

# Ed.

## Then They Came for the Books



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## Women, Running

All of the stories in this issue excite me, but the one that I couldn't wait to dive into was the piece about current Ed.L.D. student and runner **ALIA QATARNEH, ED.M.'22**. With a son who became a runner a few years ago, I suddenly find myself immersed in the cross country and track and field world. I've learned what it means to PR and why every runner is on Strava. Even when my son isn't around, I actually listen to the Coffee Club Podcast, hosted by pro runners with the On Athletics Club. So when I learned that one of our Ed.L.D. students, Alia, was getting ready to run the Boston Marathon for the first time as a "TrailBlazHer," I knew I had to write about her. First off, what exactly is a TrailBlazHer? I learned that, at its core, it's an all-female running group that supports and creates space for all women, but especially BIPOC women interested in running and moving and doing it in community. Part of their goal, in addition to creating a supportive sisterhood, is to redefine the typical image of what "a runner" looks like. As a story about the group in *Runner's World* noted, "This women's run crew is unapologetically staking their claim to the streets of Boston." Turns out Alia grew up in Boston and ran in high school, but like many runners, never quite felt like she fit in or could run a big race like the Boston Marathon — until she met the TrailBlazHers. Turns out, she's pretty inspiring. LH

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"What I conclude from this study is the Ivy League doesn't *have* low-income students because it doesn't *want* low-income students."

PROFESSOR SUSAN DYNARSKI

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# People



**"I stand here today because these women taught their only grandchild to work hard, dream big, and never take any of this for granted."**

**TIM MCCARTHY (SEE P. 8)**

SIMONE MASSONI

FEATURE

Story by  
**Lory Hough**  
Photographs by  
**Brad Trent**

# As Luck Would Have It

**TIM MCCARTHY** on his humble roots, talking too much, and the many ways he hit the jackpot



# Everyone,

says Lecturer Tim McCarthy, has a story that is important to tell and share.

"I believe that deeply," he says from his tiny office in Gutman stuffed with photos and tchotchkes.

McCarthy's story starts in 1971, the year he was dropped off as a newborn at a Catholic Charities location in upstate New York by his birth parents and taken in by Michelle and "Coach Mac," a young couple looking to adopt. McCarthy calls them the "jackpot parents" — and the start of the good luck that he feels he's carried throughout his life.

"I really do think that the through line for me with all of the things in my life that bring me joy and affirmation is that I just feel very, very lucky as a human being," he says. "And my family is the first stroke of luck. That's what set me flowing." It's also why he doesn't spend energy pondering the "what ifs," like searching for his birth parents.

"I've never been interested in that at all," he says, plus there was never any official documentation when he was dropped off, making a search nearly impossible. "And I haven't ever wanted to. I got super lucky. My parents are amazing." Both passionate public school educators (for a combined 79 years), his parents turned 80 this year and moved to Cape Cod to be closer to Provincetown, where McCarthy lives with his husband, **C.J. CROWDER, ED.M.'02**.

As McCarthy talks about his upbringing, he says he's still surprised every day that he went to Harvard as an undergrad and now works at the university.

"I did not come from a fancy background," he says. "I come from blue collar, hardworking folk and teachers. When I say I come from humble roots, I really do come from humble roots. We're not fancy folks. My mother once said that we're probably not fit for polite company. We're a little bawdy, sometimes a little profane. We love the old adage: Talk about religion or politics at the dinner table. That's all we talked about. And sports."

Growing up, McCarthy went to the elementary school where my mother taught and to the high school where his father coached (including the basketball team he played for). He remembers how much his mother read to him, especially Judy Blume, one of her favorites, and books with diverse characters and misfits. In high school, he would put his finished homework on the kitchen table when he went to bed and find it there in the morning, marked up.

"When I came down for breakfast, there were edits and sometimes more work to do," he says. His parents were lovingly tough, and education was at the center of everything

the family did. "But it wasn't just about what I was doing in school. It was this larger kind of ecosystem of education that was everywhere around us all the time. Always ideas, opinions, questions, debates. And I was included in all of it from the very, very beginning. There was never a time that I needed to earn my way to the big kids' table."

His parents were busy educators, which turned out to be another important through line for McCarthy — it gave him the opportunity to spend lots of time with his grandparents, especially his grandmothers, who he talked about this past May when he delivered the student-selected Convocation speech to 2023 Ed School graduates.

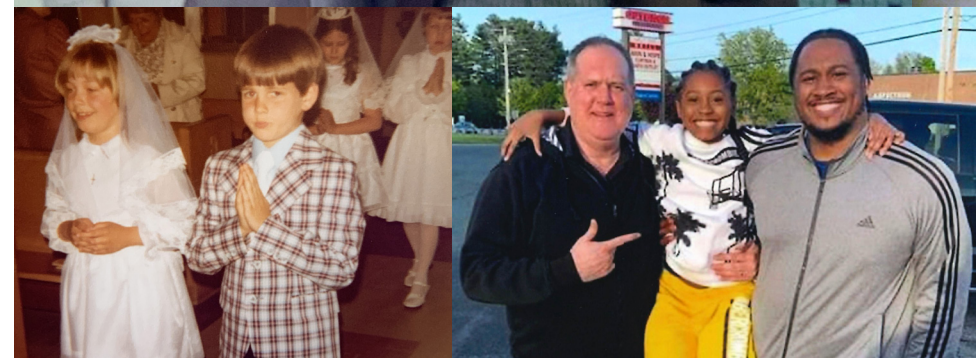
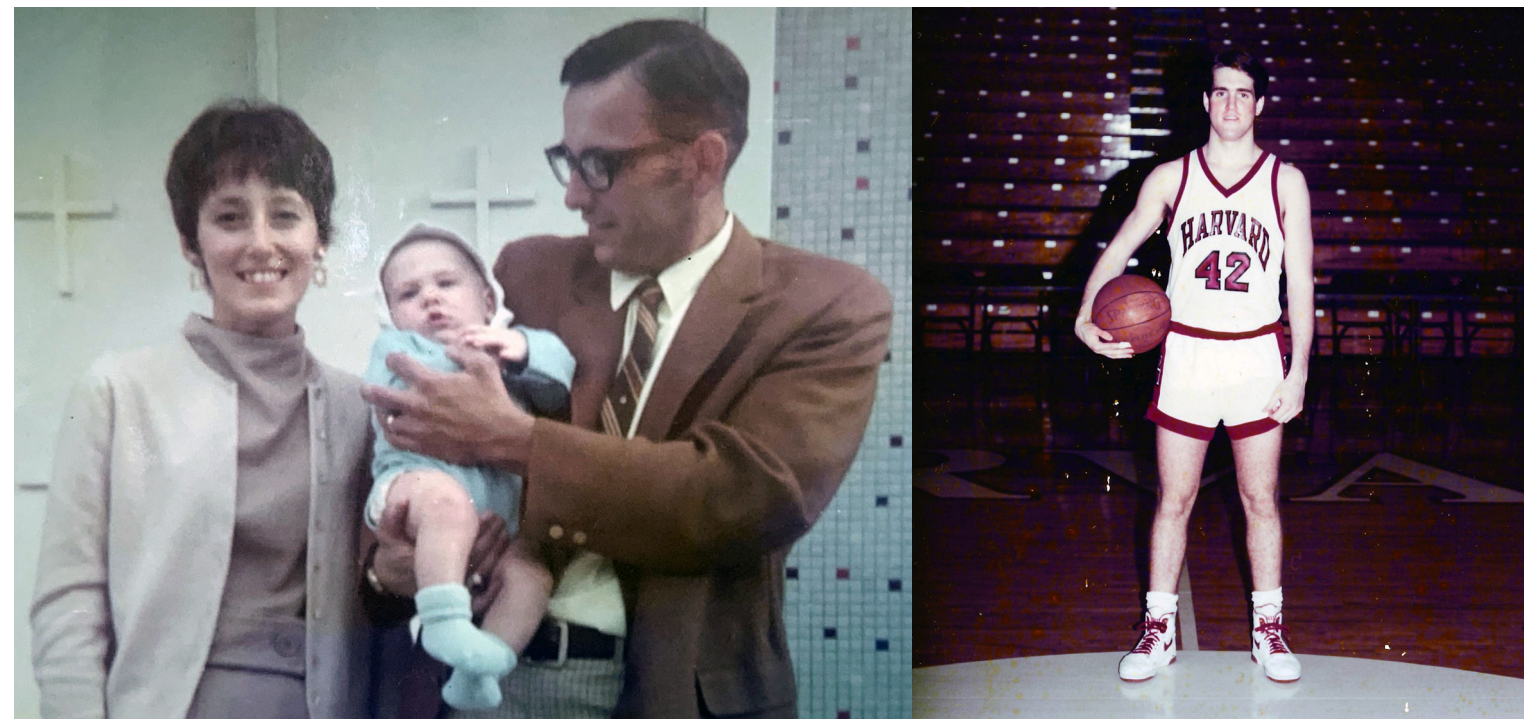
"In addition to being a grateful son and glowing uncle, I am also a Grandma's Boy," he said during the speech. On one side, was Grandma McCarthy, his father's mother. An Eleanor Roosevelt figure who had been a trailblazing teacher, department chair, and union president at a high school about 45 minutes north of New York City. "She was a very, very formidable, forceful person," he says. "Deeply loving and wonderful, but she was tough."

And in many ways, she was also his first teacher.

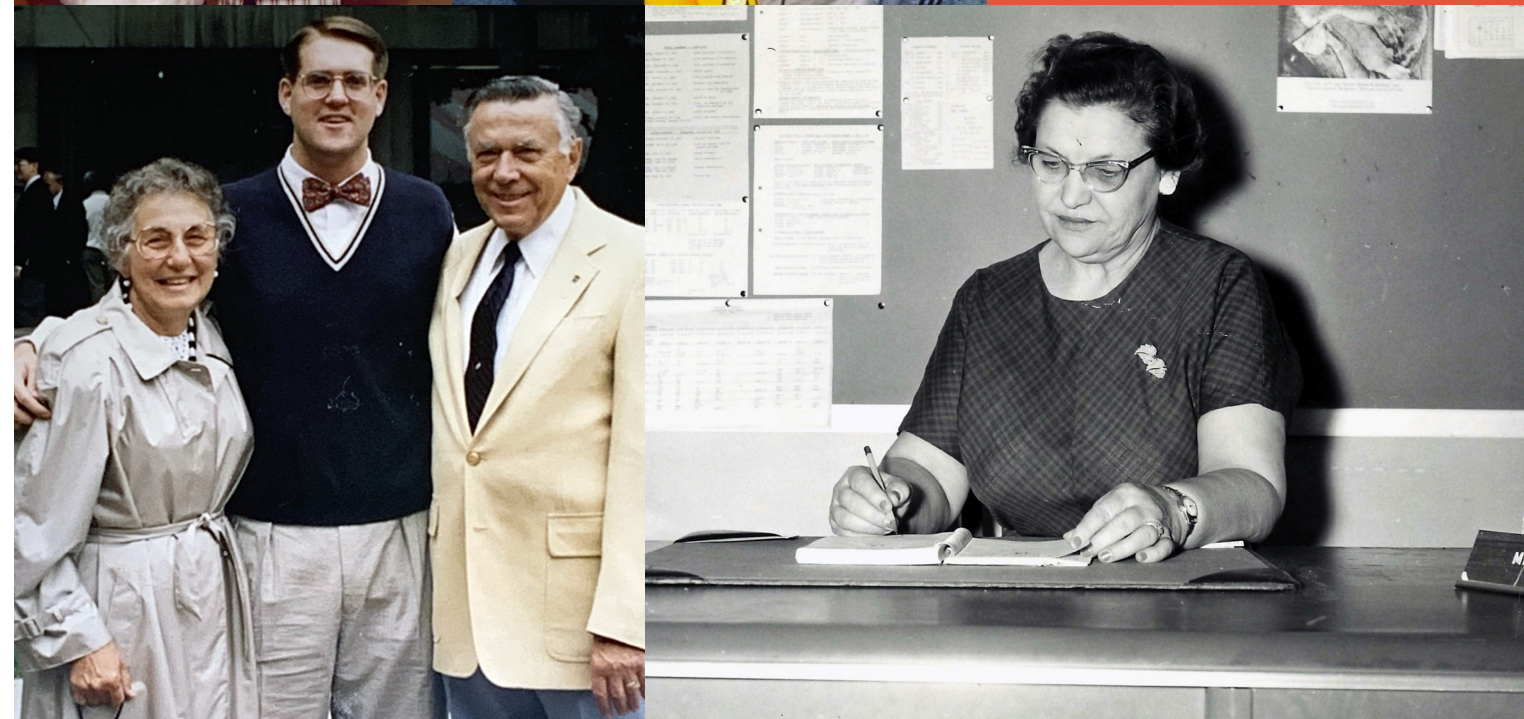
"My parents were both teaching at the time, and early in their careers. My mom took some time off, but mostly she was teaching full time. My grandmother and grandfather had both retired the year I was born and adopted so they moved upstate and kind of took care of me," he says. They picked him up from school and had him over on the weekends. He remembers lots of afternoons sitting with Grandma McCarthy on an old wooden swing in her yard, drinking sweet, Lipton iced tea. She would ask him "millions of questions," especially about what he had learned in school that day and what questions the lessons brought up for him. "She spent an enormous amount of time giving me her undivided attention."

That swing was his favorite school, he says, and hugely transformative in its own way.

"Even before I went to school, I was asking questions. I was a huge troublemaker, huge troublemaker. I always had behavioral issues, all the way through high school," he says, laughing. "Probably also in college, graduate school. I'm still a troublemaker. My worst marks were handwriting and behavior. On my second-grade report card, which we still have, my teacher wrote in the comment section, 'Timmy talks too much.' My parents had to respond that they received the report card. My dad wrote, 'you're telling us!'"



Top: McCarthy with his parents in 19xx, Harvard hoops star; Center: first communion, with Malia and Marcus; Bottom: with Gram and Grandpa Bobrinitz at Harvard graduation, Grandma McCarthy at work in 19xx



COURTESY TIM MCCARTHY

“So Timmy’s always talked too much,” McCarthy says. “My father used to joke that I got vaccinated with a phonograph needle.” Given who McCarthy was surrounded by growing up, it’s not a surprise that he learned it was okay to express himself.

