emergency services where there is at least limited, free internet connection and where mobile phone services have yet to arrive or remains prohibitively expensive.

But when Facebook's servers crashed on 4 October, it became clear that those bright spots hid grave pitfalls. The cacophony of ringtones that usually echo throughout the sprawling urban encampment in Matamoros went silent as hundreds of migrants from Central America and the Caribbean, and the aid workers helping them, scrambled to contact immigration lawyers and medical services located on the other side of the US-Mexico border without being able to use WhatsApp.

More than 8,000 miles away in Sindh, Pakistan, WhatsApp is a critical tool of commerce, especially for poverty-stricken rural villages that rely on very thin margins from livestock sales. Deep in the difficult-to-traverse Thar desert, connectivity is a precious rarity. Every day, one or two villagers travel for more than an hour to special wifi hotspots, armed with the single phone in the village and responsible for the communication and business needs of the community. There, they contact urban livestock buyers over WhatsApp and earn the entire village's income for the day. "Luckily for us, the outage started at 9pm and went into the early hours of the morning," Salahuddin said. "Had this happened during the day, it would have significantly held up work and been a massive crisis for many smallholder communities throughout Pakistan and the region."

With so many lives dependent upon a functional messaging service, the Facebook outage reveals the need for a different path forward. The present challenge demonstrates the need for government and socially vital parts of the economy to encourage businesses to spread their operations across multiple platforms in order to cushion the economic shock of another outage. In light of the outage and existing concerns about Facebook's ethics on privacy, momentum is building to encourage WhatsApp users to switch to Signal or Telegram. But the widespread penetration of WhatsApp has created significant cultural stickiness and inertia, impeding en masse migrations to competitors. Phone memory is scarce in many rural and off-grid communities, and deleting WhatsApp for another app often also means abandoning connections to friends and extended family who might be less inclined to switch platforms.

Facebook's ceaseless pursuit of competitive control has brought us to this point. According to reports, Facebook's acquisition of WhatsApp for \$19bn in 2014 was the culmination of months of obsessive data collection and tracking. Facebook executives feared that WhatsApp posed a serious competitive threat to Facebook as it was heavily outpacing Facebook's own Messenger. While it is up to the ongoing investigations to decide whether Facebook can truly be classified as a monopoly, the social media giant is playing a dangerous game in its continued attempts to entrench its overwhelming dominance in the mobile messaging space. Either by accident or through the actions of a malevolent actor, a more prolonged outage is inevitable in the future. And when it hits, millions of lives will be brought down alongside those servers.

Source: The Guardian

This article has been edited for exam purposes

Chanel, TikTok and the Beauty Advent Calendar Controversy

Hell hath no fury like a social media mob that thinks it has identified a luxury scam. Or so it seemed this weekend, when a series of viral TikTok videos involving an \$825 Chanel Advent calendar and the disappointed customer who bought it went viral, inspiring a multitude of users to call foul on the brand. Or rather, all over its Instagram page. In one way, this is merely the latest example of the vigilante justice meted out against powerful global brands by individuals willing to point out perceived injustice, including cultural appropriation, copying designs and other forms of misbehavior, and of the shifting balance of power between brands and audience. But the emotions around this anti-Advent calendar campaign have been particularly high, in part, perhaps, because of the holiday involved, and the idea that rather than representing good will toward customers, this particular gift item suggests they're being played for suckers.

Here's what happened: On Dec. 3, Elise Harmon, a Tiktoker in California, posted a video of herself unboxing a Chanel Advent calendar in the shape of the Chanel No. 5 bottle. "Am I crazy?" she asked. "Absolutely. But I've never seen a Chanel Advent calendar, so let's see if it's worth the hype." Ms. Harmon gave the calendar "a 10 out of 10" for packaging, but she was upset to open a box and discover what appeared to be Chanel stickers. A hand cream, on the other hand, she liked. And so it went with the unboxing over eight more posts, in which Ms. Harmon revealed perfumes (good), key chains (not so much), lipstick and nail polish (mostly good, even if they were also mostly sample size), a mirror (not), a rope bracelet with a CC wax stamp (huh?), a plastic mini snow globe and ... a Chanel dustbag, the bags used for shoes or other accessories. It was the dustbag that really set people off.

As of Dec. 6, the series has been viewed more than 50 million times, and each post has thousands of comments, mostly along the "you wuz robbed" or "who do they think they are?" lines. To cap it all off, Ms. Harmon told her followers that she had been "blocked" by Chanel. Her followers were enraged. Under each Instagram photo of the work of the various specialty ateliers Chanel now sponsors — the flower maker Lemarie, the embroidery atelier Montex, among others — and promotional clips for the collection film, are hundreds of comments: "Don't ignore the inevitable! We want some answers!" And, "Is the film funded by the advent calendar sales?"

As for Chanel, it has not publicly addressed the issue. It is not the only luxury brand to offer an expensive beauty Advent calendar, though it is the most expensive. Indeed, it's actually late to the game, which took off about a decade ago. Now there are a plethora of such limited-edition Christmas calendars, including ones from La Mer, Guerlain and L'Occitane. Dior (\$550), Armani (\$310) and Saint Laurent (\$300) also have beauty Advent calendars. None of them are cheap, and most contain a mix of beauty samples — the mini versions of products often given free with a purchase — and full-size or limited edition offerings. And the beauty versions are just the latest iteration of the way Advent calendars, invented in the mid-19th century in Germany to teach children about the catechism and spirituality, have been commercialized over the years. Even the Nazis created their own as a form of propaganda. (The priciest Advent calendar on the market is probably the new \$150,000 Tiffany version)

So why has the Chanel version gotten people so het up? After all, luxury brands have never been shy about the fact that, in large part, what their customers are buying is the brand equity itself. A dustbag with "Chanel" on it is worth more than a dustbag with nothing on it. Moreover, Chanel does lay out all the contents of the calendar on its website, so it's not a secret what anybody is getting for their money. It's not apparent that their offering is any more flimflam than that of other brands.

