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THE STUDENT VOICE OF LEHMAN COLLEGE

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## NY's Tuition-Free Program Has Not Relieved CUNY Students' Financial Burden



Lehman College campus. Article and photo by Perla Tolentino. [Page 3]



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# NY's Tuition-Free Program Has Not Relieved CUNY Students' Financial Burden

By Perla Tolentino



**Lehman College Office of Financial Aid, located in Shuster Hall room 136. Photo by Perla Tolentino.**

New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo introduced the Excelsior Scholarship two years ago to much fanfare as a program promising tuition liberation to all N.Y. four-year colleges. But while Cuomo's big offer was said to be alleviating, Lehman and other CUNY students continue to suffer financially.

The main drawback seems to be the requirements that become prohibitive for a majority of students. Qualified students may receive up to \$5,500 per semester, but applicants must meet a long list of requirements in order to receive full aid, as reported by Forbes

a month after Cuomo announced the program. These include an income of less than \$110,000, full-time enrollment of at least 12 credits per semester and a total of 30 credits per academic year, and no student loans in default, according to N.Y. Higher Education Services Corporation. Applicants who enrolled prior to 2018-19 must have earned 30 credits per year before applying for the program.

According to the New York Post, Governor Cuomo stated that the scholarship was intended to support middle-income families because most

full-time lower-income CUNY students already receive enough government assistance to cover their tuition without the scholarship. That might explain the program's lackluster results, which show that over two-thirds of applicants, or 68 percent according to Times Union, have been turned down. The N.Y. based newspaper also revealed that the 30-credit requirement is the main fail line for applicants.

Only 4,155 students across all of CUNY have been awarded the Excelsior Scholarship, according to Center for an Urban Future. In 2018, Lehman had

a total enrollment of 11,230 students. Only 168 of these students received the Excelsior Scholarship, a mere 1.4 percent of the 2018 enrollment year. This is a sliver of the 59 percent of Lehman students who qualified for grants or scholarships and the 21 percent who are utilizing loans or other forms of financial support in order to pay for school, according to the Department of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment at Lehman.

Because most financial aid only covers fall and spring semesters, the 30-credit requirement sets an especially high bar for working students who also depend on financial aid. Since they cannot afford to pay out of pocket for credits, they must take five classes each semester in addition to maintaining their work schedules, in order to be eligible for the Excelsior.

Shut out of the tuition-free Excelsior promise, most Lehman students

**“I knew about the Excelsior free-tuition program before and I have struggled a lot with financial aid. Unfortunately, I don’t qualify for either.”**

**- Jesmy Pujols, a 35-year-old Lehman social work major**

continue to seek other ways to cover their educational costs. “I knew about the Excelsior free-tuition program before and I have struggled a lot with financial aid. Unfortunately, I don’t qualify for either,” said Jesmy Pujols, a 35-year-old Lehman social work major

in her third year. “I’ve had problems with my paperwork disappearing and my fall 2018 loan is still not even finalized yet,” she said.

Steven Roa, a 23-year-old Lehman senior and English major, also reported difficulties with financial aid. “I’ve been struggling with financial aid since I was at LaGuardia Community College, and it was because they delayed my assistance,” he said. “I heard of the Excelsior Scholarship but didn’t look into it because I’m in my senior year.”

Lehman sophomore, Ashley Thomas, concurred. “Although I’m familiar with the Excelsior Scholarship, I have struggled with financial aid. In spring 2018 I had to take out a loan in order to cover my tuition.” The 22-year-old social work major offered this advice: “You have to be assertive and be knowledgeable. Ask questions and know the contact information of every financial aid representative available.”

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# Trump's Emergency Declaration Upsets Lehman Students

By Jonathan Rivera



President Trump views border wall prototypes. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

“Isn’t that unconstitutional?” asked Lehman sophomore and psychology major, Ana Gomez, about President Trump’s declaration of a national emergency on Feb. 15. During his speech that day at the White House Rose Garden, the president alleged that the declaration was necessary to expedite his border wall plan. Trump also said that national emergencies have been signed many times by past presidents and that “nobody cares.” Whitehouse.gov states that the president plans to utilize military construction money in order to build the wall.

“I think it’s a symbolic form of bullying,” said Lehman junior and English major

Jennifer Monique Crespo regarding the border wall. “With all the reports and research, it has been shown that the border wall is not the main entrance that illegal immigrants use to enter the U.S.,” she added.

A report for the Center for Migration Studies found that the number of illegal immigrants who overstay their temporary visas is double that of immigrants apprehended at the border. The Department of Homeland Security reported that in 2017, 701,901 immigrants remained in the U.S. past their departure date which dwarfed the 303,916 that were apprehended attempting to cross the border illegally.