“I was around adults all the time, as it happens when you’re an only child,” he says. “And I was around adults all the time who were curious about me and wanted to know what I had to say and gave me room and space to tell fanciful stories and to ask tough questions and to just chatter away and make sense of things in their presence.”

That included his other grandmother, Gram Bobrinitz on his mother’s side, who “was also hungry to learn,” he said during his convocation speech — and taught him other important lessons.

“Unlike Grandma McCarthy, who was a first-generation college student, Gram left high school when she was 16 to work in a garment factory in upstate New York,” he says. Her family could only afford to send one of their four daughters to nursing school, so she became a cuffer, which meant putting cuffs on men’s dress shirts. And she cooked. As McCarthy told the Ed School students in May, when he wasn’t on the swing with Grandma McCarthy, he was in the kitchen with Gram Bobrinitz, “smelling the sauce, marveling at the meatballs, and hovering over the homemade pasta that seemed to stretch across every surface.” By the time he reached middle school, Gram Bobrinitz was nearly 60 and decided it was time to finally get her high school diploma. “That meant that she had to clear some space to study in the midst of all that macaroni. Sometimes, we studied together — I helped her with spelling, she helped me with math — and she beat me to high school graduation.”

McCarthy says he doesn’t know what inspired her to go back to school but wishes he had asked.

“My biggest regret in my life is not doing oral histories with my grandparents before they passed,” he says. “It’s the biggest regret. So frustrating. And so, I’m now starting to interview my parents, which is good to have that at least.”

When Gram Bobrinitz died in 2012, he buried his Ph.D. diploma with her. Her GED hangs in his office in Gutman, next to “McCarthy Way,” a sign Grandma McCarthy’s school district made after the street to the high school where she taught was renamed in her honor.

“My grandmothers cherished education for different reasons — Grandma McCarthy because she was among the

first in our family to go to college, Gram Bobrinitz because she went back to high school to finish what she started,” McCarthy said at Convocation. “I stand here today because these women taught their only grandchild to work hard, dream big, and never take any of this for granted.”

#### At A Place Like This

And he did dream big. After graduating from Harvard College with a BA and getting two master’s and a Ph.D. from Columbia, McCarthy returned to Harvard, where he taught history and literature to undergraduates before joining the faculty at the Kennedy School, where he was the first openly gay faculty member and stayed for 16 years before coming to the Ed School. “My career has gone all over the place,” he says.

Initially he planned on staying in New York after his Ph.D., but was still connected to Malcolm, a young boy he mentored while volunteering at the Maynard Fletcher School in Cambridge when he was a Harvard undergraduate. McCarthy later became Malcolm’s big brother through the Big Brother/Big Sister program.

“I made a commitment that I was going to stay connected to him and stay in touch with his mother,” he says. Malcom even attended his father’s basketball camp in Albany. When Malcolm was a teen, his mother called McCarthy and asked him if he’d help parent him.

“And so I did. I came back from New York and put everything on hold,” he says. That was in 1998. McCarthy started teaching at Harvard College and moved into Quincy House as a resident scholar. Malcom lived with him during high school, becoming a track star at nearby Rindge and Latin.

“I met him when he was four and I was 19. He is 37 now. I’m 52,” McCarthy says.

And the connection has expanded. Now, Malcom’s 14-year-old daughter Malia has become a big part of McCarthy’s life and visits the Harvard campus regularly. Through him, she’s met famous visitors, including Hillary Clinton and John Lewis. When Malia was nine, McCarthy wrote a piece to her that he posted online called “May Our Hope Persist: A Love Letter to My Niece.” He had started the letter in his mind when he was holding her for the first time in the hospital, the day she was born nine years earlier. “I’d never before met a human that new to the world,” he wrote. “You were very small, but you weighed everything. I can’t forget the look on the nurse’s face when she

“I come from blue collar, hardworking folk and teachers. When I say I come from humble roots, I really do come from humble roots. We’re not fancy folks. My mother once said that we’re probably not fit for polite company. We’re a little bawdy, sometimes a little profane.”



came into that hospital room in Boston and saw you in my arms as you settled into your first night's sleep. Not everyone can see what is so obvious to us: we are family."

Not long ago, McCarthy joined a new family: at the Ed School. By the time Dean Bridget Terry Long called him in 2021 and asked if he was interested in joining the faculty full time (he was), McCarthy already had strong ties to the school, having taught a few modules and Project Zero classes. There was also the strongest connection: C.J. Crowder. Currently the director of talent acquisition at Ignite Reading, Crowder was an Ed School student when they met in 2001, McCarthy a professor in the yard.

"I used to work at Harvard Collections — it doesn't exist anymore — and a few of us went to Whitney's after work," Crowder says of their first meeting. Crowder went to the jukebox to play a song and turned to the guy next to him to borrow a dollar. "I told him I would play a song for him. I played *Captain Jack* by Billy Joel, and we spent the rest of the night talking." Their first official date was waffles and eggs in the dining hall at Quincy House, where McCarthy worked as an assistant resident dean. "When I entered the courtyard for the first date, I heard a little boy, a neighbor, call out, 'Timothy Patrick McCarthy!!' because he was so excited to see Tim and I think I fell in love with him at that moment."

When Long reached out about the Ed School job, Crowder says McCarthy was ready to move to Appian Way.

"HGSE is a special place. When I was there, there was a saying that it's called HGSE because it embraces you like a hug. It reaches out for special educators who understand the importance of sparking the imagination, passion, and excitement of educators and it makes them a vital part of the HGSE community," he says. "Tim was longing for that opportunity, and I think the leadership at HGSE could sense that. Be the change...that's Tim."

It's a vibe that his students have since picked up on, which doesn't surprise Crowder.

"He loves teaching — his parents and grandmother were teachers so it's in his blood," he says. "He loves connecting with his students and they bring him so much joy and light. He truly believes in the mutual benefit of teaching and knows as much as he teaches his students, they teach him so much more."

During his Convocation speech in May, McCarthy talked to the soon-to-be graduates about how recent "world-historical disruptions" like the pandemic and po-

litical insurrections "have changed us for good. I say that because I have learned this from all of you." Students, he explained, have shown him how to listen more deeply and speak more lovingly. They've challenged him to make classrooms more accessible and inclusive. And they have "checked" him when his walk and talk were misaligned.

They have also appreciated his way of including storytelling — and one's personal history — into learning.

As **BRIAN RADLEY, ED.M.'19**, noted in an interview about faculty influences, McCarthy "affirmed for me the power of narrative as a way to connect with and inspire others. He also helped me reconnect with my own educational story in a truly empowering way."

That through line of storytelling is why McCarthy joined the American Repertory Theater as a board adviser and host of their *Resistance Mic!* series, and recently hosted a series of author talks with Harvard Book Store. It's also what keeps him talking about his own family and the influence they've had on who he is as an educator, and a person.

"I say to all my classes that stories are the connective tissue of our common and different human experiences. That's just a core belief that I have," he says. "Part of it is that I come from a storytelling family. One of the dimensions of that larger ecosystem of education and my family was that everyone was always sharing stories, telling stories about each other, and telling stories about where they've been and what they've done. Stories were just so important for us."

Recently, his colleagues at the Codman Square Health Center in Dorchester, where he's been teaching a year-long, college-level intro to the humanities class for adults since 2001, cheered when listening online to McCarthy's Ed School Convocation speech. For years, they had been hearing those same stories.

"They were like, 'oh my God, I love that your grandmothers made it into this speech.' They were so excited that the grandmas had made it to Harvard, because in a way, my story of my grandmothers and their devotion to me and to education was one of the ways that I helped to explain why someone from Harvard was in Dorchester, why someone who teaches at Harvard was also teaching in the Clemente Course. I am an unlikely presence, both at Harvard and in Dorchester. Right?"

"There was nothing to predict," he says, "that I would end up at a place like this." □

"I say to all my classes that stories are the connective tissue of our common and different human experiences. That's just a core belief that I have."



# She Sets the Pace



Alum works to dismantle what it means to be a runner and a scientist

Story by Lory Hough

**ALIA QATARNEH, ED.M.'22**, is many things. She's first-generation, East Boston-raised, Arab-Italian-American. She's an educator, rhymer, runner, learner, leader, and scientist.

She's also a TrailblazHer — part of an all-female running “crew” that launched in 2020 in Boston to respond to a need — the need for women in and around the city, and especially women of color, to have a safe space to truly see themselves as runners. Too often, the common narrative in society is that to be a “runner,” you must have a certain body shape or be able to hit specific PRs. But as Qatarneh once said in an interview about women interested in joining the TrailblazHer group, “if you run for the 39 bus, you are a runner.”

That's why the TrailblazHer's mission isn't about going faster or besting one another in races. It's about being visible and dismantling mainstream messaging about women and their bodies. It's about the mental, physical, and spiritual fitness of the women who show up each week. And, more than anything, says Qatarneh, a crew “LeadHer” who oversees weekly runs, it's about community.

“TrailblazHers isn't just a run crew,” she says. “We are a family, a sisterhood even.”

That sisterhood supported Qatarneh last April when she ran the Boston Marathon for the first time. She had been running for years before joining TrailblazHers — first as a sprinter in high school at Boston Latin, then tackling longer distances, including seven half marathons. But running Boston — the biggest race in her hometown, and known

worldwide — was never, ever on Qatarneh's radar.

“It's important to differentiate between *knowing* about the Boston Marathon and *wanting* to run the Boston Marathon,” she says. “As a Bostonian, I've known about this iconic race since I was in elementary school. Did I know it was iconic? Absolutely not. My father had taken my sister and I to the finish line a few times in the 90s, but I did not grasp the gravity of this one-day event. I did not know anyone who ran a marathon, let alone Boston. No family member or relative, no Eastie neighbor, no co-worker of my parents. Begs the question, why? Who is this race for? It surely wasn't for me. But things changed in 2022.”

That was the year the Boston Running Collaborative, an extension of the Boston Athletic Association, opened nominations for their inaugural Boston Marathon Program. This goal was to actively engage local runners and make the iconic marathon more inclusive and representative of the city. TrailblazHers nominated Qatarneh to receive a coveted bib. On the big day this past April, future Ed.L.D. classmates tracked her progress and one of her former professors, Monica Higgins, cheered her on in the rain at the 13.1-mile mark.

This summer, Qatarneh reached another milestone: In June, as she prepared to start the Ed.L.D. Program, she left the job she held for the past 11 years at Harvard working with middle and high school biology teachers to bring cutting edge lab techniques to the classroom as part of the science educa-

FRANCES RAMIREZ/PUMA RUNNING



Qatarneh running the 2022 Boston 10K for Women along the Charles. Opposite: TrailBlazHer annual Bra Run, 2023



**“I’m challenging the running sector by disrupting the narrative around what it means to be and look like a runner, and I’m disrupting within the Harvard community by challenging what it means to be a scientist.”**

tion outreach program housed in the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology.

The job was a way, she says, for her to challenge another unwritten narrative, in this case, that science isn’t for everyone.

“With the underrepresentation of marginalized populations prevalent in STEM fields, it has been my personal ambition to help students see themselves in STEM,” she says. “While pushing the boundaries of science education, I have recognized the intersection of education and industry is central to uplifting underserved communities. This is why I applied to the Ed.L.D. Program at HGSE; to become an agent

for change in advancing school-to-career pathways for K–12 students who are underrepresented in the STEM fields. Why? I was that student. I continue to be that student.”

This brings her back to a question she now gets asked a lot: What does it mean to trailblaze?

“To me, it means to change things with intention,” she told the *Harvard Gazette* back in April, just before the marathon. “I’m challenging the running sector by disrupting the narrative around what it means to be and look like a runner, and I’m disrupting within the Harvard community by challenging what it means to be a scientist.” □



TrailBlazHer support during the Boston Marathon



Qatarnah (far right) with TrailblazHers running the 2022 Boston 10K for Women

FRANCES RAMIREZ/PUMA RUNNING; BRYON MALIK PHOTOGRAPHY

QUICK CHAT

# Why Rest is Best

And why it’s an act of justice Story by Lory Hough

**Just after he joined the Ed School in July, after xxx years in the Africana Studies department at San Francisco State University, Professor SHAWN GINWRIGHT spoke to Ed. about social justice educators and the importance of rest – including his own.**

**What got you thinking about the toll activism takes on educators, especially their ability to rest?**

To keep it real, I didn’t always see the connection between social change and rest. Rest became important to me when I realized that something was really wrong in my own life. In 2001, I experienced a sort of a mental breakdown. We had just given birth to our daughter Nyah. I was teaching at Santa Clara University. I was the executive director of a nonprofit in Oakland and constantly raising money, and I was leading a series of youth organizing sessions with young people. One night, I woke up in a sweat and I couldn’t sleep. I was so stressed and worried about failing to raise money, not being good enough at teaching, and most importantly, not being there for my daughter. I walked into the living room and broke down crying. Well, really, I was sobbing. At first, I was surprised and didn’t know where all this emotion was coming from. But when I tried to calm it, bury it, and stuff it back down, it welled up even more.