But because it was new, and because it cost so much, and because it was Chanel, with all the mythology built into the name, the stakes and expectations may have been higher. And the sense of betrayal when those expectations were not met, greater — and, it would seem, the desire to publicly pile on in response, irresistible. Those who profit from perception can also lose because of it. What Ms. Harmon opened up wasn't just a new mini perfume. It was a new reality, now completely out of the box.

Source: The NY Times

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Article N° / /

Substitute Teachers Never Got Much Respect, but Now They Are in Demand

When Amber McCoy called in sick this fall, there was not a substitute teacher who could step into her fourth-grade class in Huntington, W.Va. Instead, her students at Kellogg Elementary School were taught by a rotating cast of seven staff members, including the assistant principal, who switched off every 45 minutes. “We are basically relying on every other warm body in our school,” Ms. McCoy said. Her current fear is that one day, several teachers will be out—with no one to fill in. “We could shut the entire school down,” she said.

Across the country, some schools are doing exactly that. Schools in Seattle will be closed on Friday because they allowed too many staff members to take the day off following the Veterans Day holiday. A Michigan school district has already closed down for several days this month. And some Colorado public schools have moved to remote learning this week, while others canceled classes altogether. The shortage has become so acute that substitute teachers, who have historically earned low pay, suddenly find themselves on the beneficial side of the supply-demand equation. In some cases, that has led to a rise in wages — and steady work.

But as the crunch continues, some schools are lowering their standards for substitute teachers, which were already lower than those for full-time faculty. The situation has become dire enough that within the last month, at least two states, Missouri and Oregon, temporarily removed their college degree requirements for would-be hires. The moves have led to concerns by parents, educators and policymakers over the quality of instruction. It is already evident that a combination of school shutdowns and remote learning led to significant learning losses for students. New standards for substitute teachers are “a short-term Band-Aid that shortchanges students,” said Kim Anderson, executive director for the National Education Association, which represents millions of education workers across the country. The problem starts with the need for more full-time teachers in many school districts. In Arizona, nearly 1,400 teachers left the profession within the first few months of the school year, according to one study. In Florida, the school year began with nearly 5,000 teacher vacancies. Low pay, high stress and challenging working conditions have plagued the profession for years. But the fear over contracting the coronavirus has created “the perfect storm,” Ms. Anderson said, and teachers are now leaving, or retiring early.

“School districts are really relying on substitutes because there are many, many teachers who have left the field,” Ms. Anderson said. Oregon once had 8,290 licensed substitute teachers, but by Sept. 18, that number had been cut in half. To create a bigger pool, the state, in an Oct. 1 emergency order, created a new license. These substitutes no longer need to pass several tests, or have a bachelor’s degree. They simply need to be at least 18 years old, sponsored by a participating district or charter school, and have “good moral character” with the “mental and physical health necessary” to teach. Missouri once required 60 college credits, the equivalent of an associate degree. Now, substitutes just need to complete a 20-hour online course on professionalism, diversity and classroom management.

“It sounds like what some of them are doing is substituting permanent teachers with substitutes,” Erica Groshen, an economist at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations, said. The problem, she said, is that substitutes cannot be expected to provide the same kind of education as a permanent teacher, who has developed lesson plans to meet certain expectations. Deborah Mitchell, 58, substitutes for Wake County Schools, in Raleigh, N.C., and does not consider her training to be particularly extensive. Ms. Mitchell attended a three-day seminar, where she and others were trained by doing mock-teaching and classroom management. “They rely on us because so many teachers are just dropping out,” she said. “But with the amount of work that you need to do — you’re not just a teacher, you’re the social worker, the shoulder to cry on. It’s a lot more than just ‘teach me arithmetic.’” She works about three to four days a week for about \$80 a day. It is less, she says, than what she would make working at Target, or as a babysitter.

“My thinking is that they will find a way to keep the lights on,” Ms. Groshen, the economist, said. “But whether the actual education taking place is up to the standards that we need — that’s going to have an impact on this generation of children for a long time.”

Source: The NY Times

This article has been edited for exam purposes

Donors Worry About Fate of Artifacts as Museum on Irish Famine Closes

In the mid-1990s John L. Lahey, the president of Quinnipiac College, read a book about the 19th-century potato famine in Ireland and decided that its causes and consequences, its death toll and resulting diaspora, warranted broader exposure. The college Lahey led began collecting artworks and documents related to the famine and in 2012 opened Ireland's Great Hunger Museum inside a former public library building in Hamden, Conn., near the school's campus.

Although the institution focused on the specific events, Lahey saw the famine story as being about more than the agricultural failure that began in 1845, he told people. It was also about the indifference of the British government to the starvation and the hostility that those escaping it often encountered when they emigrated from Ireland. But Lahey retired in 2018 and the institution, now known as Quinnipiac University, has decided to close the museum, citing financial pressures that made it a burden to sustain. The museum averaged fewer than 20 visitors a day in the year before the pandemic, according to the university, which said that the museum had only generated enough "support and revenue" to cover a quarter of its operating budget. The university said efforts to boost fund-raising for the museum had fallen short and stated in August that it was closing permanently.

