Poverty in a Pandemic

How COVID-19 is ravaging our disadvantaged communities.
FOR THE BEST SELECTION & PRICES in PRODUCE, MEAT and SEAFOOD in the Mid-South!
“One of the worst things is you can’t tell if people are smiling.”

“Well, I’m smiling,” I said, from behind my mask. “Hope you have a good day. And thanks.”

“Oh, I will. At least I have a job.”

I’ve got one, too. But my co-workers and I are working from our homes, unlike the checker at Fresh Market, who’s on the front lines, toiling with rubber gloves and a mask behind a plastic shield. But, truth be told, all of us who are still working in this current situation are lucky.

The economy is tanking. At last count, 26 million Americans had filed for unemployment. And for many of those folks, no job means no health-care insurance. Which means they’ve joined the approximately 44 million other Americans who have no health insurance — in the middle of the worst health crisis in memory. A Gallup poll released this week reported that one in seven Americans wouldn’t seek care for coronavirus symptoms due to worries about the possible cost of treatment.

Nationally, COVID-19 crisis “management” is still an unholy, disorganized mess. While steps are being taken in some states to “reopen the economy,” just across a border, another state is still bottled down. Germs don’t recognize borders, last I heard. But coherent leadership from the top of the political food chain is quite obviously not going to happen. Or coherent anything, for that matter.

Most indications are that things won’t truly return to “normal” until a vaccine is discovered, and that’s likely many months away. Most projections I’ve read predict a second surge of the virus. It could happen soon, if we reopen the economy too fast. It could happen this fall, even if we bring down the infection rate this summer. Everyone appears to be shooting in the dark to some extent.

What we do know is that in two months, nearly 60,000 Americans have died. And that’s just the official number. Higher general death rates in some parts of the country suggest that many probable COVID deaths have not been attributed to the disease.

I was chatting with a group of journalists via Zoom this week. There was some talk about covering “other stories” besides the virus, but the fact is there is almost no story you can report on that isn’t impacted by the COVID crisis: politics, education, government, voting rights, food, the arts, sports, social justice, wage and income disparity — you name it.

Unsurprisingly, as Maya Smith reports in this week’s cover story, the disadvantaged among us — the poor, the homeless, the undocumented, certain African-American communities — are disproportionately affected by COVID. It’s an eye-opening story.

And those folks’ lack of access to health care affects everyone, even those fortunate enough to have it. More people walking around with the disease means more people getting infected, which sustains the shutdown and stay-at-home orders. If millions of Americans can’t get — or can’t pay for — medical care, all of us pay the price.

If there’s an upside to all of this, it’s that it’s given us a chance to see what’s truly broken, to understand what needs to be changed to get this country back on track. COVID has exposed major faultlines in our civic and social foundations. We have a long list of problems and disparities that need to be addressed. But at the top of that list is health care.

What the United States calls a health-care system is an insult to the word “system.” It’s bloated, inequitable, inefficient, greed-driven, and unsustainable. The current situation has made that blindingly clear. Vast numbers of Americans avoid seeking medical care because they can’t afford it. Vast numbers of Americans avoid seeking medical care because they can’t afford it. In so doing, their treatable conditions become emergency room situations are lucky.

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Closing Time, Airports, & the Virus

Researchers warn of another shutdown, Cohen questions funding, and tracking coronavirus.

OPEN AND CLOSE
New research from Vanderbilt University researchers shows how much it can spread in communities.

If orders are lifted and virus rates spike again, it could trigger a “circuit breaker.” Stay-at-home orders could return to save hospitals and health-care systems from becoming overwhelmed.

If the transmission rate continues to slow, for example, the economy could remain open indefinitely. If the state opens on May 1st and virus rates spike above 1.5, the new model says the economy would need to close again in 46 days.

The state’s transmission rate remained the same over the last two weeks, according to the researcher. However, it’s unknown if the current virus transmission rate will change after the governor’s Safer at Home order is lifted. But the Vanderbilt researchers said “we do know that the number of social contacts among Tennesseans will increase — even if certain aspects of physical distancing at businesses, mask-wearing, and hygiene practices continue.”

WASHINGTON
City leaders want changes to the 1978 Kendrick consent decree on police surveillance, and the court is asking for public comment on the changes.

Those changes would allow Memphis Police Department investigators to gather intelligence on social media, use undercover social accounts, share the information with other law enforcement agencies, and more.

AIRPORT DISPARITY
Rep. Steve Cohen (D-Memphis) pointed out a disparity in CARES Act funding for airports. Memphis International Airport saw 4.4 million passengers in 2018 and got $24.6 million. Knoxville’s McGhee Tyson saw about 2.5 million passengers and got more than $25.8 million.

INSTAGRAM FOUNDERS ON THE VIRUS
Instagram founders Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger launched a new website this month to track an important number to check the spread of the coronavirus. Rt.live tracks the effective reproduction number of the virus to show how much it can spread in communities.

States need a number below one to show the virus is shrinking. Tennessee’s number was at 1.16 over the weekend.

A FLYER COLORING BOOK
The Memphis Flyer is now accepting art from locals to produce a Memphis coloring book. Proceeds from the book will help soften the paper’s financial blow in the wake of coronavirus and will be split with artists. Print versions of the coloring book will cost $35, or you can get a printable PDF version for $20.

Art submissions are due Thursday, April 30th. Send them to anna@memphisflyer.com.

SAFER AT HOME ENDS
Governor Bill Lee announced last week that his order for Tennesseans to remain at home will expire April 30th, with the “vast majority of businesses in 89 counties allowed to reopen on May 1st.”

Lee said he will work with officials in Shelby, Madison, Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, and Sullivan counties to help them plan their reopenings.

ABORTIONS ALLOWED
A federal district court in Tennessee blocked the governor’s attempt to temporarily ban abortion because of the coronavirus. A federal judge blocked the move saying “abortion is a time-sensitive procedure.”

Visit the News Blog at memphisflyer.com for fuller versions of these stories and more local news.
Sex and Drinking

The coronavirus has us drinking up and buying sex dolls.

Sales of sex dolls are through the roof, and American workers are drinking on the job. That sentence was brought to you by the coronavirus.

Sex Doll Genie, which bills itself as the “largest sex doll store in the world,” reported a sales spike in February and March. Demand from single males of all sexual orientations more than doubled in the company’s first quarter of 2020, with a 51.6 percent increase in sales between February and March. Orders placed by single females grew 15.8 percent in the same period, according to the company.

“We are seeing the sex doll industry go through a revolution during the COVID-19 pandemic with a huge increase in orders from both couples and male and single females,” said Sex Doll Genie CEO Janet Stevens, who co-founded the company with her husband, Amit. “Couples who have been quarantined together seem to be much more open to trying something new after possibly experimenting more during the lockdown.

“We are also seeing more single men and women placing orders for the first time; we think this is because they view solo play as a safer alternative to dating apps like Tinder right now,” Stevens said.