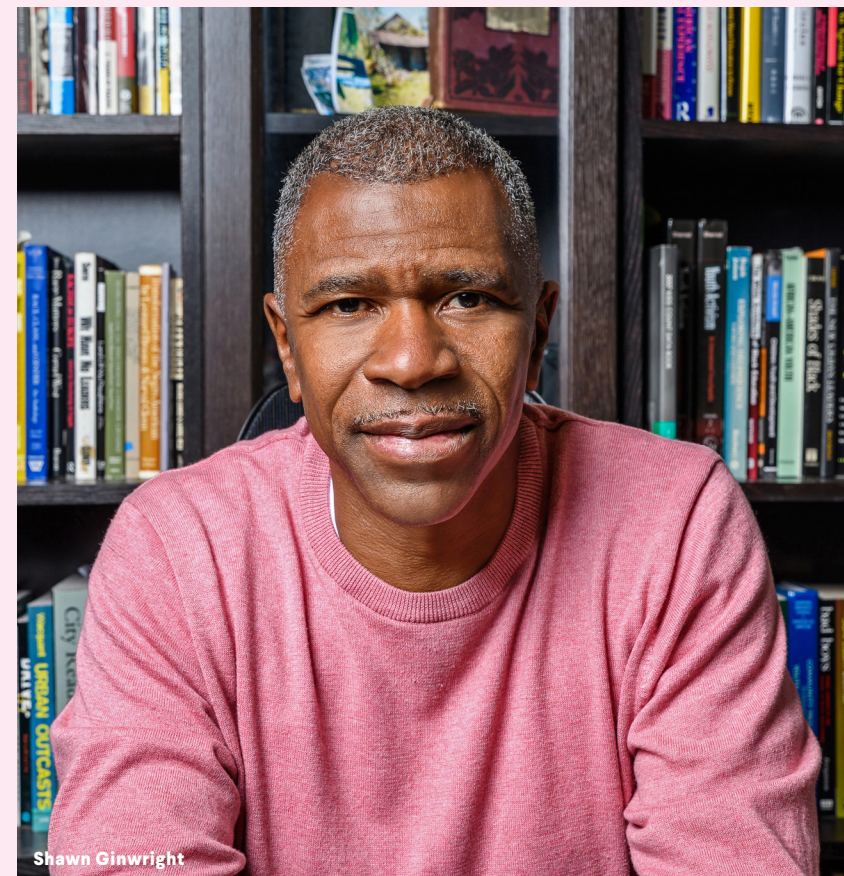
**What happened next?**

I was five minutes into my snotty nose crying when the inner dialogue started in my head. One voice, the

strong baritone Black man stood up and said, “Hey, you a grown ass man. Suck it up and keep it moving.” Another voice, one that I’d never heard before said, “It’s OK man, you are so hard on yourself, just let go of all this shit you’ve been carrying.” More sobbing. Nedra, my spouse, heard me and came into the living room. She had never seen me in that state, so she knew something was really wrong. We sat and talked, and what became clear to me was that I needed to make a different choice about how I wanted to live. I remember reading somewhere this quote, “I choose peace of mind, instead of this” and that’s exactly how I felt. I also realized that I wasn’t alone, and that a lot of teachers I was supporting were experiencing their own version of my meltdown.

**Why do educators sacrifice rest in the name of justice?**

The truth is, teachers aren’t really trained to understand themselves. They are trained to support and teach students without much consideration of how to cultivate the reservoir of presence that is required to teach and support in a transformative way. In most cases, teachers are expected to grind and burn their way through the challenges of teaching. This is particularly the case for social justice educators who assume that there is not much time for their own rest because there is so much suffering and injustice in our schools. Rest is also an opportunity to reflect because it allows us to take stock of what’s going on inside and shatters the myth that real social justice work



Shawn Ginwright

happens outside of us. Rest forces us to reconcile the close relationship between our inner journey and how we show up in the world.

**You say “rest is an act of freedom.” What do you mean?**

There are so many ways that we, as a society, view rest as a sign of weakness. The idea that rest is weakness has a long history in America and it is still deeply rooted in white supremacist capitalist culture that views work, labor, and productivity as the bedrock of a healthy economy. People of color, in the minds of white America, have primarily been seen as labor to exploit. Rest and leisure are reserved for the white folk who supposedly *earned* the luxury to rest. Rest and race are intertwined and [it] boils down to who has the right to rest, and under what conditions should rest and leisure be granted? ...We collectively free ourselves from the impact of White supremacist capitalist culture when we center rest in our personal and professional lives. □

**“The truth is, teachers aren’t really trained to understand themselves.”**

To read the full interview, go to [gse.harvard.edu/ed](https://gse.harvard.edu/ed)



**“He’s the only puppet I have ever hugged when no one was watching.”**

KATE MARLEY

Liz Hara

# The Puppet Wrangler

Even puppets need an entourage Story by Lory Hough

SHE GAVE UP a semester abroad in college to make hundreds of rubber warts before tackling vines and leaves. When a fuzzy, elephant-antelope named Mr. Snuffleupagus needs your help, that’s just what you do.

For Liz Hara, a new student in the online master’s program, it’s also what she wanted to do.

Starting in high school, Hara began building puppets for local theaters in Minneapolis. During her junior year of college at Vassar, she landed an internship with the Jim Hensen Company. This included helping Marty Robinson — aka, Mr. Snuffleupagus — with prop and design work (the warts and vines, among other things) for the Broadway production of *Little Shop of Horrors* that Robinson was involved with at the time. The internship also led to costume work for other Broadway productions, including *The Lion King* and *Shrek*.

Robinson eventually became her mentor and “puppet dad.” (Her “puppet mom” is Pam Arciero, who plays Oscar the Grouch’s girlfriend, Grundgetta.) A full-time job at *Sesame Street* followed, doing something few, if any, Ed School students can claim on their resumes: puppet wrangling.

“It’s basically an art department for the puppets,” Hara explained during a visit to Appian Way in July. “Puppet wranglers dress the puppets and do their hair and makeup.” They also handle rigging — the controls that bring the puppet to life. Hara says it’s a dream job and during the first few weeks as a wrangler, she fell asleep every night “giggling to myself.”

Asked about her favorite puppet, she jokes, “we never have favorite babies,” but admits a soft spot for Grover, even though, with his big hands, he’s hard to dress. “He’s the only puppet I have ever hugged when no one was watching.”

In time, Hara also became interested in writing and joined the *Sesame* writing room. With the team, she won an Emmy in 2018 for outstanding writing (after winning her first in 2015 for costume design). She also started writing for other shows, including *Shark Dog*, *NinjaGo*, and *Life in Pieces*.

Nowadays, Hara is a full-time writer for Marvel’s *Moon Girl* and *Devil Dinosaur*, an animated series about a 13-year-old genius named Lunella who fights crime in New York City with a 10-ton T-Rex. And she’s become more interested in the learning side of kids’ shows, not just the crafting side. Curriculum, she says, is one of reasons she decided to come to the Ed School.

“The curriculum meetings have always been fascinating to me,” she says. “I would love to create my own curriculum-based show someday, where we bake the curriculum into the premise and format instead of trying to marry them after the fact, which is how it’s often done.”

And when she has time, she’s still, happily, taking care of the puppets. As she recently told *Maple Grove* magazine, with puppets, “Things come to life and there is just a beautiful relationship between the audience and the puppet. That is still the most exciting thing about puppetry. Every performance is an invitation to the audience to come play.” □

# Community Building

Ed.L.D. student all in for K-12 Story by Lory Hough

IT WAS INTRODUCED as “a summer experience built with the Black boy in mind.” Three days of learning about leadership, what it means to be an entrepreneur, how to advocate for yourself, and the importance of storytelling.

Created by Ed.L.D. student Terrance Mitchell, Camp Harvard grew out of his work this past year with the Cambridge superintendent’s office and Harvard’s Phillips Brooks House. He says he chose the name of the camp, which was open to fifth through eighth-grade Black boys in Cambridge, intentionally, and not only because it was held at the Ed School and in Harvard Yard.

“Most times when I see tour guides visiting the Harvard campus, I rarely see Black students,” he says. “We wanted the campus to be our oyster,” and for the boys to know that they belonged there.

With little funding, Mitchell, a former teacher and principal in Atlanta, New Orleans, and more recently, his hometown, Cleveland, took on most of Camp Harvard’s duties, from teaching to facilitating lunches. Jumping fully in with the students was something he learned the importance of this past year in the Ed.L.D. Program.

“How often do we move from the balcony and find connection to the people we are expected to lead?” he says. “Part of the lack of funding for the camp allowed me to think intentionally about the initiative we have for supporting our young people.”

In late July, as Mitchell was getting ready for part two of the camp

— a virtual session that included the original 20 boys from Cambridge, as well as boys from New York, Boston, Atlanta, and Cleveland — he talked about how he often felt invisible in school because his family constantly moved.

“I went to a different elementary school every year of my life,” he says. It wasn’t easy, and he had to learn how to pivot between public and Catholic, suburban and urban. But, he says, the back-and-forth between different types of schools taught him something important: “It allowed me to see what schooling could and should be.”

By the time he got to high school, centered in a housing project, he realized it was “sink or swim.” He was tracked in the school’s basic level but started advocating for himself — a skill he taught campers this summer — and eventually got into honors and AP classes. And then Darren Hudson, a young Black man and his ninth-grade American history teacher, essentially changed his life: He gave him a VHS tape about Morehouse College.

“That was very transformational,” Mitchell says. “I shared with him that I attended a college tour over the summer and Morehouse was a good visit. He remembered this conversation and hand-delivered to me a VHS tape.” The Morehouse video, created for orientation, “solidified my choice of college. Prior, I didn’t think HBCUs were diverse spaces and might limit my post-college opportunities. Watching this video of academically sound young

Black men going through rituals and celebrations altered how I saw Black men in this country. Prior to that video, I had no idea of the collective power of Black men.”

Mitchell eventually enrolled at Morehouse. Initially, he majored in applied physics and engineering, but after tutoring students at a community center in a Black neighborhood, he started taking education classes at nearby Spelman College. (Morehouse didn’t offer ed classes — something he wants to change someday.)

After his first year, he went home to Cleveland and shared with his mother how much he liked tutoring and asked if she would be disappointed if he pursued teaching one day as a career.

“She shared that she would be proud of any career path I took,” Mitchell says. “After a sophomore year course with Dr. Christine King Farris, the elder sister of Dr. [Martin Luther] King, I knew education would be my path. I immediately declared a major in early childhood education and the rest is history.”

As Mitchell starts his second year in the Ed.L.D. Program, he’s continuing his internship with the Cambridge superintendent’s office and volunteering with the local branch of My Brother’s Keeper, as he keeps his eye on his own leadership goal: becoming superintendent of Cleveland public schools.

“I become very ambitious and excited about the opportunities we have” in education, he says. “Everything for me is in K-12.” □

**“How often do we move from the balcony and find connection to the people we are expected to lead?”**



Terrance Mitchell

# Ideas



"I think right now, many Americans rightly worry about the future of our democracy and our ability to work together as a nation to solve collective problems."

PROFESSOR MARTIN WEST (SEE P. 24)

SIMONE MASSONI

# Civics



As national history and civics scores drop, educators are finding new ways to make room in their classrooms for social studies

Story by **Andrew Bauld**  
Illustrations by **Giulio Bonasera**

# Duty





**THERE'S A SIGN** in Rebecca Park's classroom that reads, "History is part of you, and you are part of history."

For some teachers, that message might be nothing more than an inspirational quote for students, quickly read and just as quickly forgotten. But for **PARK, ED.M.'17**, a 12th-grade humanities teacher, it speaks to her deeper philosophy when it comes to teaching social studies, one that was instilled in her as a member of the founding cohort of the Harvard Teacher Fellows Program.

"For me, my job is to prepare students to be civically engaged, to be motivated to be engaged with both community activism and more traditional things like voting," Park says. "But also, to deeply believe we can't move forward without understanding the past. You can't understand yourself if you don't understand the past."

Park is lucky. For the last six years she's taught at Leaders, a small Outward Bound high school in Brooklyn, New York, that emphasizes community-based and project-based learning, and so she's been able to bring history and civics to life for her students beyond just dates and facts in a textbook.

Students have interviewed political candidates. They've written policy papers on issues that directly impact them. They've read classic novels to learn about the past and make connections to current events.

But what's happening in Park's classroom is far from the norm in most American schools, where time for social studies has steadily been shrinking for years, pushed aside to focus on math and English language arts. In some states, new laws are making it illegal to even teach certain subjects related to history and civics.

Coupled with COVID-related learning loss, it's no wonder that the latest report from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) had a bleak assessment: American students are failing in social studies. NAEP, often referred to as the Nation's Report Card, saw eighth-grade civic and history scores sink to new lows, with just 13% of students demonstrating proficiency in history, and 22% in civics.

"I think right now, many Americans rightly worry about the future of our democracy and our ability to work together as a nation to solve collective problems," says Professor Martin West, who is also a member of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the Nation's Report Card. "Ensuring that students have a solid foundation in history and civics is not the only thing we need to address those concerns, but it strikes me as an essential prerequisite for strengthening American democracy."

In an opinion piece for *The Boston Globe*, West wrote that the "ongoing erosion of student's history and civics knowledge should sound alarm bells across the country."

But at a time when civic engagement has become increasingly polarized and toxic, and many educators are faced with restrictions on what they can even teach, will schools be able to heed that warning?

#### Not Just COVID's Fault

In 2022, the average NAEP eighth-grade U.S. history score decreased by five points compared to 2018 and by nine points compared to 2014. Average scores also dropped across racial and ethnic groups, compared to four years before. And while scores dropped, the percentage of students who fell below the NAEP's "basic" achievement level increased, rising from 34% in 2018 to 40% in 2022.

Even in high-performing districts, the gaps in student knowledge when it comes to history are shocking, educators say. **SPIKE SOMMERS, ED.M.'22**, found that out firsthand this past year, his first teaching eighth grade social studies in Brookline

**"I think right now, many Americans rightly worry about the future of our democracy and our ability to work together as a nation to solve collective problems. Ensuring that students have a solid foundation in history and civics ... strikes me as an essential prerequisite for strengthening American democracy."**

PROFESSOR MARTIN WEST

Public Schools, a high-achieving district less than four miles from Harvard.

During a discussion about the Thirteenth Amendment, Sommers asked his students to imagine what life was like at the time for Black Americans in the 19th century. He quickly realized that was too advanced a question for many students, who he said, "had no idea what the Civil War was, or they conflated it with the American Revolution, or thought Martin Luther King, Jr., was involved with it. I realized I couldn't assume students had a historical basis for the things we were talking about."

It's not just scores and knowledge that have slipped. Compared to 2018, this year also marked a decline in the percentage of eighth-grade students who reported taking a class mainly focused on U.S. history, while elementary teachers focused they lack the support to teach social studies well.

To understand how we got to this point, it helps to know the history of social studies education in this country.

There's no doubt that the pandemic had an adverse effect on student performance in history and civic scores in 2022, but, West says, "it would be a mistake to reduce the issue to the pandemic alone. "While civic scores fell for the first time since the NAEP test began in 1998, history scores have been falling for nearly a decade and fell by a similar amount between 2014 and 2018.

"Over a much longer period, we know that there have been pretty substantial declines in instructional time elementary school teachers report devoting to history, social studies, [and] civic content, and that's a consequence in part to an accountability system that focuses almost entirely on students' math and reading achievement," West says.