"The announcement was sad and disappointing and perplexing to me," said Lahey, who was president of Quinnipiac for 31 years. "To close a museum dedicated to educating people about the evils of discrimination and bigotry¹ — in this case anti-Catholic and anti-Irish bigotry — at a time when the world is so concerned with these issues doesn't make a whole lot of sense." The museum's collection is described by the institution as "the world's largest collection of Great Hunger-related art."

The Committee to Save Ireland's Great Hunger Museum sent an open letter to Quinnipiac's president, Judy Olian, in September. "Our deepest concern," the letter said in part, "is what will happen to the collection and its power to communicate this global tragedy." The university stressed that it has no plans to sell the collection and hopes to find another institution with an interest in displaying it. "We are committed to finding a solution for continued display of the collection that will ensure it remains publicly accessible, advances the museum's original mission, and preserves the story of the Great Hunger," the statement said, adding: "The university is in active conversations with potential partners who are interested in displaying the museum's collection; Quinnipiac is not selling the museum's collection."

The museum's history begins with Lahey, who as the grand marshal of the 1997 St. Patrick's Day Parade in Manhattan, used that position to speak out about the famine. Soon afterward, Lahey said, one of the school's benefactors, Murray Lender, encouraged him to collect artworks and documents related to the famine. Some of those were displayed in the Lender Family Special Collection Room inside a Quinnipiac library. To Lahey, cultivating a connection to Irish history made sense in part because the university was located between New York City and Boston, with their large Irish American populations. The university created study abroad programs in Cork, began participating in the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade in Manhattan and established an undergraduate minor in Irish studies. He said expanding the ties to Irish history was part of a plan — including starting the political polls for which the university is known and elevating its sports programs — to turn a regional college into an institution with a national reputation. "With Irish America and within Ireland we have a visibility and a respect," Lahey said. "And it's a reason Quinnipiac was able to grow from 1,900 students to 10,000 and why we're as successful as we have been."

Beyond the museum's importance to the university, some of its supporters said its presence was significant because the story of the Irish diaspora — the ordeal of crossing the Atlantic to escape starvation only to face prejudice and hardship, and still make a mark in a new country — can resonate for current immigrants who may be feeling disoriented and unwelcome. "Irish America can see itself as a resilient people who came through this nightmare that is striking the world all over, with humanitarian issues, refugees, hunger, rotten government policies," said Turlough McConnell, a writer and producer who founded the committee to save the museum. "If the only thing we can do is to inspire others that they can come through this, then that's a gift we can give them."

Source: The NY Times

This article has been edited for exam purposes

¹ Bigotry: prejudice against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular group.

How Tech Is Helping Poor People Get Government Aid

In making his case that safety net programs should be easier to use, Jimmy Chen, a tech entrepreneur, recalled visiting a welfare office where people on food stamps endured long waits to submit routine paperwork. They passed the time as people in lines do, staring at their phones — which had the potential to do the work online with greater convenience, accuracy and speed. The image of aid-seekers wasting time with a solution literally in hand captures what critics call an overlooked challenge for people in poverty: Administrative burdens make benefits hard to obtain and tax the time and emotional resources of those who need help. “Too much bureaucracy prevents people from getting the help they need,” said Mr. Chen, whose start-up, Propel, offers a free app that five million households now use to manage their food stamp benefits.

Barriers to aid are as old as aid itself, and they exist for reasons as varied as concerns about fraud, the bureaucratic tension between accuracy and speed, and hostility toward people in need. But the perils of red tape have drawn new attention since the coronavirus pandemic left millions of Americans seeking government help, many for the first time. The government approved vast increases in spending but often struggled to deliver the assistance. While some programs reached most households quickly (stimulus checks), others (most) lagged far behind. The share of eligible people receiving benefits varies greatly by program: It is about 82 percent for food stamps, 78 percent for the earned-income tax credit and 24 percent for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or cash welfare, according to government estimates. That means billions of dollars go unclaimed.

On his first day in office, President Biden issued an executive order asking agencies to identify “systemic barriers in accessing benefits,” with the results due in January. Shaped by forces as diverse as the tech revolution, welfare rights and behavioral psychology, the movement to create a more user-friendly safety net was underway before the pandemic underscored the perils of bureaucracy.

In an age of ambitious social movements, the cry of civic tech — power to the portals — may seem obscure, but Mr. Chen, 34, says democratizing technology’s rewards is essential to social justice. “For someone like me, a phone is like a magic wand,” he said. “If I want to call a cab, there’s an app; if I want to book a hotel, there’s an app; if I want to get a date, there’s an app. It’s just incredibly unfair that we don’t apply more of this sophisticated knowledge to the problems of lower-income Americans.” Among those drawn to the app — recently renamed Providers, from Fresh EBT — is Kimberly Wilson, a single mother in Spindale, N.C., who has a 7-year-old son and cleans vacation rental homes. With her work interrupted by the pandemic, she turned to food stamps, which is also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. What Ms. Wilson said she likes most about the SNAP app is the ability to instantly check her balance, which she does almost daily. “It’s a comfort knowing I’m going to be able to feed my kid,” she said. The app also explains the timing and amounts of her payments better than the state, she said, and it steered her to a broadband subsidy that saved \$50 a month. “It makes you feel like it’s normal to need help,” she said.

With 42 million Americans receiving SNAP, many conservatives dispute the notion that aid is elusive. They see dependency as a greater concern than red tape and argue that administrative contact serves important goals, like deterring people who do not really need help or letting caseworkers encourage the jobless to find work. Poverty has long been linked to oppressive bureaucracy and sometimes barriers to aid are created deliberately. When Florida’s unemployment system proved unresponsive at the start of the pandemic, Gov. Ron DeSantis told CBS Miami last year that his predecessor’s administration devised it to drive people away. (Mr. DeSantis and his predecessor, Rick Scott, are both Republicans.) Other programs are hindered by inadequate staffing and technology simply because the poor people they serve lack political clout. Historically, administrative hurdles have been tools of racial discrimination.

