INTO THE MULTIVERSE

HOW CHRISTOPHER REYES CREATED AN ALTERNATE WORLD IN DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS.
THE PLACE TO BE ON FOURTH AND GOAL

BET MGM BOOK BAR & GRILL

GOLD STRIKE. AN MGM RESORT

OUR 1648TH ISSUE 09.24.20

On Sunday, I went looking for Corona.

I’ve been spending some of these glorious early fall days kayaking and fishing local lakes — Shelby Forest, Wapanocca, and elsewhere. Last Saturday night, I was looking for new water online, scanning Google Maps images of Arkansas, north of Memphis. That’s when I spotted Corona Lake. Because I have a simple mind, I thought, “Wouldn’t it be cool to go paddle Corona Lake during the coronavirus pandemic?” Also, I thought I might get a column out of it. So …

I googled “Corona Lake, Arkansas,” to see what I could learn about it. No results. There was a Corona Lake in Tipton County, Tennessee, that came up in the search but none in Arkansas. Then I remembered something interesting, something I’d forgotten about: There are parts of Tennessee on the west side of the Mississippi, due to the meanderings of the river channel over the course of time, which pay no attention to state lines created by mere mortals. Corona Lake, in Tipton County, Tennessee, was on the Arkansas side of the Mississippi.

So now I was intrigued, and off I went Sunday morning in search of the mysterious Tennessee lake that looked like it was in Arkansas. I hopped off I-55 North near Turrell, and soon I was headed east on unmarked roads — no signs, no other vehicles, no houses, just big yellow fields, high blue sky, and car wheels on a gravel road. Anything vertical was covered in kudzu. The roads weren’t marked, but my phone seemed confident we were on the right track, so I kept driving, stirring up dust in the rearview for miles behind.

As my GPS indicated I was getting near the lake, I droved past a very large, very Southern-looking house — white columns, red brick, large lawn, grand trees. The road ended a few hundred yards later, next to where two puzzled-looking men stood near a combine and a pickup truck. I got out, grinning an innocent man’s grin, and said, “Hey, looks like this might be private land. I didn’t realize that. Didn’t see any signs. Sorry.”

The men approached, saying nothing, looking me up and down. They were wearing ball caps, field shirts, and khakis; they looked like farmers — like Delta money. The older man, a shortish fellow, turned sideways while looking up at me over his right shoulder, an interesting conversational gambit.

“Oh, this is definitely private land,” he said. “What is it you’re looking for?”

I blathered on a bit about seeing Lake Corona on a map and trying to fish some new water, suddenly conscious of my shorts and Tevas and Subaru and kayak — a stranger in a strange land. Finally, I ran out of words.

“I’m John Tipton,” the man said. “This is my son, Will.” I introduced myself and we bumped elbows and said nice to meet you.

“Where are you from,” John asked.

“Memphis,” I said. “I write for a paper there. I might write about this.”

John paused for a beat, still looking sideways at me, then he said, “You know what? You go on ahead and fish that lake, but I’ll tell you, it’s mostly bighead carp. If you catch something, you let us know.”

“Thanks,” I said. “That’s kind of you. I’ll give it a shot.” Then I said, “This is Tennessee, right?”

“Yessir, it’s Tennessee.”

“And I’m guessing this county might have been named after you?”

“Well, not me, but my great-great-grandfather, yessir.”

“Well, it’s really nice of you to let me paddle around your lake. I appreciate it.”

“Problem. Good luck.”

Turns out John Tipton was right. Corona Lake was a muddy slough, not worth casting a line or even dipping a paddle into, so I didn’t stay long. But it was a good day, even though the kayak never left the car roof. I explored some new country, met two nice fellows, took some cool photos — and I got a column out of it.

Bruce VanWyngarden
brucev@memphisflyer.com
WALKING (DEAD) IN MEMPHIS
Downtown Memphis is invaded by flesh-eating Walkers in the Walking Dead mobile game.

MARSHA, MARSHA
Writer and podcast host Jemele Hill roasted Tennessee Sen. Marsha Blackburn with a comeback tweet heard ’round the internet last week.

901 REASONS
The city of Memphis began an online campaign recently to give citizens #901Reasons to wear a mask, social distance, and stamp out COVID-19 here. This one is the best so far.

STREETDOG STRUGGLES
The Streetdog Foundation said COVID-19 limitations have dampened fundraising this year.

SALES TAXES UP
Tennessee tax revenues in August were higher than they were a year ago, buoyed by federal stimulus funds, according to state officials. Sales of building materials and groceries were up, while sales from retailers, bars, and restaurants were down, of course.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RATES RISE
The Shelby County Crime Commission announced a sharp increase in domestic violence aggravated assaults during the months of May, June, and July.