Trump’s previous effort to fund the wall resulted in a 35-day shutdown, the longest in U.S. history. He failed to acquire the money he demanded and on Jan. 25 he signed an act to fund and resume halted operations. This included paying the salaries of more than 800,000 federal workers across the country whose wages had been held since Dec. 22. The online magazine Vox estimated that 380,000 employees were suspended and 420,000 more worked without pay.

The shutdown also impacted students, since all financial aid checks, scholarships, and other federal aid were

**“I think it’s a symbolic form of bullying that the president is doing.”**

**- Jennifer Monique Crespo, Lehman junior and English major**

delayed. This impeded the enrollment of thousands of students, including the 59 percent of Lehman students who receive financial aid, according to Lehman’s Department of Institutional Research.

Lehman junior and computer science major, Guevara Torres said, “I was definitely worried, not so much about coverage [of the shutdown] but on what terms my loans would need to be fulfilled.”

# Michelle Obama's Inspiring 'Becoming' Maps Her Success

By Brittany Aufiero



Obama was photographed by Miller Mobley. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

In her poignant, eloquently crafted autobiographical memoir “Becoming,” Michelle Obama writes about how she found her voice and learned to use it effectively to enact real change. The book has enjoyed widespread success and sold 1.4 million copies within its first week of publication on Nov. 13, 2018. According to Barnes & Noble, it is the best-selling book in the U.S. for 2018.

“Becoming” is divided into three distinct sections: “Becoming Me,” “Becoming Us,” and “Becoming More.” Each represents different stages of growth for Obama in becoming successful. All speak to the strength, grace, and intelligence of the former First Lady of the United States.

She traces the formative experiences of her life back in time. It begins with her

upbringing in a working-class family on Chicago’s Southside, follows through her years at Princeton and Harvard Law School, to the day she met her husband, became a mother and began using her platform to advocate for children’s health at a national level.

Any woman who aspires to balance a successful career and personal life simultaneously will find Obama’s words here truly inspiring. For women of color especially, this book sends a powerful message of hope and perseverance in the face of adverse circumstances. At one point, she recalls a time when she was forced to attend a job interview for a managerial position at a hospital with an infant Sasha in her lap. She is candid regarding the discrimination she has experienced and the ways she has managed to use it to her advantage to further her own goals.

At its heart, “Becoming” is a reflection on the realities of what is possible with the right amount of determination. Remarkably, it manages to uplift without ever reading as condescending. Obama emphasizes how a child’s access to education and supportive adults are necessary for his or her success.

Her optimistic appeal for the future is a refreshingly cool glass of water in the scorching desert of today’s troubling political climate. The book ends on a note of hope and satisfaction, “A glimmer of the world as it could be. This was our bid for permanence: a rising generation that understood what was possible—and that even more was possible for them.”

# ‘DNA’ Sandwiches Same Old Sound Between Mild Update

By Allen Mena



“DNA” album cover art. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

The Backstreet Boys released their ninth and newest album on Jan. 25, 2019. It’s their first album since 2013. Titled “DNA,” its 13 songs include radio favorites “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart” and “OK.” The songs mainly feature melodic tunes carried out by a variety of musical instruments, such as the flute and saxophone. The tunes are reminiscent of some of the group’s classic songs like “I Want It That Way,” and are simultaneously modern enough to resonate with a younger audience.

The first and last tracks of the album are the strongest pieces because their harmonizing stays true to the band’s roots and also agrees with the fast-

paced beats that are commonplace in the music industry today. The stand-out song is “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart,” because of its fast-paced, modern style. It is comparable to Maroon 5’s recent hit featuring Cardi B, “Girls Like you,” because it has similar beats at a similar pace, along with multiple singers performing at the same time during the chorus and throughout the song.

Sadly, most of the songs in the middle of “DNA” come across as fillers and generally sound the same in their delivery. The least impressive track on the album is “Breathe.” While this song might have been a smash hit in the 90s, the acapella vocals and pace of the

song do not align with what is popular today.

However, this album’s initial success adds to the group’s legacy, since it landed #1 album on the Billboard 200. This still pales in comparison to the Backstreet Boys’ most successful album, “Millennium,” which made over ten million dollars in sales and included their greatest hit song, “I Want It That Way.” The Backstreet Boys have won numerous music awards, including their most prestigious, “Album of the Year” in 1999 at the Billboard Music Awards. Given the album’s considerable replay value from radio hits, it easily earns three out of five stars.