Researchers began to observe what they call the "social studies squeeze" in 2007, a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which required, by law, that states test students in reading and math, but not in other content areas. Without the pressure of high-stakes testing, schools slowly began reducing their emphasis on instructional time for other subjects, including social studies.

"We know when you don't test, the time investment shrinks," says Professor Danielle Allen, director of the Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP), an initiative of Harvard's Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics. But, she adds, this deemphasis goes back even further than NCLB.

"We have a 70-year story of disinvestment," in civics and history, she says, a trend that began during World War II with an increased investment in STEM research, and has continued to today, with the federal government spending a little more than \$50 per student for STEM versus five cents for civics, according to research from the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.

Those sidelining actions now echo across the latest NAEP scores, where students are unable to answer some of the most basic questions related to the foundations of the American political system or the historic events that have gotten us to where we are today. But, even if these low NAEP scores do serve as a wakeup call, that warning is coming at possibly the worst time.

"When we need more robust civic education with young people to help foster the democratic attitudes to safeguard democracy is at the very time when teachers feel under threat if they attempt to do so," says Professor Meira Levinson, a founding member of the National Action Civics Collaborative at xxx.

Since 2021, 18 states have imposed bans on certain classroom discussion topics, including race and gender. Some have gone even farther. In 2021, Texas passed legislation to not only block teaching lessons about racism or sexism, but also included a provision that outlawed assignments involving communication between students and federal, state, or local officials.

These limitations are restricting what teachers can teach, especially when it comes to social studies. A recent report by the RAND Corporation, *Walking on Eggshells*, found that one in four teachers changed their curriculum or instruction because of state and district restrictions. In July of this year, the Florida State Board of Education approved new social studies standards that included language about how "slaves developed



**Rebecca Park**  
12th-Grade humanities teacher  
Brooklyn, New York



**Martin West**  
HGSE professor  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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**“When we need more robust civic education with young people to help foster the democratic attitudes to safeguard democracy is at the very time when teachers feel under threat if they attempt to do so.”**

PROFESSOR MEIRA LEVINSON



**Spike Sommers**  
8th-grade social studies teacher  
Brookline, Massachusetts



**Danielle Allen**  
HGSE professor; director,  
Democratic Knowledge Project  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit.” Not only are students receiving a censored version of history, but they are also losing out on the chance to discuss controversial topics, a critical component in the development of their civic skills.

“Whatever we are doing in our schools, it is insufficient to meet the very real and high stakes demands of the current moment where we need more informed, more engaged, more skillful citizens with the right kinds of dispositions, not toward violence but toward using non-violent tools, to try and collectively identify real problems together,” Levinson says.

Experts have some solutions. End-of-year history and civics tests might improve results, as “research shows teachers spend more time on social studies in states that include the subject in their testing programs,” according to West. Infrastructure — meaning the policies that support teachers’ instructional practices and student learning — for social studies is also severely lacking in most states and at the district level, according to another RAND report. Creating more consistent frameworks and providing more support, including teacher evaluation and professional development, could go a long way in holding schools more accountable for student achievement in social studies.

But in addition to these more traditional interventions, educators and experts are also beginning to rethink what civics and history education can look like in 21st-century classrooms, and some promising changes are taking place right here in Massachusetts.

### Leading the Change

It’s fitting that the birthplace of the American Revolution might serve as a model for turning the tide of failing social studies instruction.

In 2018, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education revised its history and social science standards, placing a greater emphasis on civics and introducing a new year-long eighth-grade civics course. The legislation

also passed a law that requires all students in eighth grade and high school to lead a school-based civics project.

West believes the state can be an example for the rest of the country in how to prepare students to better understand history and become active civic participants. It’s a good start to reversing decades of neglect when it comes to teaching history and civics, but, unfortunately, it’s targeted primarily at improving grades. There’s still a deep disillusionment amongst young people and how they feel about American democracy that extends beyond the classroom.

According to the Democratic Knowledge Project, fewer than 30% of people under 40 believe it is essential to live in a democracy, while 1 in 4 young people believe choosing leaders through free elections is unimportant.

But Allen and the project’s staff are trying to change that attitude. One of the group’s many initiatives includes an eighth-grade civics curriculum called “Civic Engagement in Our Democracy.” (See sidebar.) Co-created by the DKP along with eighth-grade educators in Cambridge Public Schools in 2019, the curriculum has since been piloted by dozens of educators around Massachusetts. In 2021, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recognized the curriculum as one of just four year-long civics curriculum that met state standards.

“To have that civic identity is to figure out what you value and connect that to the many roles in being part of a civic society, like voting, holding elected office, and working on local committees, and also with those outside civic institutions, like protests,” says Allen. “Our hope is to help young people reclaim one of those civic roles for themselves and reclaim an ownership stake in our democracy.”

Through project-based activities and projects, students learn about history while also developing their civic identity by reflecting on their own personal values to better understand the potential civic roles available to them.

Audrey Koble teaches eighth-grade English and civics at Brooke Roslindale Charter School

ROWAN RASKIN; LAURA ROSE



**Meira Levinson**  
HGSE professor  
Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Audrey Koble**  
8th-grade English & civics  
teacher  
Boston, Massachusetts

in Boston. She piloted the DKP curriculum last year and says the work around student identity was powerful.

“It made it clear that you have to understand yourself to understand how a government can work for you,” Koble says.

That initial work laid the foundation for students to create impactful civic projects at the end of the school year. Students attended local government board meetings and spoke with local political and business leaders including Boston Mayor Michelle Wu and New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft. And their projects reflected ideas for real problems facing students, like one in which students proposed a new MBTA subway route to address a lack of service between the Orange Line and the Green Line.

Koble says thanks to the curriculum and their final projects, she feels confident her students are headed to high school with a stronger understanding of themselves and their place in their democracy. “They know some politicians are out there with their best interests in mind, and that they have the ability to reach out to them,” Koble says. “I didn’t understand that unto well into my 20s, and for them to understand that at 13 and 14 years old is incredible.”

Spike Sommers also piloted the DKP curriculum at his school in Brookline, and despite needing to fill in some gaps for students, he found the curriculum very powerful, especially in the way that it “used the social studies to make the civics understandable and contextualized, while the social studies really came alive because you see how relevant it is today.”

One unit, in particular, highlighted that relationship, where students learned about Prince Hall, a Black abolitionist leader in Boston who began a petition campaign to end slavery in 1773. Using his writings as primary sources, students went on to write their own petitions, from adding more gender-neutral bathrooms at their school to changing the school start time.

That’s not to say the curriculum or the new framework are perfect. Sommers found the end-of-year civic project particularly challenging.

Even with supports built into the DKP curriculum, Sommers says students often felt overwhelmed with leading a project on their own, and even he felt buried at times trying to keep track of more than 80 unique projects, the quality of which varied widely from student to student.

### Civics Education That Works

Lecturer Eric Soto-Shed recognizes the challenges of bringing impactful civics learning into classrooms. Although he’s encouraged by the work at both the state level and by organizations like the DKP, he’s working to help make it easier for teachers to assess civics skills and competencies and make sure students across classrooms can have consistent, meaningful experiences.

Along with Jack Schneider, an education professor at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Soto-Shed is working on a research project to identify what exactly it looks like to be an engaged citizen and to codify those skills into resources to support students and teachers.

“If we want to put curriculum into the classroom, we first need to identify the civic thinking actions we want students to do,” Soto-Shed says. “There’s a lot of good curriculum out there and research informed by philosophy and theory, but Jack and I were interested in the cognitive moves that engaged citizens do when they are participating in some kind of civic action.”

Taking inspiration from the Reading Like a Historian curriculum developed by the Stanford History Education Group, which taught students how to approach history through the same skills as professional historians, Soto-Shed is planning to do the same for civics.

In a recent research paper called *Teaching Students to be Skilled Citizens*, Soto-Shed and his co-authors surveyed 100 experts, including professors, elected officials, and nonprofit civic leaders, along with 500 regular citizens to come up with some main areas of civic involvement, including politically engaged activities like voting and activism, and a broader category called neighborliness, which covers interpersonal tasks

### “It made it clear that you have to understand yourself to understand how a government can work for you.”

AUDREY KOBLE, TEACHER AT BOSTON’S BROOKE  
ROSLINDALE CHARTER SCHOOL

like volunteering, helping others, and communicating across differences.

Soto-Shed says by identifying how people engage in these tasks, he hopes it will be easier for schools to integrate civics learning. “What we’re hoping to do with our research is help schools and states and districts be intentional about the civic skills we really need to care about, what the tasks are for students to demonstrate those skills, and how can they be taught,” he says.

And by identifying the tasks, he also thinks it will allow districts to build those civic competencies into many different parts of the curriculum through interdisciplinary lessons and activities.

“Look at volunteering, or neighborliness, those are things that can cut across curriculum,” Soto-Shed says. “I think part of the challenge is that civics is broadly defined and can live in many different parts of the curriculum, so having concrete tasks for where and how and when they are taught will help districts be more systematic about it.”

West also believes that getting creative about how to fit in civics during the school day can be another solution to improving civics learning.

“I think it’s a mistake to think about instructional time in schools as a zero-sum game where different subjects need to compete for time,” West says. One of the most obvious ways is by incorporating history and civics content into English language arts classes.

Rebecca Park does that with her students in Brooklyn. During a unit on New York City, Park had her students read *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. At the same time, they researched the historical setting of the novel to learn more about political corruption, poverty, and women’s rights, and how those issues impacted the literary characters. For another project, students read Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* and connected past moral panics with today’s controversies over issues like critical race theory.

Interdisciplinary projects like these don’t just benefit history learning, either. Studies, including one conducted recently by Professor James Kim called Models of Reading Engagement, show

that increasing background knowledge in social studies and science also improves student reading comprehension.

Another way teachers can make civics more exciting for students is by making it more accessible. While learning about the Constitution and the presidency are important, they can also feel very distant for students, especially eighth-graders. But learning about local government and the impact it has on their lives can feel much more relevant to students. Plus, it’s a lot easier to get a local politician to speak with students than say the president of the United States.

During the 2021 New York City Council election, Park took advantage of online learning to virtually invite nearly a dozen candidates to speak with her class. In preparation, students created rubrics about the qualities that would make the best council member and used them to interview each candidate.

“We have to balance the fundamentals they need to know with giving them an access point to make them curious to access more information rather than just starting with Article 1 of the Constitution,” says Park. “I think it’s important that civic curriculum starts with local government or local activism to give kids the motivations to get through the drier stuff.”

But teaching for student engagement doesn’t mean sacrificing learning the fundamentals of history or civics. Soto-Shed says even when teachers give students the freedom to choose any action project they want, they can still learn about and show their understanding of policies and systems of democracy by justifying their project choices.

“If a student wants to organize a protest, have them talk about why a referendum might not work, or if they want to do a social media campaign, who in the government do they think really needs to hear it,” Soto-Shed says. “Justify the action and really draw on the knowledge of the issue and of the system. That can be a powerful way to make sure students are learning the nuts and bolts while also being engaged in passionate work.” □



**Eric Soto-Shed**  
HGSE lecturer  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

**ANDREW BAULD, ED.M. '16,** is a writer based in New York City. His last piece for *Ed.* was on what’s lost when colleges compete



# Lecturer Huan-Tang Lu

This past summer, just after joining the Ed School to teach courses on cognitive and psychological assessments and the challenges kids face, Lecturer Huan-Tang Lu, a counselor and former assistant professor at Rowan University, spoke to *Ed.* about reading with his children, how animals play into his book choices, and the practical reason he reads in bed.

**What are you currently reading?**

*Three Little Pigs*

**What in particular drew you to this book?**

We have three sons, so naturally, this became our everyday nighttime story. Those three little pigs have adventured to various places like ice cream shops, haunted houses, a swimming pool, etc.

**What kind of reader were you as a kid? Did you have a favorite book or genre growing up?**

History books and comic books. Books on history that helped me learn the past and all kinds of comic books that inspired my imagination of the world.

**What's the most interesting or useful thing you read recently in a book?**

Play therapy skills may work even on your pets. I tried, and (I think) they do!

You're forming a book group at your house. Name three people you'd want in the group, and why.

I would love to have my wife and three kids in the group as every second with them is too precious to give away. If family members do not count, I can't really name anyone. Yet, one has to bring laughter, one

has to bring food, and one has to bring the book. The interactions are more important than the book itself!

**Is there a book you assigned to your students this fall that you think all educators should read?**

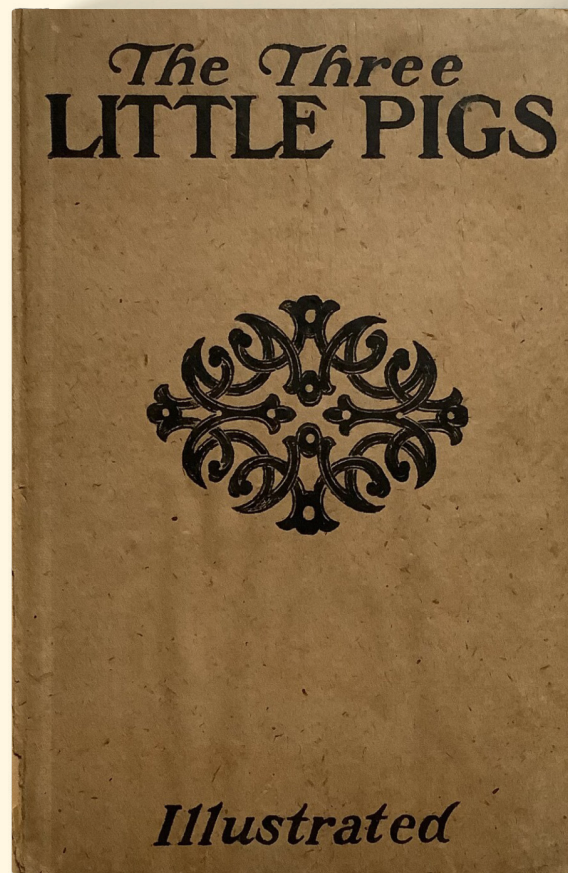
*The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook* by Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz. Those stories show why schools have to be safe spaces and why educators must care to build rapport with students.

**Favorite place to read.**

I love to read in bed because it is warm and comfy. Also, it is convenient in case I fall asleep.