OPEN THE BARS?
Shelby County Health Department Officer Dr. Bruce Randolph hinted at changes last week that could soon open some businesses, like limited-service restaurants. As of press time, SCHD was watching new data before announcing any changes.

DEFFRAUD THE GOVERNMENT
A state investigative report claims two Memphis nonprofits defrauded the federal government for thousands of dollars in 2018 by claiming they served more free food and snacks to children than they actually did.

DELAYING THE DELAY
After complaining about delays in the process to find a possible new power partner for Memphis Light, Gas & Water (MLGW), the MLGW board delayed a vote last week to further the process.

Visit the News Blog at memphisflyer.com for fuller versions of these stories and more local news.
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 Department immediately allocated $2 billion on March 27, 2020, the same day President Trump signed the Act, based on the fiscal year 2020 CDBG formula; this constituted the first round of CDBG-CV funds. Next, $1 billion was required by the Act to be allocated to States and insular areas within 45 days of enactment of the Act; HUD accomplished this on May 11, 2020, and this constituted the second round of CDBG-CV funds. Finally, the remaining $2 billion in CDBG-CV funds was required by the Act to be allocated to states and local governments at the discretion of the Secretary on a rolling basis; HUD accomplished this on September 11, 2020, and this constituted the third round of CDBG-CV funds. Additionally, up to $10 million will be set aside for technical assistance.

Shelby County’s allocation for the third round is $1,107,065 in CDBG-CV funds to address the needs in low- to moderate-income areas of Shelby County outside of the City of Memphis. Shelby County’s cumulative amount for all allocation rounds is $1,811,271.

As a result of the special allocation of CDBG-CV in the third round, SCDH proposes amending the PY 2020 Annual Action Plan to reflect the additional $1,107,065 in CDBG-CV funds for a cumulative $1,811,271 in CDBG-CV funds as available resource. Up to 20% of the CDBG-CV round three allocation, $221,413.00, may be used for administrative expenses. Any unspent administrative funds may be reprogrammed for use on a Public Service Activity. At minimum, 80% of the CDBG-CV round three allocation, $885,652.00, will be used for Public Service Activities in order to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus.

The substantial amendment to the PY 2020 Annual Action Plan will be available for public review from September 28, 2020 through October 2, 2020. SCDH will respond to written comments within five working days of their receipt. For questions concerning the Amendment to the Consolidated Plan, please contact Sydney Wright at Sydney.wright@shelbycountytn.gov.

Written comments should be addressed to Ms. Sydney Wright at 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, please contact Sydney Wright at Sydney.wright@shelbycountytn.gov.

In order to solicit public comments on the Amendment to the Consolidated Plan, SCDH will hold a virtual public hearing; Tuesday, September 29, 2020 at 5:30pm. To join the virtual hearing go to this web address https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/866826797 or dial (872) 240-3412 and enter access code: 866-826-797. 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, September 28, 2020 and we will work to accommodate you.

Para más 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
Tennessee Governor Bill Lee said last week he and others “ferociously” defended businesses from pandemic-related tax hikes ahead, but critics noted he has raised taxes on Tennessee’s online shoppers by about $377 million over the last two years.

Lee touted investment of $400 million into the state’s flagging unemployment insurance trust fund. The investment was a piece of $2.6 billion from the federal CARES Act fund.

Without the investment, Lee said tax premiums paid by Tennessee employers would have increased by 300 percent next year, according to figures from the University of Tennessee Boyd Center. Tennessee businesses would have seen their unemployment taxes raised by $837 million.

Tennessee has some of the lowest unemployment tax rates in the country, according to the Sycamore Institute. Tennessee businesses pay taxes on $7,000 of an employee’s annual pay for the unemployment fund. In contrast, Washington state businesses owners pay such taxes on $52,700 of an employee’s annual pay. The average tax on all wages in Tennessee was 0.2 percent, the third-lowest in the country.

Employee unemployment benefits are also among the lowest in the country. Lawmakers here raised the maximum weekly benefit last year to $275, the fourth-lowest weekly payout in the country. The average weekly payout is $242, the fourth-lowest nationally. These benefits replace about 37 percent of an average worker’s lost wages in Tennessee, the fifth-lowest percent in the country, according to the Sycamore Institute.

Tennessee has also kept a relatively low fund balance in its unemployment trust fund. In March, the fund was $1.3 billion, the highest balance ever in the fund’s history. But even that amount fell short of federal standards in the fund’s ability to weather a typical recession.