The app now offers an account that can receive paychecks and other government benefits, prompted in part by the difficulties that the poorest households experienced in collecting stimulus checks, because they often lack stable bank accounts. However they make ends meet, Mr. Chen said, poor people should know where they stand without having to buy a banana. “We pay hundreds of billions of dollars to fund these programs,” he said. “Why not make them work well?”

Source: The NY Times

This article has been edited for exam purposes



Concours

après classes préparatoires

Sujets de l'épreuve orale
Anglais LV2

2022

International student numbers expected to bounce back

Charli Ronander Berge was tired of studying her UTS fashion design course online in Norway between 2am to 7am to manage the 10-hour time difference. When told she could return to Sydney on December 6 as part of the first cohort of international students to come back to campus, she was “really happy and started to cry”. Charli Ronander Berge is part of the first cohort of international students to return to Sydney. The 23-year-old is excited at the prospect of completing the third year of her bachelor of fashion design on campus in 2022. She studied on campus at the University of Technology Sydney from 2019 until July 2020 before returning to Norway.

University of Sydney international student Li Ying Chan, 22, felt like she’d won the lottery when she secured a seat on one of the first flights back to Australia from Singapore last week. University of Sydney student Li Ying Chan felt like she had won the lottery when she heard she could return to Australia from Singapore. “It still feels quite unreal, but I am very happy to be back,” she said. “It was a roller-coaster. Me and my friends were on edge about when we would be coming back.

New research suggests Australia and New Zealand can expect the flow of international students to return to pre-pandemic levels now that international borders are reopening. But the researchers added that it could take some time to reach the same total number of international students who studied here before the pandemic. The report by education policy think tank the Mitchell Institute, at Victoria University, published on Tuesday, shows countries with open borders including Britain, Canada and the United States have seen international student visa application numbers rebound since the pandemic.

The Mitchell Institute report looked at five major destinations for international students: Australia, Britain, the US, Canada and New Zealand. It found they all experienced a large fall in new international students in early to mid-2020. But while numbers in Australia and New Zealand have continued to decline, British, US and Canadian markets have recovered. Report author Peter Hurley said it was likely that many students who planned to study in Australia went elsewhere, particularly students from India who opted for Britain instead.

“Part of the reason international students pay high fees is to experience a different culture and, for many, to immerse themselves in a country with a different language,” Dr. Hurley said. “They can’t do that when they are studying online. “This data shows that international students are looking to the countries that are open, and where they can travel and gain the whole international student experience.”

The research shows the Australian education sector and businesses that rely on international students are on track to lose \$20 billion a year until borders reopen. “For every six-monthly missed intake of international students, we estimate Australia is losing about \$4 billion to the economy,” Dr. Hurley said. “Those losses are not one-off but accumulate for the duration that the missed students would have been studying their course in Australia – usually three to four years.”

Source: The Sydney Morning Herald

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The Superwealthy Are Snatching Up Superyachts as Pandemic Presents

In an era of environmental awareness and conspicuous displays of sustainability, you might not expect a rise in the number of people with the means and appetite for a \$60 million floating fortress of solitude. But, in part because of the coronavirus crisis, the superyacht industry is booming—and the number of vessels under construction or on order worldwide has hit a new record. According to figures revealed in the latest edition of Boat International's Global Order Book, more than 1,200 superyachts are slated to be built—a rise of 25 percent on last year.

"The market's never been busier," said Will Christie, a superyacht broker. "And I've been in the industry 20 years. A lot of people say they appreciate the safety of being on a yacht during the pandemic. But it's also because whereas in previous eras the people with enough money were too busy in the office to justify the purchase, these days they can work from anywhere. "Everybody just wants freedom, and ultra-high-net-worth individuals can afford it," he added. "The ability to escape anywhere is very attractive in the current climate. They think: I don't need to be stuck in the office, and if you're worth billions, why should you be?" Critics of the boom in superyachts point to the vastly disproportionate environmental damage produced by the super-rich. "Whether it's this or private jets or trips to space, they're just sticking two fingers up at the rest of society," said Peter Newell, a professor of international relations at Sussex University.

Newell, the lead author of a Rapid Transition Alliance report which called for policymakers to target the "polluter elite" to limit their carbon consumption, said industry claims of moves to a more sustainable model were unconvincing. He called for government action. "You can't just rely on people's empathy—it has to be tax and regulation," he said. "But it is very, very hard with a mobile elite that can move its money and its property around."

The economic anthropologist Richard Wilk, a distinguished professor at Indiana University, said: "Of course, if you add every superyacht together, it's just a blip on total greenhouse gas production. But it is symbolic—and the global impact of the 2,000-odd billionaires on the planet are very significant. So it's part of a pattern of overconsumption by the upper crust." In research with his colleague Beatriz Barros, he found that the average billionaire had a carbon footprint thousands of times that of the average person.

Sympathy for superyacht owners may not have been enhanced by a recent intervention from Australia's richest woman, the mining magnate Gina Rinehart. In a video recorded from the deck of her own vessel in front of an emerald sea, she complained that there were not enough spaces to dock superyachts in Queensland. Queensland might suffer because overseas superyacht owners would be less likely to visit, she added. "These superyachts need marinas too—sadly lacking for vessels over 50 meters. It's time for more marinas large enough to cater not only for small and medium yachts but larger ones too."