Stevens said attitudes about sex dolls are changing. People stuck at home are open to trying new things. This is bringing the sex doll industry into the mainstream. Average customers now are the “highly educated, single males and females between 30-40 years old and with high-income, heterosexual married couples looking to add a new dimension to their sex life together.”

Sex Doll Genie carries more than 2,600 sex doll designs from 16 different brands. The store’s three best-selling dolls are the “adventurous, survivorist Frankie,” “H-cup Daria,” and “male doll, Lucas.”

Drinking on the Job

Tennesseans are drinking on the job. So say the folks from Fishbowl, a website for professionals to discuss workplace issues. A Fishbowl survey found that nearly 43 percent of Tennesseans were boozing while working from home.

The stat goes along with other, sadder national stats. Fifty-four percent of workers fear losing their jobs right now. Teachers report that less than half of students are showing up for remote classes. About 62 percent of working parents say they cannot juggle childcare while working from home.

To perhaps lighten the mood, Fishbowl asked professionals, “Do you ever drink alcohol while working from home?” The survey included companies like EY, Deloitte, Accenture, Amazon, Edelman, Nike, Google, KPMG, and thousands of others. The answer from them was yes, but not a resounding yes.

Of the 12,995 surveyed across the country, nearly 42 percent said they did drink on the clock. North Carolina had the highest rate at nearly 47 percent. Oregon, Connecticut, Colorado, and Washington posted similar numbers.

Arkansas had the lowest drinking-on-the-clock rate with about 29 percent saying they did imbibe while on the job. New Jersey, Virginia, Michigan, and Missouri followed closely behind Arkansas.

Advertising and marketing agency employees had the highest percentage (49 percent) saying they did drink on the job.
Deus Ex Machina

Stalled by anti-climax, will the voting-machine question be resolved anytime soon?

Linda Phillips

Now it appears that our next round of local and state elections — the ones scheduled for August — could be in jeopardy. Governor Bill Lee, who was relatively late in imposing shelter-in-place rules for Tennessee, has now put himself in the vanguard of the nation’s state executives in casting them aside, allowing restaurants and other formerly public places to begin re-opening — though there is no evidence so far that the ominous coronavirus epidemic has sufficiently spent itself or even begun to plateau.

Though the Shelby County Commission, meeting via webinar, has formally requested a loosening of the regulations regarding absentee ballots, there is no indication that the governor nor the General Assembly, its sessions indefinitely suspended, will approve such a process. So the specter presents itself of lengthy, thinly populated, and distanced voter lines like those we saw in the recent Wisconsin elections — followed, as we now know, by a spike in COVID-19 infections.

And, even should circumstances clear to the point of allowing some sense of relative comfort in going to our accustomed physical voting locations, Shelby County is experiencing delay after delay in replacing the now discredited Diebold voting machines that virtually nobody trusts. Election Administrator Linda Phillips last year set a goal of having new machines in time for the August 6th primary for county general election and primaries for state/federal offices.

Accordingly, Phillips sent out an RFP (request for proposals) to various vendors, and, with the resultant bids in hand, last week revealed her preference to a closed executive-committee meeting of the county’s five official election commissioners. Only four of the commissioners were present — two Republicans, two Democrats of the body required to tilt to the state’s official majority party (Republican).

The fifth, GOP member Brent Taylor, was a late arrival, having tried in vain to get connected to the webinar from his home and a second location before arriving finally — and connecting — at a computer in the Election Commission’s Shelby Farms location.

By that time, Taylor himself was pretty frazzled: “Don’t get upset with me,” he said. “It’s not my fault it didn’t work.” But I can say I’m not going to participate in any more of these audio-visual conferences. … I’m just not gonna. I’m not gonna do anything other than meet in person.”

A consensus had already developed that the sequence originally planned — Phillips’ announcement of her choice (complete with the relevant specs) at the executive-committee session, followed by public discussion from some 50-odd interested virtual attendees (most of them favoring hand-marked paper ballots as against ballot-marking devices), followed by a formal vote of selection by the Election Commission — had to be scrapped.

Phillips herself had offered that she wanted to make some changes before a public presentation; it later developed that the “changes” may have had to do with the costs involved.

After a good deal of back-and-forth, it was agreed that the public discussion about the generalities of voting-machine selection would be heard but that the administrator’s announcement of her preference, followed by what was expected to be approval on a party-line basis, would be delayed until a second meeting of the Election Commission — this one to be in a public space where social-distancing could be practiced — would be held this week, whereupon public sentiment could be revisited.

Meanwhile, there is rampant speculation about compromise solutions involving a mix of devices and even reports that the Shelby County Commission, which is charged with footing the bill and which has voted a preference for hand-marked paper ballots, is empowered by state law to make its own decision and can order whatever kind of machine it pleases.
Shelby County has received a special allocation of Community Development Block Grant funds to be used to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus. This allocation was authorized by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), Public Law 116-136, which was signed by President Trump on March 27, 2020, to respond to the growing effects of this historic public health crisis. The CARES Act made available $5 billion in Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds. Of this amount, the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is immediately allocating $2 billion based on the fiscal year 2020 CDBG formula. The remaining $3 billion shall be allocated based on needs using best available data, in the following tranches: $1 billion shall be allocated to States and insular areas within 45 days of enactment of the CARES Act, and $2 billion shall be distributed to local governments at the discretion of the Secretary. Up to $10 million will be set aside for technical assistance. Given the immediate needs faced by our communities, HUD has announced the first allocation of funds. Shelby County’s allocation is $704,206 in CDBG-CV funds to address the needs in low- to moderate-income areas of Shelby County outside of the City of Memphis.

On April 1, 2020, HUD released a memorandum on Availability of Waivers of Community Planning and Development (CPD) Grant Program and Consolidated Plan Requirements to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and Mitigate Economic Impacts Caused by COVID-19. Two waivers were made available in relation to consolidated plan requirements and are detailed below. Shelby County Government proposes amending the Citizen Participation Plan in order to use the two waivers to consolidated plan requirements through the end of program year 2020 which is June 30, 2021.

Citizen Participation Public Comment Period for Consolidated Plan Amendment Requirement: 30-day Public Comment Period.

Citations: 24 CFR 91.105(c)(2) and (k), 24 CFR 91.115(c)(2) and (i) and 24 CFR 91.401

Explanation: A CPD grantee may amend an approved consolidated plan in accordance with 24 CFR 91.505. Substantial amendments to the consolidated plan are subject to the citizen participation process in the grantee’s citizen participation plan. The citizen participation plan must provide citizens with 30 days to comment on substantial amendments.

Justification: Given the need to expedite actions to respond to COVID-19, HUD waives 24 CFR 91.105(c)(2) and (k), 91.115(c)(2) and (i) as specified below, in order to balance the need to respond quickly to the growing spread and effects of COVID-19 with the statutory requirement to provide reasonable notice and opportunity to comment on substantive amendments concerning the proposed uses of CDBG, HOME, HTF, HOPWA or ESG funds.