**What book is on deck once you're ready to read something new?**

I believe that the future and the past are the key to understanding the present. I also believe that innovation has to be interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary simultaneously. That said, two books on my nightstand now are, *A Brief History of*



*Time* by Stephen Hawking and Mozi. The former teaches me new science perspectives and how to popularize science. The later one allows me to examine one of the earliest philosophers that promoted universal love, self-reflection, authenticity, and equity.

**What's your genre of choice?**

Well-researched historical fiction which allows me to vividly picture how people lived in other eras. Historical fiction, synthesized history,

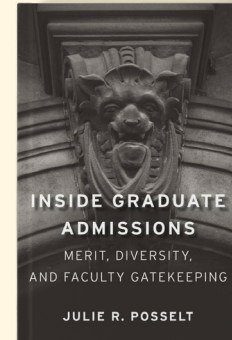
literature, culture, and more to give a panoramic view of a time period. It allows me to draw connections and insights to the present day. The genre also exposes me to a diversity of viewpoints throughout history, in line with my interest in equity. It satisfies my intellectual curiosity.

**Are you a paper book or e-reader?**

Paper book!

Looking for past On My Bookshelf interviews? Go to [gse.harvard.edu/ed/bookshelf](http://gse.harvard.edu/ed/bookshelf)

JILL ANDERSON

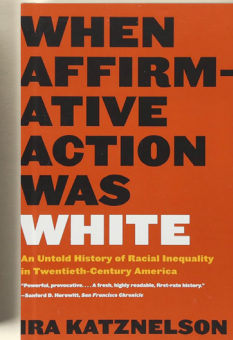


**Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping**

By Julie Posselt (HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

If you're casting a relatively wide net in terms of topics, I think graduate admissions is a space that is often overlooked in conversations about affirmative action, race-conscious admission, and diversity. Julie Posselt's 2016 book has been instrumental in revealing how considerations of diversity and merit shape graduate school admissions processes. As institutions consider the implications of the Supreme Court's decisions on various aspects of higher education, including graduate education, this book provides a useful resource for understanding this unique context.

RECOMMENDED BY DREW ALLEN, SENIOR LECTURER AND ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND ANALYTICS

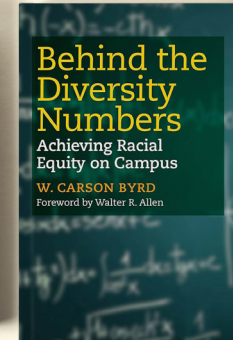


**When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America**

By Ira Katznelson (W.W. NORTON)

For anyone still trying to grasp the implications of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that affirmative action in admissions is unconstitutional, let me offer some advice. Take the long view. Centuries of chattel enslavement aside, the history of America's elected officials taking steps relevant to racial inequality does not begin with attempts to remedy it in 1961. It begins decades before, when elected officials deliberately exacerbated racial inequalities. Katznelson's book reveals how national policies, especially in the 1930s-1950s, deepened racial wounds and widened inequality gaps that policies of the 1960s were developed to remedy. This largely camouflaged record of affirmative action for whites should not be overlooked by those trying to understand where public policy can go from here.

RECOMMENDED BY JOHN SILVANUS WILSON JR., ED.M.'82, ED.D.'85, AUTHOR, HOPE AND HEALING: BLACK COLLEGES AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

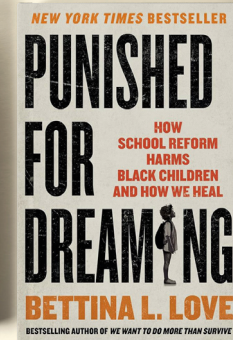


**Behind the Diversity Numbers: Achieving Racial Equity on Campus**

By W. Carson Byrd (HARVARD EDUCATION PRESS)

W. Carson Byrd asks higher education leaders and policymakers to look beyond the numbers when tackling diversity on campus. This book uncovers how frequently used approaches to examine and understand race-related issues on college campuses can reinforce racism and inequality, rather than combat them. Quantitative-heavy approaches can turn students into numbers, devaluing their lived experiences of marginalization on campus. Byrd repositions these experiences to better understand how to design effective analytic and policy strategies to promote racial equity and justice in higher education.

RECOMMENDED BY JAYNE FARGNOLI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, HARVARD EDUCATION PRESS

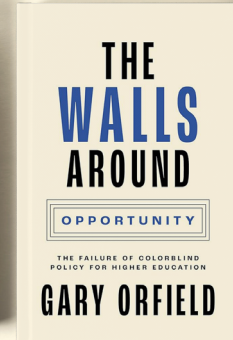


**Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal**

By Bettina Love (ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 2023)

In *Punished for Dreaming*, one of the core texts for my Ethnic Studies and Education course, Love illuminates the political and philanthropic common denominators in educational reform movements between 1980-2020 and in doing so, invites readers to critically consider how current bans and restrictive policies and practices impact beliefs and approaches to equity work in education. Love challenges readers to examine how "diversity," "equity," and "inclusion" have been defined in the context of educational reform initiatives and offers a framework for repairing the institutional wounds of oppression and carcerality through educational reparations. *Punished for Dreaming* centers the importance of exercising solidarity, accountability, repair, and joy in the struggle toward healing.

RECOMMENDED BY CHRISTINA "V" VILLARREAL, ED.M.05, LECTURER

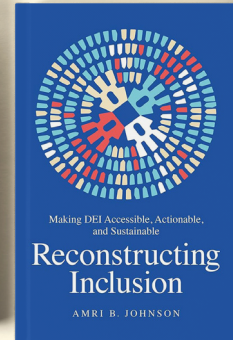


**The Walls Around Opportunity: The Failure of Colorblind Policy for Higher Education**

By Gary Orfield (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022)

Professor Gary Orfield is my go-to researcher for this topic, and he has so many titles. One of his most recent, *The Walls Around Opportunity: The Failure of Colorblind Policy for Higher Education*, looks at the importance of access to higher education in the context of a racially unequal society. His book includes commentary by James Anderson, professor emeritus at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and Stella Flores, an associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

RECOMMENDED BY CARLA LILLVIK, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND RESEARCH LIBRARIAN, GUTMAN LIBRARY



**Reconstructing Inclusion: Making DEI Accessible, Actionable, and Sustainable**

By Amri Johnson (MATT HOLT BOOKS, 2022)

As our society continues to examine the importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within institutions of learning and the workplace, the field has surprisingly not changed dramatically in its approach over the past few decades. Johnson, a well-respected DEI thought leader, makes the persuasive case that the current paradigms within the field need to be reexamined by practitioners. He lays out a heartfelt critique of current DEI practices while also providing a blueprint for meaningful organizational change.

RECOMMENDED BY JARROD CHIN, CHIEF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION OFFICER

Listen to an EdCast with Rich Reddick, Ed.M.'98, Ed.D.'08, associate dean for equity, community engagement, and outreach at the University of Texas at Austin, and author *Restorative Resistance in Higher Education* (Harvard Education Press)

# Saved by the Ball

How a high school football team and determined principal helped keep their tiny school from closing Story by Lory Hough

WHEN LINDA ANDERSON, ED.M.'23, was offered a new principal job a few years ago, she was told she had a year to save the century-old Catholic school in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. Enrollment had plummeted from a high of 800 to less than 100.

And save it she did. But not by the hand of some higher being. It was through better marketing, updated business practices, and the fast feet of a surprising partner: the school's football team.

"The football team is really such an amazing part of the story" of saving St. Bernard's, says Anderson. "The year that they won the Super Bowl, they were the smallest team in the state of Massachusetts. They had about 25 players, which is barely enough to even field a football team. Most of them were playing both offense and defense. They were resilient and humble and hardworking, and they just really embodied the spirit of the school and what we were all trying to do."

The players and coach knew that their wins were a rallying point for the struggling community. In that way, says Anderson, the team "was a microcosm of the school itself and this mission that we had to overcome tremendous odds. I think what they did more than anything was they helped to fill our tanks and inspire us to keep going because they kept going." This was especially true when Anderson was out fundraising and started to feel worn down. "It was this kind of tug-of-war of influence and success. The team just captured the incredible energy and heart of the entire institution. That was what

really made their story so integral to our success."

They eventually raised \$2 million and enrollment more than doubled since 2019. They also updated their mission and Anderson began consulting with other religious schools on strategies for staying open. And they got the "blessing" of the local archdiocese to operate as an independent Catholic school.

It was a comeback story that captured the attention of film producer Jeff Bowler, a former St. Bernard's student. Bowler heard about the school's plight and the football team's success and reached out to talk about doing a documentary.

"I think their heartstrings were tugged by what our story was and how it all shook out," Anderson says. "They felt like it was something that the world should hear, but also something other Catholic schools specifically should hear because they're closing left and right."

*All In: Miracle at St. Bernard's* debuted at the end of 2022, about a year after Anderson started the master's program part-time at the Ed School. Doing homework while running a school, she says, helped her reconnect again as an educator to what it means to be a student.

"We get lost a lot. We're so busy doing our jobs that we forget that being a student is exciting and it's a privilege, but it's hard and it takes grit and discipline. Those aren't easy things to have even when you're an adult," she says. "I would empathize with my students when I'd see them in study hall, cramming in a paper. I was like, girl, I got you. Mine's due tomorrow, too. Let's go. We can do this." □

"We get lost a lot. We're so busy doing our jobs that we forget that being a student is exciting and it's a privilege, but it's hard and it takes grit and discipline."



A team win, a scene from *All In: Miracle at St. Bernard's*.

COURTESY: FOOLIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

# Hooked on Books

Research shows even infrequent readers get absorbed in reading

Story by Lory Hough



MG Prezioso, Ed.M.'17



Professor Paul Harris

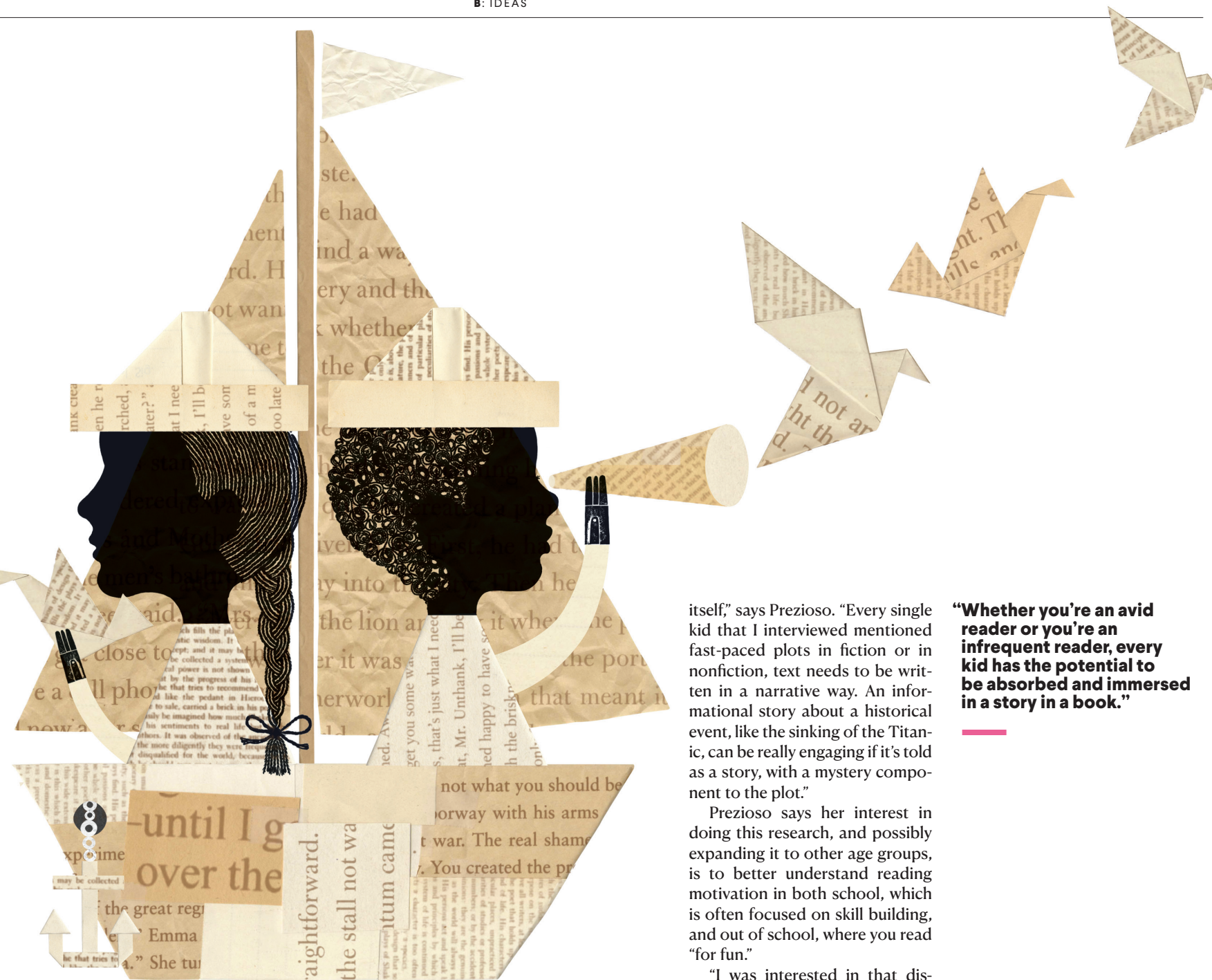
YOU KNOW THAT FEELING when you're reading a good book and you get so lost in the story that you forget everything else going on around you?

It's known in the academic world as "story world absorption," and for years, researchers have studied why readers get hooked on certain narratives. Unfortunately, though, most of the research has focused primarily on adults, despite our knowing how important reading is for kids.

That changed this past summer when doctoral student **MG PREZIOSO, ED.M.'17**, and Professor Paul Harris released results from their new study, published in the journal, *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, that looks at what's happening when children ages 9–11 become absorbed in what they are reading. They were motivated, in part, by something they noticed: kids with different levels of reading interest were completely immersed in and equally excited about a particular book series: *Harry Potter*.

Was it just this popular series, they wondered, or something else?