Source: Mother Jones

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NYC Has Seen an Increase in Reports of Anti-Asian Hate Crimes. Why Is the NYPD Commissioner Blaming it on Cash Bail Reform?

The number of hate crimes reported to the New York Police Department has roughly doubled to 503 incidents over the last year, driven largely by a rise in reported anti-Asian crime, city law enforcement officials announced this week.

Hate crime statistics are notoriously unreliable, and interpretations of why police in New York are seeing so many more cases vary widely. In an interview this week with NBC News, Russell Jeung—the cofounder of Stop AAPI Hate and a leading voice on the rise in anti-Asian racism during the pandemic—said the new numbers were consistent with the surge in racism against Asian Americans but may also reflect increased reporting rates to police. He pointed to the political climate in which members of both parties use anti-Asian rhetoric, especially against China, and racist stereotypes that suggest Asian Americans are “easier, softer” targets, to use NBC’s paraphrasing.

Yet NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea instead blames the new hate crime numbers on one of his favorite punching bags: bail reform. Last year, the state enacted a groundbreaking law to limit the number of people stuck in jail before trial simply because they could not afford cash bail. Within days, powerful critics of the law were blaming it for new crimes, with public officials including NYC Mayor Bill DeBlasio pointing to anti-Semitic attacks to argue that the reforms needed to be rolled back. The tactic worked: That April, just a few months after the reforms were enacted, New York limited the scope of the new law and increased the number of situations in which judges could impose cash bail. Yet New York City police officials—aided and abetted by tabloid media coverage—have continued to attack the changes to the state’s cash bail system, no matter whether or not evidence exists to back up their claims.

Asked at a Tuesday press conference about his opinion on why the overall number of hate crime reports doubled this year, compared to last year, Shea pointed to fewer New Yorkers being kept in jail before trial. “You’re dealing with incarceration levels that have been driven down—do we expect all of those people to abide by every single law and be model citizens?” he said at a Tuesday press conference. “We’re seeing a little bit of mental illness, we’re seeing just disregard for common decency,” he told local news anchor Dan Mannarino. “But when you have mass amounts of people put back on the streets that have traditionally been held in jail, you’re seeing some of that permeate here as well.”

In its most recent report tracking anti-Asian hate since the start of the pandemic, Stop AAPI Hate tallied 10,370 discriminatory incidents between March 19, 2020 to September 30, 2021—commonly against Asian women, in public spaces like streets and businesses, and involving verbal harassment. In response, the group is calling for increasing education in ethnic studies, expanding civil rights legislation and enforcement, and “community-based safety solutions” rather than “more policing or mass criminalization that disproportionately affect communities of color.”

Source: Mother Jones

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Humans Have Broken a Fundamental Law of the Ocean

On November 19, 1969, the CSS *Hudson* slipped through the frigid waters of Halifax Harbour in Nova Scotia and out into the open ocean. The research vessel was embarking on what many of the marine scientists on board thought of as the last great, uncharted oceanic voyage: The first complete circumnavigation of the Americas. The ship was bound for Rio de Janeiro, where it would pick up more scientists before passing through Cape Horn—the southernmost point in the Americas—and then head north through the Pacific to traverse the ice-packed Northern Passage back to Halifax Harbour.

Along the way, the *Hudson* would make frequent stops so its scientists could collect samples and take measurements. One of those scientists, Ray Sheldon, had boarded the *Hudson* in Valparaíso, Chile. A marine ecologist at Canada's Bedford Institute of Oceanography, Sheldon was fascinated by the microscopic plankton that seemed to be everywhere in the ocean: How far and wide did these tiny organisms spread? To find out, Sheldon and his colleagues hauled buckets of seawater up to the *Hudson*'s laboratory and used a plankton-counting machine to total up the size and number of creatures they found.

Life in the ocean, they discovered, followed a simple mathematical rule: The abundance of an organism is closely linked to its body size. To put it another way, the smaller the organism, the more of them you find in the ocean. When Sheldon and his colleagues organized their plankton samples by orders of magnitude, they found that each size bracket contained exactly the same mass of creatures. Sheldon thought this rule might govern all life in the ocean, from the smallest bacterium to the largest whales. This hunch turned out to be true. The Sheldon spectrum, as it became known, has been observed in plankton, fish, and in freshwater ecosystems, too.

But now humans seem to have broken this fundamental law of the ocean. Thanks to industrial fishing, the total ocean biomass of larger fish and marine mammals is much lower than it should be if the Sheldon spectrum was still in effect. Comparing pre-1850 estimates to the modern-day models told a very different story. The models suggest that the biomass of fish larger than 10 grams and all marine mammals has shrunk by more than 2 billion metric tons since 1800. The very largest size classes appear to have experienced a reduction in biomass of nearly 90 percent since 1800. Many of the big fish and mammals that used to populate the ocean simply aren't there anymore.

One problem is that fisheries often target what scientists call BOFFFFs: big, old, fat, fecund, female fish. Their large bodies are prized by fishers, but BOFFFFs are a vital source of new baby fish. One way to manage this is to encourage the fishing industry to target medium-size fish, allowing mature ones to replenish depleted populations.

Overfishing means these populations are starting from a much weaker point than they would otherwise be. Take too many fish out of the ocean and you reduce genetic diversity, weaken food webs, and allow ocean habitats to degrade, all of which makes an individual ecosystem more vulnerable to changes.

Source: Wired

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Want People to Eat Less Meat? Fake Burgers Probably Won't Cut It

Spring was a bad season for carnivores: Popular cooking website Epicurious committed publicly to leaving beef out of all of its recipes, and one of the world's most famous fine dining restaurants, Eleven Madison Park, announced that it was nixing all meat from its menu. Both moves were made in the name of environmental sustainability—meat production is thought to be responsible for around 15 percent of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions.