Applicability: This 30-day minimum for the required public comment period is waived for substantial amendments, provided that no less than 5 days are provided for public comments on each substantial amendment. The waiver is available through the end of the recipient’s 2020 program year. Any recipient wishing to undertake further amendments to prior year plans following the 2020 program year can do so during the development of its FY 2021 Annual Action Plan.

Implementation in Shelby County: Effective May 11, 2020 through June 30, 2021, the citizen participation public comment period for substantial amendments is 5 days.

Citizen Participation Reasonable Notice and Opportunity to Comment Requirement: Reasonable Notice and Opportunity to Comment.

Citations: 24 CFR 91.105(c)(2) and (k), 24 CFR 91.115(c)(2) and (i) and 24 CFR 91.401

Explanation: As noted above, the regulations at 24 CFR 91.105 (for local governments) and 91.115 (for States) set forth the citizen participation plan requirements for recipients. For substantial amendments to the consolidated plan, the regulations require the recipient to follow its citizen participation plan to provide citizens with reasonable notice and opportunity to comment. The citizen participation plan must state how reasonable notice and opportunity to comment will be given.

Justification: HUD recognizes the efforts to contain COVID-19 require limiting public gatherings, such as those often used to obtain citizen participation, and that there is a need to respond quickly to the growing spread and effects of COVID-19. Therefore, HUD waives 24 CFR 91.105(c)(2) and (k), 24 CFR 91.115(c)(2) and (i) and 24 CFR 91.401 as specified below to allow these grantees to determine what constitutes reasonable notice and opportunity to comment given their circumstances.

Applicability: This authority is in effect through the end of the 2020 program year.

Implementation in Shelby County: Effective May 11, 2020 through June 30, 2021, reasonable notice and opportunity to comment will be provided via public notice and at least one virtual public hearing. Public notices will be published the Memphis Flyer, La Prensa Latina (a bilingual publication serving the Hispanic population), and in the New Tri-State Defender or the Silver Star News (publications serving the African American population). The County will also distribute public notices through the Department of Housing website and the City of Memphis main library listserv. The public notices will include date/time and access information on the virtual public hearing where citizens can provide comments and ask questions.

As a result of the special allocation of CDBG-CV and waivers to consolidated plan requirements, SCDH proposes amending the FY 2019 Annual Action Plan to reflect the $704,206 in CDBG-CV funds to be used for Public Service Activities. Also proposed is an amendment to the Citizen Participation Plan to make use of the two waivers to consolidated plan requirements which are detailed above.

The substantial amendment to the FY 2019 Annual Action Plan and the Proposed Citizen Participation Plan will be available for public review from May 4, 2020 through May 8, 2020 on the Department of Housing webpage on the Shelby County Government website at the following link: http://www.shelbycountytn.gov/3103/Reports-and-Plans. This information will also be distributed via email through the City of Memphis main library listserv.

In order to solicit public comments on the Amendment to the Consolidated Plan and Proposed Citizen Participation Plan, SCDH will hold a virtual public hearing; Tuesday, May 5, 2020 at 5:30pm. To join the virtual hearing go to this web address https://zoom.us/j/3793977959 or dial (301) 715-8592 and enter meeting ID: 3793977959. If you plan to attend the public hearing and have special needs, please contact the Department of Housing at Sydney. wright@shelbycountytn.gov by Monday, May 4, 2020 and we will work to accommodate you.

Written comments should be addressed to Ms. Sydney Wright (Sydney.wright@shelbycountytn.gov), Shelby County Department of Housing, 1075 Mullins Station Road, Memphis, TN 38134. SCDH will respond to written comments within five working days of their receipt. For questions concerning the Amendment to the Consolidated Plan and/or the Proposed Citizen Participation Plan, please contact the Sydney Wright or for TTY at 901-222-2301.

Para mas información en Español, por favor llame al 901-222-3993.

The Shelby County Department of Housing does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or provision of services. Equal opportunity/equal access provider.

Lee Harris
Shelby County Mayor

Attest:
Scott Walkup, Administrator
Department of Housing
As COVID-19 rampages through the country, its effects are disproportionately affecting people in disenfranchised communities — those living in poverty, the undocumented, certain African-American neighborhoods — and the children in these communities. Issues of low wages, lack of access to medical care, and educational disadvantages have existed for years. Now the coronavirus pandemic is magnifying these problems and bringing them to light. Here’s a look at how COVID-19 has impacted the less fortunate among us.

Poverty in a Pandemic

For those living in poverty, Dr. Elena Delavega, a professor at the University of Memphis and an expert in poverty, says the pandemic has “tremendous implications on a number of fronts.”

Memphis has a poverty rate of just under 28 percent, according to the 2019 Memphis Poverty Fact Sheet compiled annually by Delavega and others at the U of M. That’s more than double the 11 percent poverty rate for Tennessee and the 12 percent rate for the country.

“From health care, to the ability to work from home, to accessing protective gear and other necessary supplies, to education, the effects of poverty are only being highlighted now,” Delavega says.

As more people are laid off or furloughed, Delavega notes that the ability to withstand a furlough depends largely on one’s savings. But, she points out, people living in poverty often don’t have savings. This means they don’t have the financial resources to buy supplies and food in bulk. “They can only buy what they need, little by little. Now they are going to the store more often and facing more exposure. And if there is a disruption in the supply chain, those who aren’t able to stock up on resources will be most impacted.” An issue that Delavega says can no longer be ignored is access to health care.

“People in poverty can’t afford to avoid the virus. They have to work. They have to eat.”

Tiffany Lowe, an employee at a local Kentucky Fried Chicken who joined other fast food workers in a strike to protest unsafe working conditions amid the COVID-19 outbreak in early April, knows the struggles cited by Delavega firsthand. Lowe has been working at KFC for three years and makes $8 an hour.

“One thing we’ve seen in South Korea is that everything was made available to everyone,” Delavega says. “Here, we don’t do that. Wealthy people have access, while poor people don’t. In Europe, we’ve seen a triage based on who has a greater chance of survival, but here that triage is economic. The priority is not given to those with a greater chance to survive, but to those who can pay for medical services.”

Delavega also notes that those who are living paycheck to paycheck must continue to work, whether they are sick or not. “People in poverty can’t afford to avoid the virus. They have to work. They have to eat.”

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— Elena Delavega
confused as to why a multi-billion dollar corporation such as KFC wouldn’t give us the things we need to survive like hazard pay, health care, and paid sick leave. I mean, if they want to call us essential employees, then they should make us feel essential, treat us like human beings, and give us what we deserve.”

Lowe says the company is also putting customers at risk, as employees who are sick are likely to still show up to work because there is no paid sick leave.