In an effort to find out, Prezioso and Harris asked children to fill out surveys about their reading habits and did follow-up interviews. They looked at reading frequency, favorite books, whether kids were more interested in fiction versus nonfiction, and the importance of character, plot, and descriptive language. What they found was that for the youngest in their survey, the 9-year-olds, frequent readers reported greater overall absorption than 9-year-old occasional readers, but 10- and 11-year-old readers reported



similar levels of absorption, regardless of how often they read.

"For that age range, it says that how often you read has no bearing on how you experience absorption," Prezioso says. "Whether you're an avid reader or you're an infrequent reader, every kid has the potential to be absorbed and immersed in a story in a book, and kids reported experiencing absorption in very similar ways." She says that while current educational re-

search tends to emphasize the importance of perseverance or grit when it comes to becoming readers, what was more important, they found, is that when children are immersed in a story, it's the story — like *Harry Potter* — that's keeping them hooked.

"When kids are absorbed in a text, they're not galvanized primarily by specific personality traits; they're motivated by the desire to find out what happens in the text

itself," says Prezioso. "Every single kid that I interviewed mentioned fast-paced plots in fiction or in nonfiction, text needs to be written in a narrative way. An informational story about a historical event, like the sinking of the Titanic, can be really engaging if it's told as a story, with a mystery component to the plot."

Prezioso says her interest in doing this research, and possibly expanding it to other age groups, is to better understand reading motivation in both school, which is often focused on skill building, and out of school, where you read "for fun."

"I was interested in that disparity, in trying to gather data on how kids experience absorption, the kinds of books that are engendering this sort of experience, and maybe how it could be used to inform classroom practice and education spaces," she says. "Ultimately, you want kids to be lifelong readers. You want kids to be acquainted with the joys that make reading, literature, poetry, and nonfiction worthwhile. It's a lifelong relationship and absorption is a piece of that." □

HANNAH DREW, JILL ANDERSON

“What I conclude from this study is the Ivy League doesn't have low-income students because it doesn't want low-income students.”

”

Professor **SUSAN DYNARSKI**, an economist, commenting in *The New York Times* (July 24, 2023) about a Harvard study that found that one in six students at the eight Ivy League universities, as well as Stanford, Duke, M.I.T., and the University of Chicago, has parents in the top 1 percent. As the *Times* wrote, the study (which Dynarski was not involved with) “quantifies for the first time the extent to which being very rich is its own qualification in selective college admissions.”

# Practice

## P THEORY

$$p_c = \frac{1}{1-c} \frac{1}{g'(1)}$$
$$I^* = p_c \frac{1}{1-c} \frac{1}{g'(1)}$$
$$[K] = \frac{1}{r}$$
$$s) \frac{M}{2023} \quad n_1 \frac{5}{210}$$



“Barbie isn’t perfect. She’s not for everyone, but maybe can she show us how to find some common ground. We can all use more of that.”

KIMBERLY WOLF, ED.M.'09 (SEE P. 52)



SIMONE MASSONI

# Then They Came for the

Librarians and other educators are angry about recent book bans — and now they're speaking out

Story by **Elaine McArdle** Illustrations by **Mark Weaver**

# BOOKS



**I**  
**IN HER 25 YEARS** as a teacher and school librarian in Santa Clara public schools in California, **MEGAN BIRDSONG, ED.M.'94**, never had a parent lodge a formal complaint about a book their child was reading. On the rare occasion a parent raised a concern, Birdsong met with them to talk about the merits of the title. “Those kinds of conversations can lead to some understanding,” says Birdsong.

How things have changed.

Suddenly book bans and other forms of censorship in schools and libraries are ascendent across the country, led by organized groups and politicians. Last year saw a record-breaking 1,269 efforts to censor books and resources nationwide, nearly twice as many as in 2021, according to the American Library Association (ALA). The ALA used to receive 300 to 400 reports a year of efforts to ban books, says Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, “but in 2020 we suddenly began receiving a growing number of reports — from one to two a week, if any, to five or six in a single day.”

“It was not a typical occurrence until the last couple of years,” agrees Birdsong, who last year became the instructional librarian at a Catholic high school in California. From her colleagues in Florida, second only to Texas in book bans, “I have heard about schools where administrators or other leadership came into the library and removed books without any communication about process, just put them on the cart and they’re gone.”

Unlike the past, today’s challenges aren’t lodged by a parent about a particular book. Rather, these are efforts to remove entire swaths of titles championed by well-funded groups such as Moms for Liberty, a nonprofit founded in 2021 by conservative women who opposed face masks during the pandemic. Prior to 2021, the vast majority of book challenges involved one title a time. But in 2022, 90 percent were attempts to ban multiple titles at once, according to the ALA, and 40% involved challenges to 100 or more books. Most challenged titles contain subject matter related to LGBTQ+ topics or race. And it’s

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 LAST YEAR, THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION DOCUMENTED 1,269 DEMANDS TO CENSOR LIBRARY BOOKS AND RESOURCES — THE HIGHEST NUMBER SINCE THE ORGANIZATION BEGAN COMPILING DATA ABOUT CENSORSHIP IN LIBRARIES IN THE UNITED STATES TWO DECADES AGO.





not just school libraries under attack: 48% of challenges were directed at public libraries.

“We are no longer seeing a parent raising a concern about their student reading a book, but advocacy groups demanding broader censorship of topics they don’t believe should be in schools or where they disagree with the viewpoints expressed in the book,” says Caldwell-Stone.

The groups leading the charge are highly coordinated and multi-faceted, working to get their preferred candidates elected to school boards and advocating for educational gag laws such as Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill, which prohibits public schools teaching about sexual orientation or gender identity in a manner the state decides “is not age-appropriate.” In 2022, 36 states introduced educational gag bills to restrict teaching topics related to race, gender, American history, and LGBTQ+ identities, according to PEN America, a free speech advocacy network.

In June, a fifth-grade teacher in Georgia was fired for reading a

best-selling children’s book to her class, *My Shadow is Purple*, which the students chose; the Cobb County School District said she violated a trio of state censorship laws passed in 2022. And this year, Florida objected to two AP courses because it says their content violates new state laws; one course is focused on African American studies, the other is a psychology course that addresses, among other topics, sexual orientation and gender identity. “They are coming from every angle to push this,” Birdsong says.

“The educational gag orders and book banning are unreal to me,” says **LIZ PHIPPS-SOEIRO, ED.M.’19**, director of the Boston Public School Libraries, adding that even in liberal Massachusetts, she’s heard of at least a dozen attempts at censorship. In many cases across the country, “A lot of these books are being banned by one complaint, and you don’t have to have read the books,” she notes. It took just a single complaint from an individual for Amanda Gorman’s book of her poem, *The Hill We Climb*, which she read at the 2021 inauguration of President Joe Biden, to be re-

moved from elementary schools in Miami Lakes, Florida.

There are efforts to ban books in every state, and nearly half the challenged books were written by or about LGBTQ+ people, while most of the others deal with racial issues. The most-challenged books in 2022 included *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. Texas leads the nation with 93 attempted book bans in 2022 involving 2,349 titles, with *The Bluest Eye* top of the list. Florida is next, and in 2022 Governor Ron DeSantis signed laws requiring schools to use certified media specialists to make sure books don’t include topics the state disallows.

While the ALA “fully acknowledges that a parent has the right to guide their student’s reading and the right to have that conversation and perhaps ask that their student not be given that book,” says Caldwell-Stone, “now we’re seeing policies and advocacy to stigmatize a whole range of materials under the rubric that they’re illegal or por-

**“I have heard about schools where administrators or other leadership came into the library and removed books without any communication about process, just put them on the cart and they’re gone.”**

MEGAN BIRDSONG, ED.M.’94

nographic — when they are none of those things.”

Moreover, “We’re seeing librarians and library workers coming under attack for providing for the information needs of their communities in a way that serves the information needs of marginalized communities, being attacked for having books on the shelves that reflect the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ persons, people of color, Black Americans, Indigenous persons,” she notes. “We’ve even had a number of communities where organizations have demanded that librarians be charged with obscenity or other crimes for having books on the shelves on themes of sex education or sexuality or that address LGBTQ+ themes.”

Many Boston public schools have been without libraries for many years, but as Phipps-Soeiro works to correct that, there are already more than a dozen open librarian positions. She believes that librarianship, like classroom teaching, is less attractive these days because educators are under attack on so many fronts.



**“The educational gag orders and book banning are unreal to me. A lot of these books are being banned by one complaint, and you don’t have to have read the books.”**

LIZ PHIPPS-SOEIRO, ED.M.’19





“These efforts with book bans are taking us backwards,” says **EMILY ROSENSTEIN, ED.M.'05**, a former English teacher and current principal at the Ben Gamla Plantation School, a public charter in Plantation, Florida. Educators have worked hard to “ensure students see themselves in the stories in our libraries. By removing these titles, authors, and characters, we are marginalizing students who already suffer historically in that way.”

At a time when educators face so many critical issues, including teacher shortages and the learning losses and behavioral regression of kids due to the pandemic lockdown, “is it really best use of our time,” Rosenstein asks, “to go through hundreds and hundreds of titles” to remove them because someone objects? It’s one thing to ensure topics are age appropriate, she agrees, but another thing entirely to “eliminate them from accessibility for students.”

The vast majority of Americans from both major political parties are against book bans and restrictions. More than 70% oppose bans

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EMILY ROSENSTEIN, ED.M.'05

in public libraries and 67% oppose efforts to remove books from schools, according to a national poll conducted by the ALA, and the majority of public school parents believe a variety of books should be available in school libraries on an age-appropriate basis, including titles addressing racism and LGBTQ+ topics. Another poll, by NPR/IPSOS, found that only 35% of Republicans (and 5% of Democrats) support efforts to remove books from school.

“It’s really hard to figure how we’ve gotten to a place so far from where a lot of us thought about our country, a place that’s about pluralism, freedom of information, freedom to read,” Birdsong laments.

What’s at stake in the battle? “Democracy!” she says, with a rueful laugh.

#### What’s So Important About Books?

For anyone wondering why schoolchildren should be offered wide access to reading materials — albeit age-appropriate — educators offer many reasons. Reading is essential

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**“The more access you have to books and to a variety of books, the better reader you become and the more interested in reading. It changes the whole trajectory of someone’s life, how they see themselves.”**

CYNTHIA HAGAN, ED.M.'22



to learning, which in turn is essential for an educated populace in a democracy, they say. Books help children understand the world around them in all its complexity, and they deserve to see themselves reflected in the books available to them. And parents should make decisions for their own children but not other people’s kids, they assert.

“The role of school libraries is to enrich the educational landscape, to create a foundation for the love of literacy,” says Phipps-Soeiro. “That can’t be done from a deficit lens. Our children come to us with their own knowledge, their own experiences, and libraries are a place to share, to build a collective knowledge together, to hear about other experiences, and to give us a broader understanding of our own cultural landscape and that of others.”

“The more access you have to books and to a variety of books, the better reader you become and the more interested in reading,” says **CYNTHIA HAGAN, ED.M.'22**,

who runs Book Joy, a literacy nonprofit in West Virginia, which provides books to students in the



local schools, many of which are operating without an in-school library. “Not only that, you develop an identity as a reader. It changes the whole trajectory of someone’s life, how they see themselves. Books are touchstones for children just as much for adults.”

Indeed, says Caldwell-Stone, studies show that “students who can find books about their experience or lives or that offer alternative perspectives, have far better educational outcomes than when censorship is used in school to indicate one viewpoint is not acceptable.”

As a librarian for five years in West Virginia, Hagan never encountered a single complaint about a book. The new national trend, she says, is “absolutely horrifying and hurts the most vulnerable of the students, because if you can’t afford books at home, you get them at a library. If that’s all being monitored and censored — you’re out of luck.”

Educators also argue that it’s essential for students to have access to books presenting different viewpoints and identities written by authors from different identities.



“When kids can see themselves in books, they can begin to see themselves as anything,” says Alex Hodges, librarian and director of the Gutman Library at the Ed School, where he is on the faculty.

“Whether they become doctors, educators, airline pilots, we want them to dream big.”

In this era of a tragic epidemic of child and teen suicides, which is especially high among those of marginalized identities, it’s critically important for kids to see themselves represented in literature, says Hodges, who received his Ed.D. from the University of Florida in August. “The worse thing we can do is continue to make children feel shame for their identity or for trying to understand the world they see or hear about on TikTok,” he says.

Moreover, “We need to teach kids how to make decisions for themselves about what they do or don’t want to read,” says Hodges. “Those are conversations parents and teachers and community members could be having so that they are taking care of the whole child and enabling that child to feel value.”

▲  
**“Now we’re seeing policies and advocacy to stigmatize a whole range of materials under the rubric they’re illegal or pornographic — when they are none of those things.”**

DEBORAH CALDWELL-STONE

Birdsong believes that many parents fear that if a child reads about a particular identity, they will adopt it. “That’s not necessarily the case,” she says, “and we need to be freer in our openness to understanding the world and people in it.” She has often had students request books addressing LGBTQ+ topics. “Occasionally it may be students who may share that identity, but I’ve found it heartening that there are also students who read those books who doesn’t necessarily share that identity,” she says. “I’ve found it inspiring the way kids want to read books that are outside their experience.”

“I also find it really strange that in a world where so many of our students have mental health challenges like anxiety and depression that have been linked to social media, and we’ve had congressional hearings on such things but seems to be very little push other than banning TikTok, I am mystified by the focus on books themselves,” says Birdsong.

She, like many others, believes the ultimate object of the movement is to stunt critical thinking so

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 A RECORD 2,571 UNIQUE TITLES WERE TARGETED FOR CENSORSHIP, A 38% INCREASE FROM THE 1,858 UNIQUE TITLES TARGETED FOR CENSORSHIP IN 2021. IN 2020, THE NUMBER TARGETED WAS 223.

that students don’t question the status quo. “One of our calls as educators is creating an educated citizenry who can think about ideas and who can vote,” says Birdsong. “This is an undermining of public education, a dismantling of institutions, all of those things.”

Phipps-Soeiro agrees. “This is a highly organized attack on our kids,” she says, that has very little to do with concerns about the age-appropriateness of materials. “It’s about shaping a narrative,” says Phipps-Soeiro, who is starting her Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts, where she will examine the social, historical, and political landscape of information for children. “Children’s books are very potent vehicles for ideology” and “school libraries were created to sort of guard the narrative of meritocracy and white supremacy in the United States.” Book banning is a symptom of “white fragility and the fear of losing the ability to control a narrative that has kept white people in power.”