The coronavirus began to quickly squeeze the fund in April. By May, withdrawals were 15 times higher than normal, draining $64 million from the fund in mid-May. Without help, the fund would have been dry in 14 weeks. So Lee and the state’s Financial Stimulus Accountability Group have invested $400 million into the fund.

Tennessee House Speaker Cameron Sexton (R-Crossville) said the move “is one of many ways we are continuing to support businesses during these difficult times by ensuring they aren’t penalized by burdensome tax increases.”

But Lee and Tennessee Republicans have increased tax burdens for another group — online shoppers. The online tax rate here is now the highest allowed by federal law.

“Gov. Lee says he wanted to save businesses from a tax hike, but what about our families who shop online?” read a statement last week from Tennessee Senate Democrats. “The tax increases didn’t have to happen right now, especially with so many everyday families shopping online for essential goods.”

The email points to three bills with sales tax expansions passed on Lee’s watch. The first simply allowed for the collection of online sales taxes. Two later bills made sure taxes here weren’t just for retail behemoths like Amazon or Walmart, lowering sales thresholds to $100,000. Taken together, the laws increased the sales tax burdens on Tennessee’s online shoppers by $377 million.
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901-585-0941
POLITICS By Jackson Baker

Never Mind …

Proposed Tennessee senatorial debate gets quashed; Bradshaw’s backstory.

For a time, it seemed that there would be a major statewide political debate this year — for U.S. Senate candidates — to be held under the auspices of the NEXSTAR network, which includes WREG-TV News Channel 3, locally.

The debate was scheduled for Wednesday, October 14th, in the studios of WKRN in Nashville.

The NEXSTAR invitation to participants cited a lengthy list of prerequisites, including one that candidates "must have reported, on the most recent official forms filed with the appropriate election authority, accepting at least $50,000 in monetary, as opposed to in-kind, campaign contributions, at least 25 percent of which must be raised from in-state constituents."

Clearly, Republican Senate nominee Bill Hagerty, who reported upwards of $12 million in receipts on his last filing, in July, easily qualified. Surprise Democratic nominee Marquita Bradshaw of Memphis had reported contributions in the neighborhood of $22,000 as of that reporting date, though presumably she has raised considerably more than $50,000 since, and would have filed reports indicating as much, and would also have qualified to take part in the debate.

Nobody else was even close to the $50,000 threshold. That would include another Memphis candidate, Aaron James, one of nine independents running. Responding to WKRN general manager Tracey Rogers, James cited a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulation requiring that “if a station allows a legally qualified candidate for any public office to use its facilities … it must give equal opportunities to all other candidates for that office to also use the station,” contending also that “the minimum bar for being recognized as an official candidate by the Federal Election Commission is only $5,000.”

Therefore, said James, given the strictures of the two cited federal commissions, he had a right to insist on inclusion; he maintains that he has a campaign fund of at least $5,000, consisting of his own money, and he filed an informal complaint this week regarding his exclusion from the debate.

Then the whole matter has become moot. Rogers announced that the debate event had been called off, and viewers in Memphis and elsewhere in the state will not, after all, have an opportunity to witness an exchange between major-party candidates Hagerty and Bradshaw, much less one involving James or any of the other eight independent candidates.

Bradshaw engaged in an interesting exchange of another kind last week with state Democratic chair Mary Mancini. In an online interview, the Democratic nominee, largely an unknown statewide but a familiar presence in environmentalist ranks, gave this account of her coming of political age:

“Right across the street from my elementary school was a Superfund site. And we didn’t learn about the dangers of this Superfund site until it closed down in 1995. … That was the year that I gave birth to my son, at the age of 21. I watched my great grandmother die of cancer. And after she died, many people in the community began experiencing sickness and death, also at alarming rates higher than the national average. And so that was when I got involved in a political process beyond voting.”

Reflecting a confidence that the U.S. Postal Service is equal to the task, District 83 state House candidate Jerri Green oversees a postcard-writing party.

• In these pandemic times, the number of public assemblies of any kind has been drastically reduced. But on Monday night, there were doubtless many people who wanted to take part in two simultaneous events and had to choose. One was a memorial service at the D’Army Bailey Shelby County Courthouse in honor of the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Organized by Assistant County Attorney Jessica Indingaro, it drew numerous legal and political eminences. Simultaneously, members of the Coalition Get Out the Vote 901 group, including some key Democrats, were participating in a Zoom meeting, co-hosted by state Senator Raumesh Akbari and Tahjae Stout-Mitchell, to discuss pre-election strategies.