“This job is the only source of income for a lot of us,” she says. “So without working, how would they survive? Some people might come if they’re sick, putting people’s lives at risk.”

Delavega says people in Lowe’s position, living in poverty, making little above minimum wage, have always been in danger of losing their livelihood and lives when a crisis occurs.

“The reality is in the American society, the lives of poor people don’t really matter,” she says. “These things aren’t new. The pandemic is just highlighting conditions that already exist. The crisis has made it obvious. We’re seeing it on a grand scale.”

This is the reality for poor people every day, she says. “One disease, one tornado, one case of bad luck for the business they work for, and this is what happens. This is true for nearly 200,000 people in Memphis. Every single day. When this is over, are we going to remember the most vulnerable among us? Are we going to remember the need for universal health care and a livable wage? Are we going to recognize the importance of internet access and make it a public resource? It’s not a luxury, but an essential utility.”

**Children Will be “Most Impacted”**

Children living poverty will be the “most and worst impacted,” Delavega says, citing the education gaps closed schools and remote learning has created. Nearly half of the children in Memphis, or 44.9 percent, live in poverty.

“They are essentially missing a half semester of learning,” she says. “Students living in wealthy homes with computers can continue to study. They have the books and the resources to continue learning. Families without computers or the internet are simply not going to be able to continue that education.”

She says for those children the school year has essentially ended, and Delavega fears they will be at a disadvantage at the beginning of next school year. “If students lose knowledge over the span of summer break, imagine how much more they are losing now and how much more academically disadvantaged they will be next year.”

Delavega fears the impact of COVID-19 on children living in poverty will be “permanent and long-lasting. The educational impacts will follow them for the rest of their lives.”

Katy Spurlock, with the Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope (MICAH) education equity task force, says MICAH sees greater inequity in education “than we do anywhere else. We’re focused on bridging the gap.”

With schools closed, Spurlock agrees that the greatest issue for students in impoverished communities is the lack of internet access and devices. “There is a huge divide there. Children whose families have internet access and devices or go to schools that provide them are a step ahead. We’re just trying to work to hold the community accountable to make sure that need is met.”

Census data shows that in the South Memphis and Washington Heights neighborhoods more than 80 percent of households have no broadband internet access. In Frayser, 63 percent of households are without internet access.

A report by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance published in 2018 found that of the 256,973 households in Memphis in 2016, 126,428 of them had no internet access.

A draft of the plan, Shelby County Schools is working on a new plan to provide students with devices and internet access. A report on bridging the gap, Spurlock says, “We’re already behind the eight ball realistically in this community with education and being able to successfully matriculate students through the school system. We already had problems with disparities before COVID-19.”

However, Spurlock says she is going to be optimistic about the outcome of the pandemic for students. “I’m going to say we’re going to be able to get this right and at least not make things worse, to ensure that children get the access they need to continue to be able to learn. When we start back school in the fall, creative thinking will prevail. I see this as an opportunity to get things right.”

Alexis Gwin-Miller, who also serves on MICAH’s education task force, says this crisis presents a “wide-open door for equity to rise. We don’t have to stay in a place of disparity.” She says it is an important time for collaboration across socioeconomic lines to address equity “for all students, no matter where they live.”

She also calls for the use of concrete data to deploy resources where they are needed, explaining there should be a priority to provide internet access in ZIP codes with the least amount of connectivity.

To bridge the digital divide, Shelby County Schools is working on a new plan to provide students with devices and internet access. A draft of the plan, continued on page 10
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**The ‘Invisible’ Community**

Mauricio Calvo, executive director of Latino Memphis, says the struggles of the Latinx and immigrant community have been threefold amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Latinx people are just like everyone else,” Calvo says. “We have the same fears and emotions, and on top of that, are struggling, as many people in poverty are, and then on top of that, there are barriers that come when you are an immigrant.”

Calvo says from the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Memphis, “There’s been an invisibility of our community. I know it wasn’t intentional, but I think in the midst of the crisis, there hasn’t been an effort to reach out to subgroups. It’s been more of a one-size-fits-all response.”

For the Latinx community, Calvo says the pandemic has highlighted specific challenges already present, such as the language barrier and lack of access, trust, and health care.

Cecilia Martinez, a caseworker for Latino Memphis, says she works directly with Latinx clients and one of the main concerns is getting accurate information in their language.

“For example, the shelter-in-place information hadn’t been correctly translated to say what it really means to say,” Martinez says. “If you don’t know what’s going on from the beginning, that makes it harder to get ahead. A lot of the time the information comes in English, and it’s usually not translated until someone brings it up.”

Martinez notes the hardest population to reach is those who speak dialects of Spanish not widely spoken, such as the Guatemalan community. “It’s hard enough to get things in Spanish, but even harder to get them in more specific languages.”

The lack of health insurance is another obstacle Calvo says the immigrant community faces. “If you are undocumented, you can’t get health insurance. This is a real issue among older Latinos. People worry about getting tested and being positive and not knowing what to do next. Some worry about getting tested in the first place because of what documentation they’ll be asked to provide.”

Calvo says the undocumented community, like many impoverished populations, is also facing financial challenges. “The stimulus payments only benefit taxpayers who have social security numbers. This is very unfair, and it’s important to know that there are many, many people who do not have social security numbers and still pay taxes and who are parents of American children. But these people were still left out of the stimulus package.”

The government is leaving people behind who are a part of the economy, Calvo says. “We can’t pretend these people aren’t a part of the economy. There are hundreds of people feeling left out. These people are humans, Memphians, and taxpayers. It’s a matter of representation.”

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**Health Disparities**

Preliminary data suggest disproportionate effects of COVID-19 among racial and ethnic minority groups, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted in a recent report.

One of these racial groups is African Americans. While blacks represent only 13 percent of the U.S. population, nearly one-third of people diagnosed with COVID-19 nationwide have been black, according to CDC data. (Race has only been reported in 42 percent of cases.) Similarly, nearly one-third of those who have died across the country are black, notes a recent analysis by the Associated Press using available state and local data.

While blacks make up 52 percent of Shelby County’s population, 68 percent of the county’s confirmed cases where race was reported are African-American. The county has not released demographics for the 44 deaths recorded here.

Duane Loynes Sr., assistant professor of urban studies and health equity at Rhodes College, says he is not surprised that COVID-19 has “ravaged” the African-American community. By design, he says African Americans are a socially vulnerable class.
Those living in the 38106 ZIP code near the Soulsville area have a life expectancy of 13 years shorter than those living in the Collierville ZIP code of 38107, Loynes says. "When you drive the short 30-minute drive from Soulsville to Collierville, the life expectancy ridiculously increases."

Loynes points to scientific reasons for this disparity and behind why African Americans might be more susceptible to contracting COVID-19 and ultimately dying from the disease.