Hodges puts it starkly: “The oligarchs who have the funding to

fund these initiatives want to keep people uneducated so they can maintain control and maintain their wealth. That’s on the record.”

#### Fighting Back

But opponents to book bans are fighting back, including in court.

“We believe that our Constitution, our First Amendment, and our Bill of Rights firmly support the idea that no government should be in the role of telling people what to think or read,” says Caldwell-Stone, “and libraries, as community hubs of information, discovery, and sharing, have a responsibility to collect books across a range of ideas and opinions and to let individuals make their own choices about what to read.”

In Escambia County, Florida, PEN American, Penguin Random House, authors, parents, and students have filed a federal lawsuit against book removals, arguing their First Amendment right to free speech is violated by decisions that are “based on ideological objections to their contents or disagreement with their

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 OF THOSE TITLES, THE VAST MAJORITY WERE WRITTEN BY OR ABOUT MEMBERS OF THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY AND PEOPLE OF COLOR.





**“I think the OCR approach is so promising because it’s bringing a new and potentially more powerful set of tools to combat discriminatory book bans. This is something new and exciting that could be a good tool for libraries looking to push back.”**

LAURA WEINRIB



messages or themes,” according to the complaint. They also argue the bans violate the Equal Protection Clause because the targeted books are disproportionately by non-white and/or LGBTQ+ authors, or address themes of race or LGBTQ+ identity.

In Arkansas, a coalition of librarians and booksellers filed a federal lawsuit in June claiming that a new state law criminalizing efforts to furnish “a harmful item to a minor” is unconstitutional because it targets books with LGBTQ+ themes. In July, a federal judge issued an injunction to temporarily block the law, agreeing that it is likely unconstitutional.

And in Llano County, Texas, seven library patrons last year sued county officials and the library board for restricting books, which they say violates their First Amendment rights. In March, a federal judge granted a temporary injunction, ordering the county to return the books to the shelves. Among the titles removed were a book for teens that described the Ku Klux Klan as a terrorist organization, and Pulitzer-Prize winning author Isabel

Wilkerson’s *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, an analysis of racism in the United States.

While *Board of Education v. Pico*, a 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case, does offer some First Amendment protections against book bans in schools, overall, the law is murkier than free speech proponents would hope, says Harvard Law School Professor Laura Weinrib. Since book challenges and removals are so pervasive and it’s been decades since the Supreme Court examined the issue, she predicts they may take it up again soon. However, she warns it’s unclear whether the current court would affirm the *Board v. Pico* protections.

For that reason, she sees a promising “new frontier” in a civil rights approach now underway by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education. In Georgia, the OCR found the Forsyth County School District may have created a hostile environment for certain students because the targeted books are by LGBTQ+ or non-white authors. If so, the bans may be discriminatory and in vio-

lation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which applies to institutions that receive federal funding.

“I think the OCR approach is so promising because it’s bringing a new and potentially more powerful set of tools to combat discriminatory book bans,” Weinrib says. “This is something new and exciting that could be a good tool for libraries looking to push back.”

And while the issue plays out in courts, Unite Against Book Bans, a national initiative of the ALA, offers toolkits to help educators, parents, and others fight book bans in other ways, including a guide to attending library and school board meetings and toolkits with talking points and how to petition decisionmakers.

And while having strong policies around book acquisitions and book challenges “isn’t going to save us, I think it is a place to start,” says Phipps-Soeiro.

Hodges agrees. “I teach my students that when you get to your school as an elementary school teacher, and if the librarian doesn’t

have a process for books to be challenged, take the ALA toolkit and advocate for it to be put in place,” he says. The policy should include a board of citizens who evaluate challenges, and a requirement that titles must be challenged one at a time, with written forms to record the specifics of challenges. That way, “you can’t challenge a hundred books in one fell swoop, you have to fill out a form for each book, which becomes a paper trail,” he says, and if the forms aren’t fully completed, “a challenge can be dismissed.”

But those who oppose book bans say free speech proponents must be as vocal as the other side.

“We need people to step up and say that to their elected officials, so they’re not just hearing from one group,” Caldwell-Stone says. “That’s what Unite Against Book Bans is about, to provide tools to encourage them and create a critical mass of individuals who support our Constitution, our civil liberties, and who want to make sure everyone enjoys the benefits of those freedoms, so they’re not just reserved for a particular group.”

**“When kids can see themselves in books, they can begin to see themselves as anything. Whether they become doctors, educators, airline pilots, we want them to dream big.”**

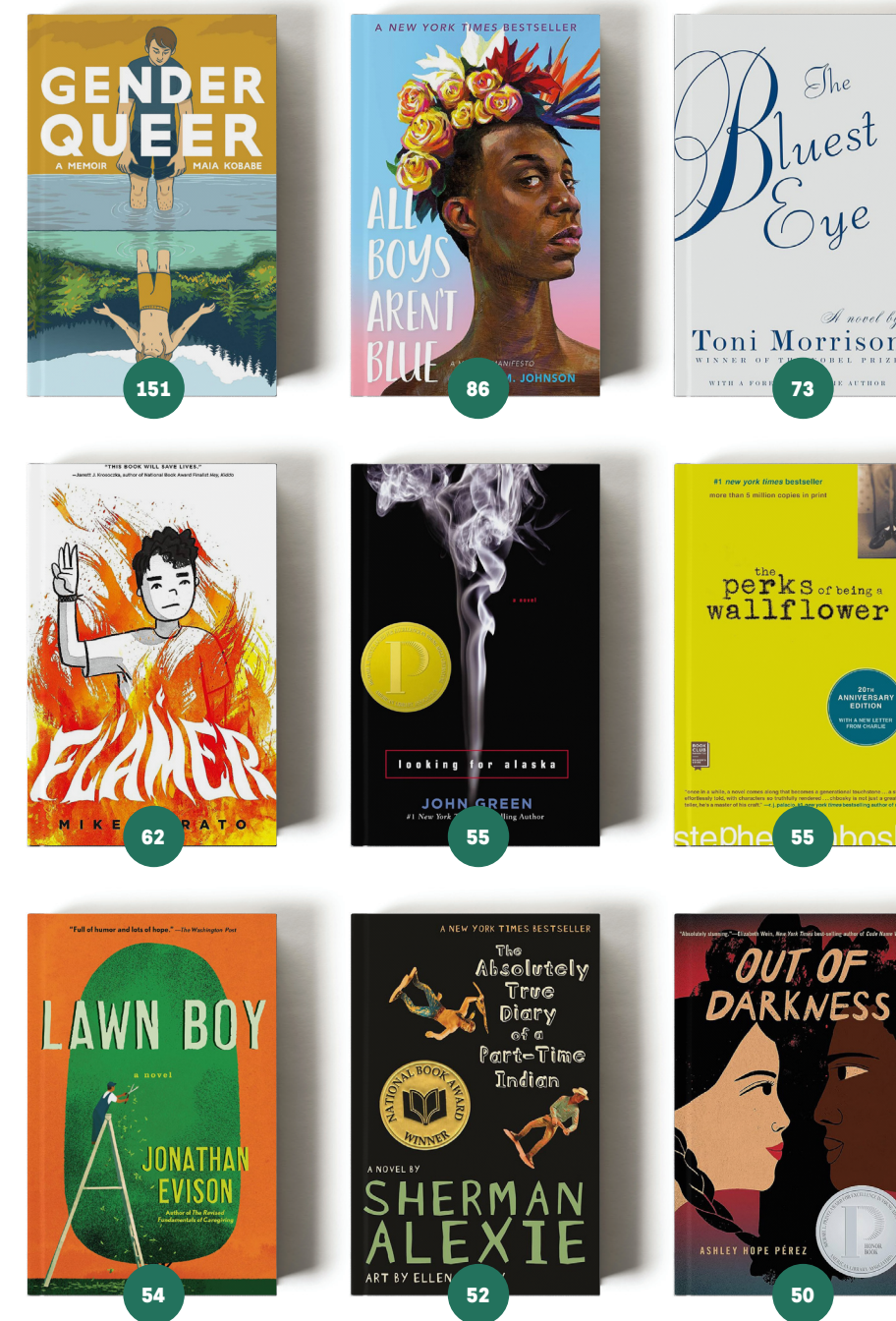
ALEX HODGES



Elaine McArdle is writer based in New York. Her last piece for Ed. looked at Maggie Yuan, Ed.M. '04, C.A.S. '07, chief program office at Doc Wayne Youth Services in Boston

## Top 12 Most Challenged Books of 2022

IN ORDER OF NUMBER OF CHALLENGES\*



“We really depend on the people who can be strong-willed and strong-voiced early,” agrees Hodges. “I firmly believe that the more we talk about book challenges and what books and authors are being affected, it raises the issue to be seen and understood by more people. We just need people to be politically active rather than complacent.”

Phipps-Soeiro is heartened by how many educators are doing just that.

“I feel my library network has gotten a lot stronger,” she says. “I’m talking to library directors across the country, professors in library science. I’ve met some wonderful caregivers from Florida who were organizing across the state to speak for libraries and librarians and children’s rights to access the books that are being banned.”

“I’m so proud of the librarians who are joining our team, who are taking up the call for this, who are speaking out, which is a lot, even though they know what the consequences are right now,” she adds. “It’s really amazing.” □

51% OF TARGETED BOOKS AND MATERIALS TOOK PLACE IN K-12 SCHOOL LIBRARIES, CLASSROOM LIBRARIES, OR SCHOOL CURRICULA; 48% TARGETED MATERIALS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES; 1% IN HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARIES AND INSTITUTIONS

# Radical Refuge for Women

Alum found a way to support communal wellness for Black and Latina early childhood educators

Story by Lory Hough

IT STARTED WITH two grants: one to host a convening about teacher self-care, the second to collect data at the convening to really see how teachers were experiencing self-care. Then COVID hit, and **VANESSA RODRIGUEZ, ED.M.'13, ED.D.'16**, had to put the work on hold.

And so she and her team at New York University's Center for Early Childhood Health and Development, where she is an assistant professor, waited. And while they waited, Rodriguez started getting asked more and more to take part in virtual panels about how educators, especially early childhood teachers, were coping. She had written a book called *The Teaching Brain* and spent more than a decade as a public school teacher before moving into higher education.

But Rodriguez hesitated on the invites: She just couldn't do self-care talks anymore.

"I'm losing my mind with them," she remembers telling a friend. "Self-care is not going to solve exploitation. Men aren't told to practice self-care when they're experiencing professional stressors. It's sexist and I was tired of it. That was kind of my breaking point. Within that notion of self-care, there's an insinuation that the reason you're struggling is because you're not taking care of yourself rather than the reason that you're struggling is because the system's exploiting you. And the system, especially for early childhood teachers during the pandemic, was especially exploiting."

Home caregivers were expected to take care of the children of first responders and essential workers,

and many never shut down. "They just kept going and on a normal day, home-based providers and centers are open from seven in the morning until seven at night," she says. Even for early childcare teachers working within public school systems, there were challenges during COVID, especially trying to virtually teach children who couldn't yet read or write.

Self-care was often the suggestion for those educators, but Rodriguez felt — and still feels — strongly that "we really need to stop telling women to practice self-care. When you tell a woman to practice self-care, especially women of color, they heal communally, not independently. To tell me as a brown skin Latina, go get a massage or facial, it's like, no, I heal in community, and I didn't do this to myself."

She remembers those same stressed feelings when she was teaching. "I failed at taking care of my own mental health as a teacher," Rodriguez says. "I was a New York City public school teacher, and it was really tough. I think all of my work is always going back to the teacher that I was in the classroom and trying to support other teachers like me so that they don't leave."

One way that Rodriguez is now supporting the wellness of preK educators is by hosting free, full-day retreats for Black and Latina women working in early childhood education. The first was last fall in East Harlem, with 100 women. Rodriguez says the retreat wasn't a traditional professional development seminar, though. Instead, the day was dedicated to communal healing, positive identity development,



**"Self-care is not going to solve exploitation. Men aren't told to practice self-care when they're experiencing professional stressors. It's sexist and I was tired of it."**

and empowerment. Mental health professionals and researchers were involved, and the facilitators were also Black and Latina. They offered food that was culturally representative and met at a nonprofit in a rehabbed abandoned public school.

Along with the in-person retreat, Rodriguez also started hosting virtual support groups. During the sessions, clinical social workers offered support and helped early childhood educators become better aware of their teaching.

"The support groups are for them to come and share and to feel like they have a place where they can be supported by mental health professionals," says Rodriguez.

She calls the work her Radical Refuge Program — and it's growing. From that first retreat and virtual session last fall in Harlem, Rodriguez is now working with two more groups of early childhood educators: One on Long Island, where she grew up, and one in Nebraska.

The Nebraska partnership came about, Rodriguez says, when she

presented information about the original Harlem retreat during a think tank conference at Yale on workforce wellbeing. A woman from Nebraska asked if she could do something similar for Black and Latina early childhood educators who were a minority in the state.

"It will be interesting to see how this plays out with a different population," she says, noting that some elements of the retreat, which will take place next spring, will stay the same, some will be very localized.

But all of the work, no matter the location, will support diverse female preK educators.

"One of the reasons that we're focusing on that population in particular is because that's the population that is leaving the profession the most quickly," Rodriguez says, "and yet that's the student population that's growing the most quickly. We need to support the mental health and wellbeing of these adults in the classroom because the kids really need them. They need whole teachers." □

“

The larger political and social roles of teachers more broadly is something this archive helps us think broadly about. Black teachers have always been aware of that, and they organized themselves.”