Fake meats currently make up less than half a percent of the meat sector, but that's quickly changing. Impossible Foods recently expanded to 17,000 US grocery stores and dropped its prices. A new report from investors Blue Horizon Corporation and Boston Consulting Group projected that the "alternative protein" sector could capture between 11 and 22 percent of global meat-eating by 2035. "When plant-based and cultivated meat reach cost and taste parity, they will simply replace industrial animal meat," Bruce Friedrich, founder and president of alt-meat lobbyist the Good Food Institute, tweeted in April.

But how solid is the evidence that these faux burgers, once cheaper, will lure a significant number of people away from the real stuff? On one hand, people are clearly excited to try fake meat. Lewis Bollard, program officer for farm-animal welfare at Open Philanthropy, points to surveys indicating that if prices were equal, 21 to 27 percent of Americans said they would embrace plant-based substitutes over real meat.

There's at least one place where Impossible meat and ground beef are already sold for the same price: a UCLA dining hall. For her 2020 PhD thesis, Hannah Malan analyzed hundreds of thousands of dining transactions and found that after Impossible meat tacos, burritos, enchiladas, and salads hit the menu, students bought 9 percent fewer animal-based entrees. But there were unintended consequences: The sales of vegetarian fare also declined 4 percent. If Malan's research is any indication, fake meat might be doing just as much to lure vegetarians away from staples as it is luring meat-eaters away from sausage.

This is a fear that some food scholars have long had about meat substitutes: that fake burgers reinforce people's belief that meat must be at the center of every meal. For millennia, cuisines on entire continents have supported thriving cultures with a fraction of the roughly 223 pounds of meat per person annually that Americans eat.

But the rest of the world is adopting our habits; global meat consumption is set to expand by 12 percent by 2029. Giving people meat-like alternatives doesn't guarantee that meat will lose popularity, says Richard York, an environmental sociologist at the University of Oregon. This is what's known as the displacement paradox. For instance, in a study of meat-eating trends between 1961 and 2013, York found that when chicken and seafood became more available than other meats, Americans didn't eat less beef and pork per capita—they just ate more meat overall.

To counter the outsize damage meat exacts on the planet, we instead need to focus on the economics that have allowed the meat industry to prosper. Marion Nestle, professor emerita at New York University, agrees that fake burgers are a limited solution. "If we really want to help people cut down on the amount of meat they are eating, we need to stop subsidizing cattle feed, stop giving tax breaks to cattle ranchers, require feedlot owners to pay the costs of cleaning up the mess they make, and issue dietary guidelines with clear 'eat less meat' messages," Nestle told me. When it comes to reining in meat production, she argues, "policy is what matters."

Source: Mother Jones

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Google will now offer African startups more than no-strings cash and office space

At a virtual event on Wednesday (Oct. 6), Google's CEO Sundar Pichai said his company will invest \$1 billion in Africa over five years to build a subsea internet cable, support nonprofits, and fund businesses. The cable, named Equiano after the Nigeria-born 18th-century abolitionist, has been in the works since 2019 when it was first announced. It will connect Africa to Europe, and increases Google's global internet infrastructure that includes Dunant—which stretches from Virginia Beach in the US to the French Atlantic coast—and Curie, which connects Chile to Los Angeles.

Google is "making tremendous progress" on constructing the branches of Equiano that will land in Nigeria, Namibia, St. Helena, and South Africa, according to Nitin Gajria, the company's managing director for Africa. When completed, the cable will "provide approximately 20 times more network capacity than the last cable built to serve Africa" and reduce internet prices by 21%, Gajria said. Equiano is one of two subsea internet cable projects by Big Tech companies in Africa, in addition to Facebook's 2Africa which was expanded this month to cover 26 countries. But Google is getting into a space that Facebook hasn't entered yet: directly funding African startups with venture capital.

One highlight of the event was when Onajite Emerhor, who leads Google's startup accelerator in Africa, announced that 50 entrepreneurs will get a share of a \$3 million fund for Black founders in Africa. The initiative resonates because even though Africa is a predominantly Black continent, white privilege has sometimes crowded out Black founders.

Some of the 50 have already raised six-figure funding from investors, but Google's equity-free money comes with perks like credits for cloud storage which, for early-stage startups, frees up cash for other needs. The package is similar to what the company's startup accelerator program has offered to over 80 early-stage startups since 2017 in Africa. The fund will seek out startups "solving real challenges in Africa," he said. It's a subjective definition that will become clear when Google starts getting mentioned in African startup funding announcements.

As much as it is a Silicon valley giant, Google will probably not be a tech financing innovator in Africa since it is joining a market square that already features the world's big name investors, from institutional players like SoftBank and Tiger Global to strategic tech investors like Mastercard, Visa, Alibaba, and Stripe. That said, Africa is not yet so flush with funding that Google becomes a surplus investor. Indeed, because most funding has stayed in Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Egypt, there's a demand for new money sources that can finance minorities like women-led startups in these countries, as well as entrepreneurs in less-funded regions like Francophone Africa.

Google's five physical offices in Africa are in Johannesburg, Nairobi, Lagos, Cairo, and Accra, but Gajria said it won't constrain their ability to seek opportunities across the continent. That remains to be seen because for now at least, these countries have first dibs on Google's other business plan for Africa – a \$10 million fund that will issue low-interest loans to small businesses. From a technology perspective, the day's other notable announcement was that Google now runs a financing partnership with Safaricom for Kenyans to buy Android smartphones, and plans to do the same with other telcos like Airtel, MTN, Orange, and Vodacom in other countries.