When one is stressed or fearful of danger, Loynes says their body produces excess cortisol, a long-acting hormone. Preparing one to fight or to take flight, cortisol does three key things in the body. It raises one’s heart rate to prepare the body to take in more oxygen, thickens the blood in case of injury to slow blood loss, and slows down one’s insulin response to give the body more energy.

"It's really a genius way our bodies are designed, but it's designed for occasional usage. But suppose you live in a world where you're poor or African-American and you're constantly worried about how you're going to pay your bills, how you're going to pay for food, how your children will get a good education, if you're going to be evicted, or about law enforcement. Your body is constantly on high alert, trying to defend itself, trying to ensure there's going to be a safety net for you."

Insulin correspond perfectly with three health issues African Americans are more likely to have than others: diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. "If your body is under stress and having to adjust to it, these are the consequences."

Another health issue more prevalent in African-American communities is asthma, he says. "We understand that there is a direct correlation between communities of color that struggle with asthma and waste sites. Black folks tend to live in close proximity to toxic areas. We see this all around the country."

This is not incidental, Loynes says. "I'm not saying someone said 'Hey, let's do this to African-American communities,' but the disregard for black life has made black communities vulnerable, and that makes all these other things worse. Because of these underlying health conditions on top of everything else, when COVID-19 comes on you, the body is already under significant stress."

In a press conference in early April, U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, who is African American, discussed blacks’ higher risk of contracting COVID-19. In his statement, Adams urged black Americans to "step up" and change their behaviors such as smoking and drinking to curb the spread of the virus among blacks. Loynes says Adams had good intentions, but "he talked in a way that blamed African Americans for why they may be more at risk. He said things like 'tell grandma and them to not to smoke or cut back on this or don't drink the alcohol.' But it's very clear all the ways racial bias leads to health disparities. But we don't like to talk about it. We'd rather blame big mama and say stop smoking. That's not the point."

Loynes says white Americans or those living in wealthy communities can afford to partake in bad behaviors because they are "born farther away from the edge. White people drink and smoke as well, but they're not dealing with the same issues. The consequences aren't as dire. The difference is they have a safety net. African Americans are born at the edge, and one mistake is it for us."

It all points back to poverty and structural racism, Loynes says. "I'm not saying African Americans are perfect. We all need to make better decisions. But the big picture items we struggle with are not our fault. They are structurally designed that way."

Loynes says fixing the structural issues and the resultant disparities that exist in U.S. society won't happen overnight. "We have to change the structural realities. We have to roll up our sleeves and get ready for multi-generational work."

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We help Mid-South nonprofits succeed.
Get in the Flow  
By Julia Baker

Your Inner Yogi (YIY) recently released its free online yoga series on Instagram via its weekly Friday Night Live series, in partnership with the Downtown Memphis Commission (DMC). It was originally meant to be part of DMC’s Yoga in the Park program until COVID-19 put a wrench in those plans.

“Originally, we planned for these classes to be held outside at Court Square Park,” says yoga instructor Caroline Collins. “The classes were supposed to start in April, and it was really a way for us to engage with the community.”

But YIY and DMC were able to think quickly on their toes and take the series online, starting with a Vinyasa Flow session led by Collins. Now, two weeks later, Collins will lead the same class.

“In my upcoming classes in May, I plan to teach Vinyasa Flow, which essentially means one breath links to one movement,” says Collins. “It means that you’re tuning into your breath first. And you’re allowing your breath to be your guide, so that a movement comes on an inhale and another movement comes on an exhale.”

Yoga is an ancient practice that has been found to provide a slew of benefits, including boosting physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health. Collins says that everyone should have access to these benefits, regardless of their ability to pay, and she stresses the importance of self-care during times like these.

“Right now, as we’re dealing with a new normal, I think a lot of us have found ourselves trying to figure out what our routines look like since everything was uprooted,” she says. “Facing these new challenges can impact everything from our thoughts and our perceptions, to even manifesting in physical ways. So yoga gives us the opportunity to come back home to ourselves to recenter, take things one breath, one moment, at a time, and helps us focus on the present.”

Instagram.com/yourinneryogi, Friday, May 1st, 6:30 p.m., free.

VARIOUS DAYS & TIMES  
April 30th - May 6th

Many events have been canceled or postponed. Luckily, we have you covered with this list of activities that can be enjoyed at home.

Call for Artists: Memphis Flyer Coloring Book Fundraiser  
memphisflyer.com, submission deadline is April 30th

Need to satisfy your creative itch while making a little bit of money? Submit work that looks and feels like Memphis to be included in a coloring book produced by us. Proceeds will be split 50/50 with artists. Visit our website for more information and submission details.

Oxford Virtual Film Festival  
oxfordfilmfest.com, $10 for each presentation (24-hour rental period, includes filmmaker Q&A), virtual access passes available for $40-$175

Last week, Oxford Film Festival began its Weekly Virtual Film Festival series, showcasing films that were due to be programmed in the 2020 festival. This weekend, check out the releases of Rockabul, Fest Forward Block #1, and Sweet Steel & The Long Shadow. Stay tuned for new releases through the end of the year.

Pinot’s Palette Virtual Classes  
pinotspalette.com, available on select dates and times, check website for times and paintings, $15 per class

Although no classes had been announced for this weekend as of press time, we do know Pinot’s Palette offers virtual classes throughout the week. This week, instructors showed attendees how to paint gorgeous skylines of wooded areas, tropical beaches, and ponds. Once registered, attendees will receive a Zoom invite and an emailed supply list.

City Tasting Tours’ Virtual Food Tour Experience  
citytastingtours.com, Friday, May 1st, 5-5:30 p.m., and Saturday, May 2nd, 5-5:30 p.m., $65.99 for a dinner for two, no-contact delivery included

Even while on your couch, you can tour the flavors the city has to offer. This weekend, City Tasting Tours offers tastes from three different S. Main restaurants while attendees watch stories from local restaurateurs and learn about Memphis with their guide.
A new online initiative organized by Crosstown Arts to support Memphis musicians.

Watch new, made-at-home performance videos shot by the artists, and show your support by buying a virtual ticket. 100% of the proceeds from all ticket sales on an artist’s page will go directly to the artist.

crosstownarts.org/againstthegrain/
Online Blues

The annual Blues Music Awards gala will go virtual this year.

The Blues Music Awards (BMAs) are typically the high point of the year for the Blues Foundation. "This is the highlight of our year, where we share the very best in blues," says Barbara Newman, president and CEO of the nonprofit. And it's the highlight for many a blues performer, not to mention others in the industry. With the need for social distancing scuttling the gala event, creative measures had to be adopted. While many festivals have postponed or canceled proceedings, the BMAs will do neither, instead hosting an online event this coming Sunday, May 3rd, at 4 pm.

"We could have created a show with a payment portal, but it was more important to us that the entire community around the world be able to celebrate the music together," says Newman. "Blues provides such a strong healing force for people, and we felt it was way more important for the Blues Foundation to make this gift to everybody, to watch for free wherever you live."