In it, local party chair Michael Harris cited DA Amy Weirich as a target for defeat. That’s called looking ahead. Weirich isn’t up for re-election until 2022.
COMMUTE BY CARPOOL OR VANPOOL
FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.SHELBYTNHEALTH.COM
September 24-30, 2020

T he moto crawler has crashed on a moon in an obscure corner of the multiverse. Its pilot and creator, Baron Von Opperbean, is missing. A towering volcano spews smoke and dribbles lava. Mysterious caves beckon you to enter. Maybe the Baron went this way. But then you remember the warning from Louise, the helpful A.I. who guided you here — “Don’t go near the anomaly.”

It sounds like a scene from a sci-fi blockbuster or a role-playing game. But it’s not. Walk into Off The Walls gallery, a warehouse space near Downtown, and you’re in Baron Von Opperbean’s Exploratorium of Magic, Science, and the Multiverse, a 2,000-square-foot art installation that is the brainchild of multimedia artist Christopher Reyes.

AHEAD OF HIS TIME

Reyes was born in Northern California. His grandfather helped found a martial arts discipline known as Kajukenbo. “It started in the 1940s in Hawaii, so technically it’s the first mixed martial art in the country, but it’s not well-recognized,” Reyes says.

Growing up, Reyes learned Kajukenbo with his father, Grandmaster Alan Reyes. “I still train almost every morning, just for a bit, to wake up and get the flow going.”

After his parents’ divorce, he moved to Memphis in 1986, where his mother, Vernie Kuglin, was based as a pilot for FedEx. Reyes’ artistic skills got him accepted into Memphis College of Art, on the cusp of the digital age. He discovered a new passion in the college’s tiny computer lab and began to use digital tools in his graphic design work. “I was the only one using the computers,” he says.

He got a job at Ardent Studios exploring the fledgling world of interactive entertainment. “We were working on enhanced CDs and CD ROMs. They weren’t called that yet because no one had a name for them. That’s where I cut my teeth. I had access to computers and video editors. We had one of the first Avids in the city, I’m sure. That’s where I learned how to video edit.”

His nights were spent in Memphis’ electronic music scene. “I don’t know if I’d call myself a musician,” he says, “but I can sequence the hell out of some electronic music.”

It was around this time, in the early 1990s, that he approached Downtown real estate mogul Henry Turley about buying an empty warehouse space at 1 S. Main. At the time, Downtown Memphis was nearly abandoned. An artist with a well-paying tech job was the ideal person to revitalize the space. But Reyes couldn’t get a loan to cover the entire building, so Turley proposed a solution: He would create a condominium association for 1 S. Main and sell Reyes the cavernous upper story of the building, while retaining control of the ground floor, which was rented to a small restaurant.

Accessible only through a rickety metal
staircase in an alley, the artist's loft became Reyes' home. For years, Reyes had to go downstairs to use the bathroom. But as the '90s wore on, he paid off the first mortgage and took out a second one to finance renovations. Eventually, he built a second floor in the loft, expanding from 4,000 to 6,000 square feet, with two bathrooms and plenty of space for offices and the kind of big art projects he favored.

In 1999, with the internet spreading rapidly, Reyes realized he was surrounded by great music that no one outside Memphis was privy to. “The idea was to stream music because Memphis musicians were so isolated,” he says. “With no record labels here, no distribution at that time, no infrastructure, no industry at all, they just had no outlets.” By 2001, he had taught himself enough web design to create a website to host his recordings. It was called Live From Memphis, and it quickly grew in scope and ambition. Before Facebook, or even Myspace, Reyes created the first online directory of Memphis musicians.

“Y ou need an ecosystem. ”

Soon, other types of artists had their own listings on Live From Memphis — LFM for short. “I was trying to provide resources to them, and I figured, here’s a graphic designer, here’s a filmmaker. I had two directories going and I was like, ‘This is stupid. I need to just put these directories together, and they’ll find each other.’”

The LFM creatives directory eventually had more than 5,000 entries. It became the premiere tool for creative networking in the Bluff City.

Reyes was also tied into the Memphis film scene, creating animation and music videos. LFM sponsored the first music video showcases at Indie Memphis and eventually spun the program off as a music video festival. LFM fielded camera crews to document Gonerfest for a decade, producing two DVD concert films. (Note: I worked with LFM as a co-creator from 2009-2013.)

Reyes experimented with streaming video, but it wasn’t until YouTube came on the scene in 2005 that it became practical to put LFM’s video creations on the web. “Flipside” was a series of short documentaries on Memphis artists that accompanied Craig Brewer’s pioneering webseries $5 Cover. “Get Down” was produced with the Downtown Memphis Commission to promote the newly flourishing neighborhoods around 1 S. Main.