Source: Quartz ZA

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Uber Sued by Justice Department for Overcharging Disabled People

The US Justice Department (DoJ) is suing ride-hailing app Uber over allegations it has been overcharging disabled people. The DoJ claims Uber's "wait time" fees are discriminating against disabled passengers who need more than two minutes to get into a car. It says Uber needs to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). But Uber said wait time fees were not intended to apply to disabled riders and that it had been refunding fees.

Kristen Clarke, assistance attorney general for the DoJ's civil rights division said the lawsuit aimed to send a "powerful message that Uber cannot penalise passengers with disabilities simply because they need more time to get into a car". Uber and other companies that provide transportation services "must ensure equal access for all people, including those with disabilities," she added. However, Uber said it disagreed that its policies were in violation of the the ADA. A spokesman said the company had been in talks with the DoJ before the "surprising and disappointing" lawsuit.

Wait time fees were "never intended for riders who are ready at their designated pickup location but need more time to get into the car", he said. Uber had a policy of refunding wait time fees for disabled riders whenever they alerted the firm that they had been charged, the spokesman said. "After a recent change last week, now any rider who certifies they are disabled will have fees automatically waived," he added.

Uber began charging passengers for driver waiting times in 2016. The firm says riders are charged on average less than 60 cents, and that wheelchair-accessible trips or Uber Assist trips do not have any wait time fees by default. It is not the first time that Uber has found itself in hot water over disability issues. In April, it was ordered to pay a blind woman in San Francisco \$1.1m after she was refused rides on 14 occasions. In the UK, Paralympic medallist Jack Hunter-Spivey said in September that Uber and other taxi drivers regularly drove off when they saw that he was a wheelchair user.

A 2020 study by the University of Tennessee found that it takes 28% more income for a disabled person in the US to achieve the same standard of living as a non-disabled person. Maria Town, president and chief executive of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), who has cerebral palsy, told the BBC that disabled people often face a "disproportionate economic burden, often as a result of realities they cannot change nor control".

In addition to higher costs for health care, medical supplies and accessibility tools, the practice of applying extra fees for services, such as grocery delivery or rideshare wait times, adds an additional "tax" for disabled consumers, she said. Ending the practice of charging wait-time fees for disabled riders would be a "step in the right direction toward economic equality and dignity", Ms Town added.

The AAPD said it had seen many cases where Uber drivers had driven away when they saw that the passenger was using a wheelchair, crutches, a walker or a service dog. "The presence of disability alone sometimes is enough, it's a huge issue," Ms Town said, recalling an incident from 2017 concerning a man in Texas who had a genetic disorder that affected his appearance.

Source: The BBC

This article has been edited for exam purposes

Proceeds From Rare Treasures Sold at Auction Help Steady Jewish History Museum

In June, the shoe designer and entrepreneur Stuart Weitzman sold the world's most expensive coin, the world's most expensive postage stamp and a block of four stamps with the airplane printed upside down, all for more than \$32 million. In November, he decided what to do with the money. He is giving all of his proceeds to the National Museum of American Jewish History, a Smithsonian-affiliated institution in Philadelphia that recently emerged from bankruptcy. For the museum — whose collection includes the piano on which Irving Berlin wrote "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and one of Albert Einstein's pipes — Weitzman's money is more than a lifeline. The museum will spend \$10 million to buy its building, which had been sold to a former trustee's family and leased back for \$1,000 a month. The rest will go toward a fund. Weitzman said the result would be that the museum could operate "debt-free and rent-free, so everything it pays attention to will be for itself and not for trying to stay afloat." The museum is responding by changing its name to the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History.

The museum had been preoccupied with financial problems for the past decade — since it completed its \$150 million building on Independence Mall, a short walk from Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell Center. For the five-story building, the museum took out a \$35 million construction loan, Galperin said. The museum had counted on fund-raising to pay it off, he said, but as the financial crisis of 2008 deepened, donations slowed. "For the next 10 years, they were servicing that debt, running out of cash," said Galperin, who was brought in as a consultant in 2019 and became chief executive last year. "The museum was in serious financial trouble."

Roughly \$30 million in debt at the beginning of 2020, it filed for bankruptcy on March 1, before the pandemic hit. Then the museum closed down. "No revenue," he said, "and because we were in bankruptcy, we weren't eligible for federal assistance under PPP," the federal paycheck protection program. The museum laid off 25 employees, two-thirds of its staff. It emerged from bankruptcy in September with a plan that essentially eliminated the debt. Some \$17 million was owed to banks. That amount was reduced to \$10.5 million after negotiations and was paid off by the deal for the building and some donations. Another \$14 million was owed to a group of current and past supporters, among them the philanthropist Sidney Kimmel. Galperin said they forgave that money.

Galperin said that Mitchell Morgan, whose family bought the building and leased it back, had given the museum three and a half years to devise a long-term plan, a timeline that Galperin called "enough of a runway to figure out what to do next." Weitzman was already acquainted with the museum before Galperin approached him in September. Weitzman had donated \$1 million in 2018 for a gallery about Jews who settled in America in the 17th century. Weitzman said Galperin was straightforward, mentioning what Weitzman had said about giving away the money from the auction. "He said, 'This is our goal. We want our building back. We don't want to get kicked out in a couple of years. We need someone or some people to secure our future,'" Weitzman recalled. "And that's what I did."