And make no mistake, the foundation takes that last part very seriously. "Our goal this year is to create a global community from all corners of the world, coming together to celebrate the music and heal our souls," Newman says. "We've timed the show so it will be late in the evening in Europe, or early in the morning in New Zealand or Australia, not at 2 or 3 a.m."

Even with the traditional live events, the performers have usually been kept secret until the show itself, and that will hold true for the online awards this year. "We gotta have some surprise factor," says Newman. "But I can tell you who our presenters are. Fantastic Negrito, Ruthie Foster, William Bell, Charlie Musselwhite, Beth Hart, Shemekia Copeland, Warren Haynes, and Ke'bi Mo' will be on camera to share the names of the nominees and the winners. Shemekia is hosting the show from her living room. Artists are sending us footage of themselves performing at home. And we've got a whole bunch of surprises that I can't really share. But I encourage people to watch. They're not gonna be disappointed."

According to Newman, many blues fans are making the most of it. "People are creating watch parties, where they watch together while they Zoom, or have a cocktail party beforehand. A lot of people are going to be dressing up in their usual black-tie attire. But even as the good times roll on, Newman has an even more important priority."

"The COVID-19 Blues Musician Emergency Relief Fund is the biggest initiative that we're working on right now. The BMAs are important, but right now everybody is very focused on what's happening in the music community — with festivals and clubs closing or postponing or canceling their events. So the fund has already helped close to 100 musicians. And we're continuing to bring in more resources to keep on covering housing or utility bills for blues musicians who really don't have any income stream right now. And with musicians not being able to perform, that trickles down to the rest of the industry, impacting the managers, the clubs, the festivals, the agents, the labels, the publicists, the studios. All of their income streams are being cut as well."

"Some people donate directly. And we've gotten tens of thousands of dollars just through ticket holders waiving their refund and donating that amount to our relief fund. Granted, we understand and respect that a lot of people who come to the music awards are also being impacted by COVID-19, and we honor refunds, no questions asked. A few have chosen to just hold their ticket purchases till next year."

While the pandemic has recently taken the lives of several legendary musicians, luminaries of the blues world have mostly been spared thus far. Many have closely followed the Facebook page of Rev. John Wilkins, who had developed acute pneumonia, possibly due to coronavirus, but it was announced on Thursday that he was "off the ventilator and breathing on his own. He still has a long road to recovery, but is getting a little stronger day by day."

Bobby Rush, who is nominated in the BMAs' Best Soul Blues Album category, also took ill recently, but announced last week that his doctor "gave me the green light and good report. I'm well and up in spirit, physically and in mind. Thanking his fans for their support, Rush added, "Stay in and sanitize … because it saves lives."

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The Blues Music Awards take place Sunday, May 3rd, at 4 p.m. CDT, on the Blues Foundation's Facebook and YouTube pages. blues.org
NOTICE TO BIDDERS

Shelby County Government has issued Sealed Bid number I000622 Big Creek Park Construction-Phase I. Information regarding this Bid is located on the County’s website at www.shelbycountytn.gov. At the top of the home page, click on the dropdown box under “Business”, Click on “Purchasing” and “Bids” to locate the name of the above described Sealed Bid.

SEALED BID I000622 DUE DATE
MONDAY, JUNE 1ST, 2020 @ 2:00 PM CST

(SB-I000622) BIG CREEK PARK CONSTRUCTION- PHASE I

All bids will be opened and read via teleconference by Shelby County Government at the time mentioned above. Please use the following information to join the bid opening:

To join by phone, call the necessary numbers below:
External: +19012222777
Internal: 22277
Meeting ID: 9012222260#
Meeting PIN: 06222#

Voluntary Pre-Bid Meeting – All interested respondents are invited to participate in this meeting via teleconference on Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at 9:30 am (CST). Please use the following information to join the pre-bid meeting:

To join by phone, call the necessary numbers below:
External: +19012222777
Internal: 22277
Meeting ID: 9012222260#
Meeting PIN: 06222#

Respondents may also contact Shelby County for information at the following numbers, TTY Number (901) 222-2301 or for information in Spanish 901-222-4289. Shelby County is an equal opportunity affirmative action employer, drug-free, and with policies of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability or military service. Shelby County encourages participation from WBE, MBE, LOSB, and Section 3 firms and vendors under this CDBG-NDR response.

By order of
LEE HARRIS, MAYOR
SHELBY COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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From Beale Street to the Collierville Town Square, independently owned shops and restaurants help our region thrive. As we all face the economic disruptions wrought by COVID-19, we at the Memphis Flyer are doing our part by offering a new way to support local businesses and local journalism.

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To get started visit bit.ly/MFADS (url is case sensitive) or contact Jeffrey Goldberg at goldberg@memphisflyer.com

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emphis-born author Eric Jerome Dickey has had success with his brand of sensual novels. The University of Memphis graduate has garnered praise from The New York Times and Entertainment Weekly, written a Storm and Black Panther miniseries for Marvel, and his readings regularly pack the house. One such signing I attended at Novel bookstore marked possibly the most people I had seen crammed into the store’s now-empty events space. All was set to keep momentum rolling with Dickey’s newest novel, The Business of Lovers (Dutton), released April 21st, and then COVID-19 upended everyone’s plans.

“We’ll do Skype, Zoom, whatever we can do via social [media],” Dickey says, explaining that he canceled signing engagements but hopes to “meet” his fans online. “The delivery of my books to my home hasn’t even happened. I don’t even have copies of my own books.”

The Business of Lovers? All things considered, maybe now is the perfect moment for a novel that takes human connection as its focus. “It’s a novel about family — the family you have and the family that you choose to have,” the author says. The Business of Lovers follows Brick Duquesne, fresh from a fight against cancer, an ailment he never revealed to his family. “It’s one of those things where people go through something but don’t know how to ask for help because they don’t want to disturb the lives of others,” Dickey explains. In a novel with former child stars, comedians, engineers, and a tangled web of relationships, Dickey’s characters search for agency and for ways to lift up the family they choose to love. Of course, as Dickey points out, perception is everything. “Anybody can smile and take a picture in front of a palm tree,” he says. That photo can only hint at what’s going on beyond the edges of the frame. ■
WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THOSE WHO HAVE STEPPED UP TO SUPPORT THE FLYER’S INDEPENDENT, LOCAL JOURNALISM, ESPECIALLY IN THIS DIFFICULT TIME.
FOOD By Michael Donahue

Dinner for One
Spotlighting offbeat solo quarantine meals.

Dining With Myself is a Facebook group for people who are dining by themselves during the quarantine. And they’re coming up with strange dishes.

The group was designed to “bring people together” by sharing whatever crazy concoctions they come up with, says founder Emily Brown. “Hey, everybody eats junk food,” she says.

The group’s tagline is “What do you eat when nobody’s watching?”