# 13 Years Later, ‘Kingdom Hearts III’ Proves the Wait Worth It

By Brittany Aufiero



**Kingdom Hearts’ protagonist Sora. Photo courtesy of Flickr.**

Following a 13-year hiatus after the release of “Kingdom Hearts II” in 2005, “Kingdom Hearts III” finally made it into stores worldwide for PlayStation 4 and Xbox One gamers on Jan. 29.

The latest installment of the single-player RPG series follows the story of keyblade-wielder Sora, as he journeys to other Disney and Pixar worlds with his companions, Donald and Goofy. Following the loss of his magic and abilities in the spin-off game “Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance,” Sora must acquire the Power of Waking in order to fully regain his strength and, along with six other guardians of light, prevent the darkness-obsessed Master Xehanort from assembling the  $\chi$ -blade, a keyblade powerful enough to open the door to Kingdom Hearts.

“Kingdom Hearts III” features stunning visuals, courtesy of Square Enix’s choice to build the game using Unreal Engine 4. Originally intended for Unreal Engine 3, game development stalled in 2014,

following Director Tetsuya Nomura’s choice to recreate the game for the most up-to-date technology. Unreal Engine 4 has been successfully used in games of multiple genres, including the third-person shooter “Gears of War 4” and features real-time rendering that yields seamless action sequences in-game.

Fans of the franchise wholeheartedly agree that the game was worth the wait. Recent Lehman graduate Melissa Ruiz, a 26-year-old English Honors student said, “the worlds feel a lot more lived in than in previous installments. I think you can definitely see why it took as long as it did to make and how much time and effort was put into it.”

Following tradition with previous installments, the game’s soundtrack features Japanese pop icon Utada Hikaru, who beautifully captures the sentimental importance of the long-awaited game. In particular, “Face My Fears” (made in collaboration with dubstep music artist Skrillex, a long-

time fan of the series) evokes strong emotions in all of the young fans who grew up with the franchise and serves as the perfect audio track for the game’s cinematic opening.

Plot-wise, the game holds up just about as well as any other in the “Kingdom Hearts” collection- which is to say, it only makes sense if you squint. Of course, this remains a quality of infinite charm, as the characters are the true heart of this series and always have been.

Nelson Fernandez, a 29-year-old English major, has followed the games since the release of “Kingdom Hearts I” in 2002. For him, the games were a major influence on his choice to pursue English: “The convoluted storytelling actually kept me intrigued throughout the years. The lore of the series is, in fact, one of the biggest inspirations that got me into writing fiction.”

Ruiz added, “Kingdom Hearts” has a convoluted storyline but this game makes a lot of connections between all of the previous games, so it’s fun to see how everything connects.”

“Kingdom Hearts III” has sold more than 5 million copies worldwide, making it the fastest-selling installment in the franchise. It has been nominated by IGN for “Best Game of E3” 2018, “Best PlayStation 4 and Xbox One Game of E3” 2018, and “Best Action Game of E3” 2018. More nominations are sure to come in as the game continues to make waves in gaming communities everywhere.

# The Highlight of ‘Unbreakable’ Franchise Can’t Save It from Mediocrity

By Michael Omoruan



Host Yvette Nicole-Brown leading a Comic-Con panel with the cast and crew of *Glass*: Writer/director M. Night Shyamalan and stars Samuel L. Jackson, Bruce Willis, Sarah Paulson, and Anya Taylor-Joy. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Audiences who fell in love with the stars of the first two “Unbreakable” films will likely be nonplussed at how their talents are wasted in “Glass,” the third movie of the trilogy. An example is the role of Kevin Wendell Crumb, played by James McAvoy, who is far and away the best part of M. Night Shyamalan’s “Unbreakable” franchise.

While “Unbreakable” tells the story of how David Dunn (Bruce Willis), the sole survivor of a train crash, comes to terms with gaining superpowers after meeting Elijah Price (Samuel L. Jackson). “Split” focuses on the character Crumb, another disturbed individual, who suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder. Crumb has over 20 programs living in his head that are referred to as “the Horde.” He

also happens to be a serial killer.

The intricate ways that McAvoy contorts his body and performs as each of Crumb’s individual personalities is mesmerizing. He was criminally underrated in “Split” and overlooked during awards season as well. “Glass,” sets 19 years after “Unbreakable.” Only weeks after the events of “Split” in 2016, his roles as Patricia, the motherly personality, and Hedwig, the infantile personality are true crowd pleasers. However, the film overall is still underwhelming.

Released on Jan. 18, it opens with Crumb still at large abducting and murdering teenage girls. David Dunn is now the owner of a home security store he runs with his son. A chance encounter

between the principle characters leads to a brief confrontation until Dr. Ellie Staple (Sarah Paulson) places them in the same mental health facility. When the two arrive, they meet Elijah Price whose alter ego is the eponymous Mr. Glass.