Source: The NY Times

This article has been edited for exam purposes

How Lila Moss Hack Brought Diabetes to the Runway

The Fendace show, held at the tail end of Milan Fashion Week in September, made news for a number of reasons: The Fendi designers, Kim Jones and Silvia Fendi, had created their version of Versace, and Donatella Versace had done her Fendi; it was the first time two brands from different luxury groups had been let loose in the other's archives; and the runway was flush with former supermodels. Yet perhaps the most notable aspect of the show may have been one of the smallest: a tubeless white pump visible on the upper left leg of Lila Grace Moss Hack, a 19-year-old model who was strutting the runway in a gold-and-white Fendi x Versace swimsuit, cut high on the thigh, and a Greek-key-trimmed jacket.

An Omnipod insulin pump used to treat Type 1 diabetes (T1D), an autoimmune disease that can be diagnosed at any age — my daughter was diagnosed when she was 8 — it was impossible to miss. Its appearance on the runway, spotlighting an often invisible condition, was another step in fashion's definition of inclusivity. While the last full fashion season, earlier this fall, may have been the most inclusive across race, age, size and gender, according to The Fashion Spot, a trend forecasting site, models with disabilities remain underrepresented and underexposed.

Laura Winson is the director of Zebedee Management, a modeling agency founded in 2017 to represent disabled and visually different models. "Before Zebedee, disability was not included in the diversity debate," she said. "Only 0.02 percent of people featured in fashion advertising had a disability." The image of Ms. Moss Hack with her pump at Fendace quickly circulated among the T1D community — according to JDRF, an organization that funds T1D research, there are about 1.6 million Americans who have it — and set off a flurry of supportive messages. Melany Grey posted in Ms. Moss Hack's Instagram feed, "the whole T1D community salutes you!" Angie Martin wrote, "I love showing my 11yo T1D daughter your pic." And Eliska Pole simply posted, "Thank you for wearing your Insulin pump so proudly."

Like the pump worn by Ms. Moss Hack, constant glucose monitors (C.G.M.s) or blood glucose monitors (B.G.M.s) help to reduce the need for finger pricks or insulin injections and provide better blood sugar regulation, particularly for those with T1D. As visual indicators of T1D, these devices open communication lines and improve people's understanding of T1D. "Seeing Lila wear her pump reminded me that I had fallen back on the practical necessity of communicating to people, instead of sharing my experience more openly," said Ms. Clover, who now wears her C.G.M. for all of her modeling jobs. "I hope that others out there can look toward Grace as a role model and feel reassured that they too can achieve whatever they set their minds to," said Levi Asher, the associate director of development at IMG Models.

For the Irish author and disability activist Sinead Burke, who has achondroplasia, a genetic disorder that is the most common form of dwarfism, seeing models with disabilities on the runway is important because, she said, "fashion touches everyone because we all need to wear clothes. It is almost universal." That Ms. Moss Hack may not have realized that wearing her visible insulin pump on the runway "would be a big deal," Ms. Burke said, "is, in and of itself, success."

Source: The NY Times

This article has been edited for exam purposes

When Did every Celebrity Become a Creative Director?

It's getting hard to keep up with the celebrity titles. Every week, it seems, there's a new creative director or partner or officer of some kind. At the end of last year, the rapper Cardi B announced that she was joining Playboy as its first creative director in residence. She joins a growing list of famous brand associates that includes Emily Ratajkowski, partner and creative director at Loops Beauty (face masks); Dakota Johnson, co-creative director and investor at Maude (sexual health and wellness products); Prince Harry, chief impact officer at BetterUp (employee coaching); Kendall Jenner, creative director at Fwr'd (an online boutique); Drew Barrymore, creative director at Garnier (hair care and skin care); Jennifer Aniston, chief creative officer at Vital Proteins (supplements); and ASAP Rocky, guest artistic director at PacSun (clothing and accessories).

Once upon a time, famous people signed on to brands as their "faces" or "spokespeople." With the rise of social media marketing came the flood of "ambassadors." Now, a corporate title once reserved for the heads of fashion houses or the artistic leads at advertising firms is being tacked onto the résumés of actors, singers and models. "When you're the face of something or a brand ambassador, you're representing them," said Susan Douglas, a professor of communication and media at the University of Michigan. "It doesn't suggest particular talent or input. But 'creative director' suggests that you have a set of executive or creative skills. It burnishes your brand as not just being a pretty face."

But that can actually be a benefit, Dr. Douglas said. "These niche companies don't want to seem like Procter & Gamble," Dr. Douglas said. "'We've really tapped into people, we know what they want.' Authenticity is the coin of the realm right now." It's a two-way validation system. "The star becomes a stand-in for the brand, and the qualities of the brand mirror or enhance the qualities we associate with the star," said Andrea McDonnell, an associate professor of communication at Providence College.

In the case of Cardi B and Playboy, Dr. McDonnell said, "her personal brand revolves around empowered sexuality. She's a female coming into what has been historically and by definition a male-centric space." Bringing her on as a creative director, she said, could "push the brand in a different direction, expand the audience and maybe do a little damage control."

Eva Goicochea, the founder and chief executive of Maude, a sexual health and wellness company, said that Dakota Johnson joined in "an investor-adviser deal." A project on which they've teamed with the Museum of Sex is planned for next spring. Ms. Goicochea said that she hadn't previously intended on working with anyone famous. For one, she said, stars are people, and they could say the wrong thing while representing the company. But there is also the risk that the brand begins to revolve around one person. "It starts to become about them and less about the topic," Ms. Goicochea said. Her advice to any business courting a celebrity or being courted by one? Vet the person thoroughly. After all, maintaining a positive and distinctive public image — both as a person and as a company — is only becoming more important.

"There's a battle for visibility," Dr. Douglas said. "What is the scarcest resource? People's attention. You have to constantly have your name out there or people forget about you."

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