The group primarily is for people who live by themselves so they’ll just not feel alone,” says Brown. She got the idea for the group after wondering what her friend who lives by herself in Fayetteville was eating. She was worried about her.

The group name was inspired by Billy Idol’s song, “Dancing With Myself.” Brown had asked a friend to Photoshop Idol holding a fork, which became the perfect image for the group.

Dining With Myself now has 750 members, according to Brown. She’s been getting about 20 new members a day.

People send positive comments even if the dish doesn’t sound or look so great. “Everybody compliments everybody. It’s hard to be offensive with food,” Brown says.

“Somebody posted a slice of American cheese and Vienna sausage, and it probably got 20 comments.”

People do post “restaurant-worthy” dishes, but not everybody “knows how to cook like that,” she says.

The group gets lots of posts of salads and pasta dishes. “Comfort food.” People also share recipes. Brown recently got feedback from a chef friend in England, who shared fancy dishes as well as his “junk food.”

Dining With Myself isn’t a political forum, Brown says. “We don’t talk about anything else except what goes on in the kitchen.”

Brown, who is on furlough from her job as a server at Amerigo, cooks for herself. “I can do fancy. I can make scrambled eggs. I can go across the board. It depends on the kind of effort I want to make,” she says.

She’s made Crabmeat Justine from the legendary Memphis restaurant, Justine’s. Her favorite go-to dish is “roasted salmon and asparagus.”

She has a large pantry. “It’s the only big closet in my house.”

As for her friend in Fayetteville, she’s doing fine. She told Brown she recently prepared a dinner consisting of “fake crab, olives, Ritz crackers, and a glass of wine.”

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Memphis Flyer
Hungry Memphis
A Very Tasteful Food Blog
Dishing it out at MemphisFlyer.com.
The Greatest Beer

Brewing under the influence … of something.

I was dancing with some gal who, remarkably, kept getting shorter — or maybe I was getting taller. It was hard to tell. Normally it takes a great deal of social pressure to get me to dance, but I was celebrating the creation of the greatest batch of beer in the drink’s long, illustrious history — and I was only a sophomore. Murffbrau, usually a bit on this side of awful, had joined the greats.

For this batch, I’d pulled out all the stops, including getting a big stove-top pot, as opposed to trying to make the stuff in a bathtub.

While I worked, my roommate — we’ll call him Alex — walked in with a bag of not-quite-fine brown powder and tried to sell it to me as cocaine. This was a little weird because I was never much of a drug guy. Although there was a lot of the stuff whirling around Tuscaloosa in those days, so I knew what it looked like and, if we’re going to be honest, what it smelled like.

and he’d sound like he’d just come back from the library. I passed on the “cocaine” and went back to beer-making.

I’d bottled thewort and waited a few weeks for the Murffbrau to reach its regrettable potential, so I was ready to dive in. Which was about the time that Alex showed up. He called me “Bra” and managed to drag it out across two syllables, so he was full of drugs — or full of something, at any rate. As his sleepy-looking girlfriend drifted back to his room to take a nap with the lava lamp, Alex performed the obligatory head check to make sure there weren’t any narcs hiding in the sofa, and dropped his voice. “We got a lot of ’shrooms. You shoulda come with. Wanna buy some?” He threw a suspiciously clean bag on the Goodwill coffee table between us.

Now, having a roommate who is a small-time drug dealer has its pitfalls, but at least it’s bohemian and vaguely dangerous. Having a roommate who is a small-time pretend drug dealer is just stupid. I was sure the goon had gone to the farmer’s market, bought a pillow-case of shiitake mushrooms for $1.40, and was now attempting to sell them for $80 a baggie. Which he swore was the “street value.” Tuscaloosa had paved roads and internal plumbing back then, but nothing the urban vernacular would define as “street.”

I’d had enough. “So,” I said, opening the bag, “you wouldn’t want me to do this?” I crammed several handfuls of mushrooms into my maw and washed it all down with a cold, chewy home-brew. Alex was still yelling about how much money I owed him, as I left for a mid-afternoon stroll.

I have a friend who still makes fun of the way I was dancing some nine hours later. I had reason to celebrate, though, for I’d just made the greatest batch of beer I’d ever made; that anyone ever had, for that matter. My technique surpassed those of German brewmasters in their lederhosen, Belgian monks in their cowls, and the English brewers in their tweed. The girl with whom I was dancing (who by this point was only three apples high) left me for some fellow who had not perfected the art of brewing that summer. But the great ones are always abandoned on the verge of triumph.

It was worth it — if only for the beer. I only wish I could remember how I’d done it. ■
Beastie Boys & Clone Wars

Two fresh streaming selections you shouldn’t miss.

Mike D and Ad-Rock get personal in Beastie Boys Story.

There’s a telling moment about 40 minutes into Beastie Boys Story. Michael Diamond (aka Mike D) and Adam Horovitz (aka Ad-Rock) are on stage in front of an audience in an ornate theater setting, recounting the end of their history-making relationship with Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons’ Def Jam Recordings. The newly minted music moguls, Ad-Rock says, didn’t care about the group. They just wanted some white boys to make rap palatable to middle America. “We could have been anybody.”

But the story of the Beastie Boys’ career, from their origin as a four-piece hardcore punk group in 1980s New York to their final show playing to 100,000 people at Bonnaroo 2009, makes the case that things were more complex than that. Yes, they happened to be in the right place at the right time, but the chemistry between the three best friends from New York City was crucial in what happened next.

Directed by frequent Beasties collaborator turned indie legend Spike Jones, Beastie Boys Story is not an exhaustive, Beasties Anthology-esque chronicle of a band whose commercial and artistic significance continues to grow over time. Instead, it is a document of a live lecture tour by the two surviving Beasties, which originated as a hybrid book tour for last year’s Beastie Boys Book — which is kind of an exhaustive, Beasties Anthology-esque chronicle.

There’s a big difference between an artist telling a story in their own words and an author bringing in a more objective viewpoint. The view is from the inside looking out. The boys talk about what it felt like to play Madison Square Garden, but without an outside voice, we never really get a sense of what a pop culture avalanche License to Illicit was in 1986-87.

The biggest missing voice is Adam Yauch (aka MCA), whose death from cancer in 2012 ended the Beastie Boys story. If there was an indispensable member of the Beastie team, it was MCA, who Mike D and Ad-Rock credit with basically all of their best ideas. (The identity of the Beastie who came up with the idea for the giant inflatable penis erected as the climax to their Fight for the Right to Party tour has apparently been lost to the ages.) Even in the early days, when Ad-Rock says he spent his downtime from touring “doing drugs,” MCA went on a pilgrimage to Tibet that led to a spiritual awakening and, eventually, the Free Tibet festival series. The Dalai Lama, MCA said, was a “funny guy.”