The film starts off well enough with Dunn returning to his security store after vindicating a pedestrian on the sidewalk, a move reminiscent of the character’s vigilantism in “Unbreakable.” But it begins to go downhill shortly after. In the first half, Jackson is devoid of any of the charisma and charm he originally had in his role as Mr. Glass. When he finally does have time to showcase his acting, the film starts to falter. Willis isn’t given much to do which results in anticlimactic scenes between him and Jackson or McAvoy. The scenes do little to advance the plot or develop the characters that many audiences love.

Offsetting these weaknesses, the score for the film by West Dylan Thordson is a highlight, drawing on the themes of “Superman,” “Avengers,” and many other superhero film scores as an inspiration. The lighting for the film was great as well. The purple, green, and yellow lights for Glass, Dunn, and Crumb, respectively are well executed.

Although the ending is bittersweet, there are fun scenes that fans will enjoy. As expected, Shyamalan has a twist in the film that will take viewers by surprise, so if you’re a fan of his previous films or love the cast, you will find some enjoyment in this.

# ‘Surviving R. Kelly’: Lehman Students Call for Justice

By Brittany Aufiero



The #MeToo movement represented at the Oslo Women's March in 2018. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

In the aftermath of the #MeToo movement survivors of sexual abuse are stepping forward now more than ever to shed light on their experiences and to advocate for justice against their assailants. Recently, singer R. Kelly, 52, was charged on Feb. 21 with 10 counts of aggravated criminal sex abuse involving four women, three of whom were underage at the time of the alleged abuse. The details surrounding the artist's illegal sexual exploits have

been met with resounding backlash both online and on campus at Lehman.

“Surviving R. Kelly,” a six-part documentary that aired consecutively from Jan. 3 to Jan. 5, portrayed testimonials from survivors and eyewitnesses about the decades-long history of the R&B music artist's sexual abuses. Celebrities including TV host Wendy Williams and R&B singers Sparkle and John Legend speak about

the disturbing actions of the decorated Grammy winner. The documentary highlights the controlling and violent behavior that Kelly exhibited towards women and cites the ways in which he uses his power and influence to groom his female fans, many of whom were underage girls.

Karina Leigh, a 21-year-old Lehman senior and English Honors major minoring in African studies and



R. Kelly photographed at his 2008 trial. Photo courtesy of Flickr.

philosophy, agrees that Kelly's behavior is a sign of a larger problem. "We live in a society that sexualizes young black girls, especially when they tend not to look their age because they're taller or may have more noticeable assets, due to the fact that they developed quicker, which is not their fault."

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), one in four girls are sexually abused before they turn 18. A 2014 national study conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) found that an estimated 64.1 percent of multiracial women and 38.2 percent of black non-Hispanic women experienced at least one act of sexual violence in their lifetime. At Lehman, 67.4 percent of students are women, and 83.3 percent of all students identify as Hispanic/Latino or Black/African American altogether.

The negative feedback against R. Kelly from social media and the music industry have raised question regarding how his fans should proceed. Can one support the art without supporting the artist by attending concerts or buying

his albums or merchandise? Leigh says not in this case.

"With R. Kelly, I feel like he promotes his sickness through his music. Like his recent song 'I Admit,' where he literally confessed everything he's done in an 18 minute song and still no action has been taken. I've never been a fan of his, so I don't listen regardless, but I do feel that it's completely unacceptable to still support him or his music."

Guevara Torres, a 28-year-old junior and computer science major, agrees with Leigh that Kelly should face consequences for his actions. "I enjoyed his music, but I am no longer a fan. It is not acceptable to attend his events and concerts. Artists can only be separated from the art until the observer decides otherwise."

On May 10, 2018, Spotify announced that it would stop promoting and recommending music made by the artist. It stated, "We don't censor content because of an artist's or creator's behavior, but we want our editorial decisions—what we choose to program—to reflect our values." Apple

Music and Pandora followed suit two days later. This year on Jan. 18, Kelly's label, RCA Records, announced that it would be dropping the artist.

Hours after being charged on Feb. 21, Kelly surrendered to the Chicago Police Department. He was released three days later after posting the \$100,000 bond necessary for his release.

**"With R. Kelly, I feel like he promotes his sickness through his music."**

**— Karina Leigh, a 21-year-old Lehman senior and English Honors major minoring in African studies and philosophy**

Janet Luna, a 21-year-old Lehman senior and English major minoring in psychology and middle and high school education, expresses satisfaction with the legal repercussions Kelly is now facing. "He like all abusers will never be able to fully pay for the damages they have caused. However, this might serve as closure to some victims, even if it might never make up for their trauma."

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