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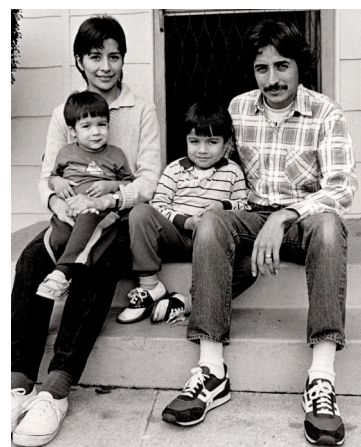
**PROFESSOR JARVIS GIVENS**, with Professor Imani Perry, in the Askwith Forum this past October on the relaunch of the Black Teacher Archive. The archive is a free, digital portal that Givens and Perry created that centralizes historical materials created by professional organizations of Black educators during the Jim Crow era through the Civil Rights era

<https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/black-teacher-archive>

# Hollywood Never Stood a Chance

California Teacher of the Year on his journey

Story by Lory Hough



Family photo from 1986; a selfie moment with Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House event; standing in front of Roosevelt High

**WHEN JASON TORRES-RANGEL, ED.M.'04,** found out he was named the 2023 California Teacher of the Year, he was honored, and his parents, both former public school teachers, were “over the moon.” Torres-Rangel, an English teacher at the Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Los Angeles Unified School District and an adjunct professor at Los Angeles Trade Technical College, talked to *Ed.* about teaching and how his career almost took another path.

**You initially wanted to work in film and interned for *The West Wing*, but changed your mind?**

At the same time that I was interning in Hollywood, I was taking undergrad classes in Chicano studies, Black studies, gender studies, and media studies. These classes and my own upbringing informed my burgeoning political consciousness. I realized that I didn't want to be part of the Hollywood machine; I wanted to go into a service profession of some kind where I could really give back to my community, a place that had given so much to me. The only people who were surprised I switched career interests were the people I was interning for in Hollywood — they tried to persuade me to stay, but I knew a different path was in store for me.

**It was actually 9/11 that made you realize that path might be education?**

I was studying abroad in Kenya during the 9/11 attacks, and the outpouring of support and concern from my host family and the whole Mombassa community about my

family back home was humbling and profound. It was one of those moments where you truly appreciate the deep connected nature of humanity. At the same time, I was interning in a school, and I helped the teacher create a lesson the next day that helped students process the event. In that moment, I saw the transformative power of education, and while the lightbulb to become a teacher didn't go off for me yet, I realized that I wanted to go into a profession that would directly impact my community back home.

**One of your undergraduate professors said you'd make a great teacher. Is that what finally led you to the classroom?**

Despite being the son of two teachers, I hadn't considered the teaching profession for myself — but sometimes there's a mentor in your life who sees something in you that you don't yet see in yourself who helps you discover your path.

**How would you describe yourself as a teacher?**

I try to do what feels right in my heart. I think it's important for teachers to be authentic to who they are; to lead with radical love; to make space for play and games and humor. Sometimes it's right to ditch the content lesson you had planned and go outside and engage in some fun community-building activities. And no student is too old for play and games and fun — even high schoolers love activities designed for elementary students. Especially after COVID, all students are still just craving the basic things: friendship, camarade-

rie, connection, safety, trust, and love. Start there, the rest will follow. Also, I once heard, “treat every student as if they could be the next president of the United States.” In our most frustrated and frustrating moments, I think it's powerful to go back to that adage.

**One of your students and their mom nominated you for the teacher of the year award, correct?**

The student who nominated me is a phenomenal social justice warrior for women's rights and her community. She writes for our school newspaper, *The Teddy Times*, and has authored articles on combating toxic masculinity, reproductive rights, and more. In her letter nominating me, she talked about how she had moved around a lot and had been in several different schools, and how she didn't feel at home until she got to our school, Roosevelt, and my class being a part of that “home away from home” feeling. As a teacher, you can't get a higher honor than that.

**Your teacher parents were “over the moon,” you said, when you told them you had been nominated. How did that feel?**

It's been an incredible journey being able to share this with them. I am who I am because of the two of them, and so I try to include them every chance I get. I recently got to take my mom to Washington D.C., where she got to meet Vice President Kamala Harris in person. That was incredible to see my mom tear up as she met her. That made my whole year. □

COURTESY, JASON TORRES-RANGEL



THEODORE ROOSEVELT  
HIGH SCHOOL



“Sometimes there's a mentor in your life who sees something in you that you don't yet see in yourself who helps you discover your path.”

# Barbie's Teachable Moments

Can the doll and movie help young people find common ground? It's complicated.

Story by Kimberly Wolf, Ed.M.'09



I know Barbie. I played with Barbie, mostly her home accessories and pools, when I was little. But, while I've long written about the intersection of "girl world" and mass media, I've never written about her. I've written about No Doubt's *I'm Just a Girl* and American Girl dolls, *Seventeen* and Mean Girls. Barbie was too easy, too cliché of a topic to spend time on. Unattainable body concepts — nothing else to dive into there.

When it comes to Barbie's recent film-driven resurgence, I'd like to think that my work in media and background in gender studies would have given me some immunity to the hype. But the trailers, steady stream of pre-release articles, and Barbie products seemingly everywhere, had my attention. I considered buying a Barbie-branded pool floatie (I don't have a pool) and Barbie logo pajamas (I don't need those). When the film came out this summer, I saw it twice.

I have so far resisted buying Barbie stuff I don't need. As an educator and parenting expert, however, I can't deny that *Barbie* is a smart take on a topic that was previously exhausted. It invites us to examine some of the most pressing cultural issues of our time and welcomes us to deepen our conversations, especially with the young people in our lives.

When it comes to reaching adolescents, mass media is a powerful tool, a jumping off point to address sensitive and complex topics, without getting too personal. *Barbie* touches on critical themes including gender and power dynamics, body image,

self-advocacy, violence against women, boundary-setting, diversity, and inclusion. We can talk about our opinions, values, and takeaways related to what we've seen. (*Barbie*, specifically, has the added benefit of being intergenerationally relevant.) We can ask our kids and students about their impressions, gently encouraging them to think critically about messaging they are being served. We can highlight some of the lessons we most hope they learn. We can also help them understand where we stand on different issues, providing insight into how we might respond if they were ever to come with us with a related concern or challenge. An added bonus to this approach? You don't even have to like *Barbie* to have impactful conversations about the film.

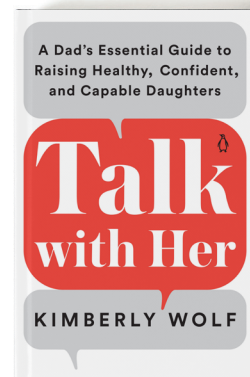
When so much public debate is plagued by rage, zero-sum thinking, and cancel culture, *Barbie* also provides us a roadmap for how to address controversial topics and navigate heated scenarios. Mattel drove production of the film. They knew they had some questions to answer about whether Barbie has been a net positive or negative for our culture, and in particular, women. With Greta Gerwig's self-deprecating take on its company and iconic doll, Mattel owned its missteps, marketing mishaps, and place in a largely male corporate world that has been accused of sabotaging, manipulating, and capitalizing on women. Examining its past while highlighting Barbie's present strengths — kindness, creativity, body positivity, and commitment to diversity (a key pil-

lar of Mattel's corporate strategy in recent years, ahead of many other manufacturers) — Mattel doubled down on its core values. The company did all of this with glitter and levity, as if to say, "We've messed up, sometimes dramatically. We've been part of the problem. We know you may find us unlikeable...But we're trying."

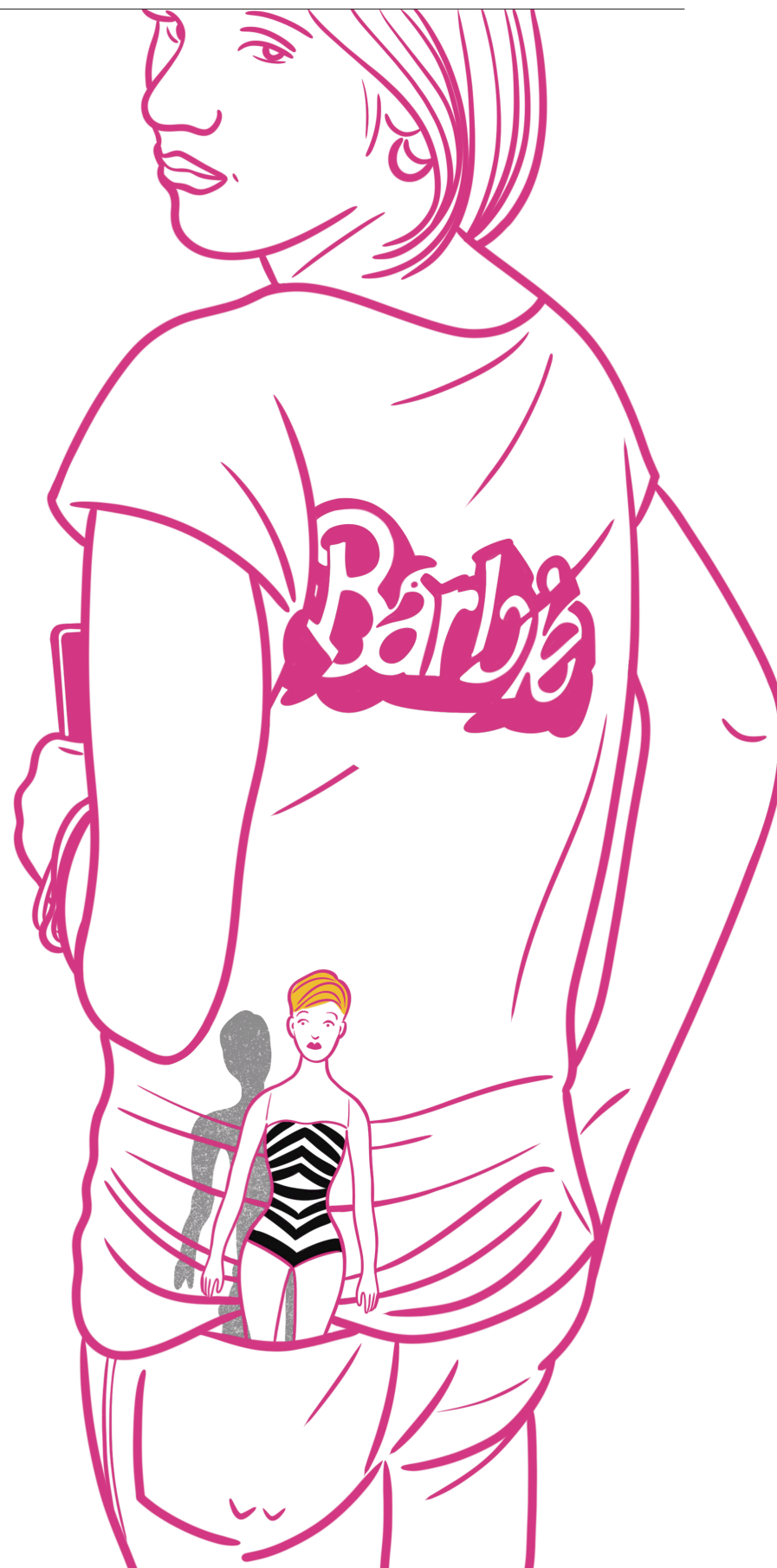
"Broader cultural discourse encourages us and our kids to take sides — often in ways that haven't been positive for our communities or our country. *Barbie* shows us how something can be both celebrated and critiqued, how we can address many (not all) serious themes with humor, creativity, and kindness, even if we have different perspectives.

Barbie isn't perfect. She's not for everyone, but maybe can she show us how to find some common ground. We can all use more of that. □

KIMBERLY WOLF, Ed.M.'09, IS THE AUTHOR OF *TALK WITH HER: A DAD'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO RAISING HEALTHY, CONFIDENT, AND CAPABLE DAUGHTERS*. LEARN MORE AT [KIMBERLYWOLF.COM](http://KIMBERLYWOLF.COM)



LING WANG



“

I'm going to teach any kid that comes to our school, but when I see a kid that has the drive to say, 'Look, my mom and dad, they stopped at high school. I'm going to college and do this, this, and this.' I'm going to move heaven and earth to make sure that kid has the opportunities.

”

CONNELIUS TROY, Ed.M.'21, assistant principal, Cristo Rey Miami High School, during a video interview that ran on the HGSE Instagram page

# New Courses Being Offered this Year that Caught Our Eye

ILLUSTRATION BY AYA KAKEDA

### A.

EDU H310M

#### Establishing Loving Spaces for Learning: Preventing Bullying and Discrimination in U.S. Schools

Feeling safe and welcome at school has a direct effect on students' academic achievement. This course, taught by Senior Lecturer **GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS, ED.M.'11, ED.D.'13**, explores the most effective ways for educators to create school climates that are nurturing, loving, and inclusive for students with diverse identities, learning styles, and challenges, and from diverse racial, cultural, socio-economic, and political backgrounds.

### B.

PROFESSIONAL ED

#### How We Argue: Strategies for Disagreeing with Empathy and Evidence

As the syllabus for this fall professional education course points out, "the call to teach and model effective ways to disagree has never been louder and more relevant." That's why educators need the right tools and skills — including becoming better at listening — as they learn how to lead their students and colleagues through complex disagreements and acquire a simple vocabulary for working on arguments with empathy.

### C.

EDU H611.01

#### Becoming a Good Person and Leading a Good Life

This spring course asks a fundamental question: How do we raise children to become good people and lead good lives? **Becoming a Good Person**, taught by Senior Lecturer **RICK WEISSBOURD, ED.D.'87**, focuses on answering this question by examining school and home environments, major trends in society, and the added challenges that come during uncertain, anxious times, persistent racism, and threats to our democracy.

### D.

EDU T554

#### Artificial Intelligence in Education

Discussions and stories about artificial intelligence (AI) focus on the negative impact it may have on students and schools. But what exactly does that mean? This course, taught by Seiji Isotani, a visiting professor from at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, is designed for students who are new or relatively new to the world of AI in education, and touches on the comparison between the evolution of human learning and AI technologies.

### E.

EDU A150

#### New Directions in Black Power Studies

Taught by Professor Jarvis Givens and Brandon Terry, an assistant professor of African and African American studies and of social, this course explores what might be at stake — philosophically, theoretically, culturally, and politically — in revisiting the Black Power Movement. The course "will provide an extended opportunity to reflect upon the political and intellectual legacy of Black Power," and the hard questions the movement continues to raise.



THE SNAP

Orientation this year moved off Appian Way and over to Sanders Theatre, where Dean Bridget Terry Long addressed the new class in historic fashion.



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**“I have heard about schools where administrators or other leadership came into the library and removed books without any communication about the process. Just put them on the cart and they’re gone.”**

**MEGAN BIRDSONG**, ED.M.'94, INSTRUCTIONAL LIBRARIAN,  
CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL (SEE PAGE 40)