What Beastie Boys Story lacks in detail, it makes up for in pathos, a word you probably wouldn’t have associated with the guys who wrote “Cooky Puss.” The feral teen Beastie Boys have aged into the Beastie Dads, with Mike D sporting a plain gray sweatshirt and khakis suitable for carpooling. Their grief over MCA’s death remains raw, with both of them choking up at the mention of his name at various points. While discussing the misogyny of early records like “Girls,” they have the kind of frankness a parent takes while trying to talk a teenager out of making the same mistakes they made when they were your age. If you’re looking for a dish session on one of Gen X’s most famously debauched scenes, you’re out of luck. Beastie Boys Story is a must for fans, but the full story of the band will have to wait for another, more objective, teller.

Beastie Boys Story is streaming on Apple+

Star Wars: The Clone Wars gets an unexpected final bow.

News broke this week that Lucasfilm was moving the Disney+ release of Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker from July to Star Wars Day, May 4th. This was done presumably to satiate the appetites of the quarantined masses with some fresh Star Wars content after The Mandalorian proved to be the House of Mouse’s new streaming service’s biggest draw. But the best thing going in the galaxy far, far away right now is something of an afterthought. The conventional wisdom is the prequel trilogy was a big collective letdown, but for many Millennials, they were an introduction to not just Star Wars, but all sci-fi and fantasy. Looking back from 2020, the execution may have been lacking, but the basic story of a group of heroes making hard moral choices in the face of a Republic in crisis from a megalomaniac villain hiding in plain sight feels spookily relevant.

The Clone Wars animated series spun off the main saga in 2008 with a cringingly bad animated movie and ran for six seasons on Cartoon Network. As it went on and Lucas turned it over to showrunner Dave Filoni, it got better every season. The animated Aananin Skywalker, voiced by Matt Lanter, was much more charismatic than the prequels’ Hayden Christensen. The prequels were basically animated movies with live action inserts, and the production design was always top-notch, even when the plots were confusing and the acting regrettable. The Clone Wars solved those problems (mostly) and expanded the scope of the visual universe in digestible, 30-minute chunks. Best of all, the show introduced the character of Ahsoka Tano (voiced by Ashley Eckstein) who has become a mind-controlled mastermind?

In the endgame, the show is better for it. The Siege of Mandalore was the biggest casualty when Disney bought Lucasfilm in 2012, leading to a hasty release of season 6 that was more like a dumping of completed product. Showrunner Filoni let it be known that there were plans afoot for a spectacular conclusion at the Siege of Mandalore, but no one seriously expected to see it happen until Disney’s surprise announcement that they would reunite the Clone Wars crew for a full season 7 on Disney+.
In the endgame, the show is better than ever. In the first three-episode arc, Aanakin leads a Dirty Dozen-type group of clone commandos called The Bad Batch to rescue a valuable prisoner in the middle of a negotiation between the former Jedi, and she finds herself in the crosshairs of the Pyke crime syndicate. (Does anyone think anyone who stumble into a double cross by the proposed Darth Maul, who also happen to be the disillusioned former apprentice of a powerful space wizard.

So far, The Siege of Mandalore is living up to its promise with jetpack-powered air battles and primo lightsaber duels. With two episodes to go before the inevitable fall of the Republic, the gathering darkness of the future Darth Vader leaves the stage. In the endgame, the show is better than ever. In the first three-episode arc, Aanakin leads a Dirty Dozen-type group of clone commandos called The Bad Batch to rescue a valuable prisoner while we catch up with Ahsoka's first solo venture. She hooks up with Trace and Rafa, a pair of would-be smugglers sent her on a mission to tip the scales of the game, leading the Mandalorian Death Watch and her old boss Obi-Wan Kenobi. Stretched thin as the war turns against the Republic, the Jedi agree to give Ahsoka her lightsabers back and send her on a mission to tip the scales in the ongoing Mandalorian civil war. As a result, she is put on a collision course with Darth Maul, who also happens to be the disillusioned former apprentice of a powerful space wizard.

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Let’s Ride It Out

Memphis’ Explore Bike Share is here for the long run.

As I grow accustomed to the uncertainty of our current situation, I recognize and applaud the examples of long-term continuity in our culture: the establishments that withstand the test of time. The efforts that surpass a trend. The endurance of a business or a brand. Those that come to mind are exemplary for many reasons, but what they all have in common is their choice of a path toward sustainable, long-term success. I can’t help but believe that my daily work in the biking world fits this definition, too.

While I can’t take credit for work before 2020, Explore Bike Share and the greater city of Memphis’ approach to biking is geared for the long game, and I’m here to keep pedaling us forward.

Ten years ago, Bicycling Magazine named Memphis one of the worst cities for biking in the country. The city of Memphis and visionaries behind projects such as the Shelby Farms Greenline sought to shift this reputation fairly expeditiously and, within two years, added over 70 miles of bike lanes. The title change followed suit, and Memphis was named the “most improved city for cycling” in Bicycling two years later.

Today, Memphis offers over 300 on- and off-road miles of bike infrastructure, from the Big River Trail to the Wolf River Greenway, from Hampline to the Greenline. Five years ago, a vision for affordable, available, accessible bike sharing in Memphis was cast, and a community-driven approach was explored in philosophy and practice. Today, Explore Bike Share’s approach remains recognized on the national stage for its unique brand and 501(c)3 revenue model built on the goodwill and adoption of our mission by members, sponsors and donors.

Two years ago, a system was launched as hundreds of Memphians voluntarily rolled out 600 bikes into stations citywide. One week following, scooters arrived, and shared mobility became a community-wide showcase and arguably competitive landscape. Today, though some scooter companies are retiring their fleets, our bikes are weathering the seasons.

Two months ago, a pandemic swept our world and our community. Safer at Home strategies stopped gatherings, travel, and business traffic. But while some parks and streets are closed to vehicular traffic in order to safeguard social distancing, bikes remain the tool to traverse our city safely. We’ve extended another 30 days of free Explore Bike Share rides through May 19th as a healthy response to COVID-19.

While our system has always been affordable, we have made it free since March 20th. The first month of our “Let’s Ride This Out” campaign welcomed 500 unique first-time riders who have explored bike share for an errand or exercise. I believe the “Let’s Ride This Out” response reflects a deep trust by our riders, by our sponsors and donors, by our members, and by our staff. While cars are parked and streets are clearer, now’s the time to explore firsthand those hundreds of bike paths paved for us. As we ride to fuel our mental health and physical well-being, we can especially understand what it means to see through trends and the temporary. Explore Bike Share is here and here to stay. Let’s keep riding this out.

Anton Mack is executive director of Explore Bike Share.
We offer a variety of products. Find our brand at: Foozie in Clark Tower, Blue Suede Do's iBank building, South Main Hemp at 364 S. Front, Two Rivers Bookstore at 2172 Young Ave, and Oothones at 410 N Cleveland St. Find our skin care at Southern Leaf Hemp, Co at 4721 Poplar Ave. simplyhemp.shop 901-443-7157

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