Live From Memphis was ahead of its time, but the world caught up. Reyes never sold advertising, and eventually grants and donations dried up. Facebook’s global spread made the directory redundant. LFM shut down in January 2013.

“I see people over and over trying to do music directory or a music thing that’s gonna change Memphis music. It always ends up petering out because what they’re thinking about is just music,” Reyes says. “You need an ecosystem.”

**FISH AND FOUL**

“For a couple of years, I was just kind of floundering,” Reyes recalls. “It was really hard to get out and shake that off because Live From Memphis was my identity. It was how I saw myself, and when I didn’t have that anymore, I was like, who the hell am I? What am I doing?”

Reyes became fascinated with projection mapping, a new technology that allowed precise control of projected digital images that can make surfaces appear to come alive. “VR [virtual reality] is cool, but when you can bring the weird stuff into your world, that’s cooler. You’re actually in something, and it’s happening around you.”

Meanwhile, Reyes and his longtime girlfriend and business partner, Sarah Fleming, had two children together. In 2016, he and Fleming and filmmaker Laura Jean Hocking collaborated on a breakthrough project called Fish. “They wanted to do a film, Laura Jean and Sarah, and I said, ‘Well, why don’t we do it like you’re inside the film?’”

Fish combined video, some of which was shot at the Memphis Zoo aquarium, with murals and projection mapping to create an immersive underwater world. It was the first big exhibition at Crosstown Arts. Mounted before the opening of the Crosstown Concourse, it legitimized the fledgling arts organization in the minds of Memphis. “Fish is the most magical thing I have seen in Memphis probably ever,” wrote Commercial Appeal art critic Fredric Keerpel.

But the triumph would be short-lived. In the early 2000s, Turley sold his interest in 1 S. Main to the owners of the Madison Hotel. In 2016, Aparium Hotel Group bought the Madison, and a share of 1 S. Main with it. The building had been under a PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes)

continued on page 13
ON THE INTERNET THIS WEEKEND!

FEATURING OVER 20 BANDS - EXCLUSIVE LIVE PERFORMANCES FOR GONERFEST 17 FROM AROUND THE WORLD AND IN MEMPHIS

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MELEANS (Memphis, TN)
The Rebel (Memphis, TN)
MARY TEE & BRUCE BRAND (Memphis, TN)
MICK TROUBLE (Memphis, TN)
GEE TEE (Memphis, TN)
ARCHERS (Memphis, TN)
EN ATTENDANT ANA (Memphis, TN)
BLOODBAGS (Memphis, TN)
DRAVID MARTE (Memphis, TN)
SARA LOU (Memphis, TN)
DICK MOVE (Memphis, TN)
NIX ALLISON (Memphis, TN)

GUINE (Memphis, TN)
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MICHAEL BEAR (Memphis, TN)
ERBATS (Memphis, TN)
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The Second Floor offers independent entrepreneurs the opportunity to access state-of-the-art workspace at very competitive prices. We know that one of the greatest needs of the small non-profit and for-profit businesses is access to office space which is safe, functional and flexible. The Second Floor has the answers for your business needs.

From the security of our gated campus, we can offer the creative business owner annual options for leasing space, the environment they will need to thrive and all of the comforts associated with any exceptional location. The Second Floor offers meeting rooms as well as an atmosphere in which any business can grow and succeed.
needed to do something. I was talking going into my own world. " Reyes says. "I his father passed away in 2019. "I was the Madison Hotel to the un-Googleable publicity, Aparium changed the name of with Aparium. Stung by the negative around Reyes and Fleming, organizing weeks branding Downtown, but were rebuffed. The artistic community Live From Memphis had nurtured rallied around Reyes and Fleming, organizing street protests outside city hall. Broke, and fearing for the future of his children, Reyes was eventually pressured to settle with Aparium. Stung by the negative publicity, Aparium changed the name of the Madison Hotel to the un-Googleable Hu. The terms of the settlement are secret.

MAKING A WORLD
Reyes started work on the project in 2020. "I had no money and no materials 2020, with the goal of opening in March 2020. "I was doing 24-hour sessions to get it done, and then COVID hit. I was just like, ah, man, it's over. I just can't do it anymore. Then I was like, well, actually I could make the videos better. I could make the sound better." Reyes finished the project largely by himself, with final help from filmmaker John Pickle. The results are stunning — mysterious and immersive.

A PORTAL
The premise: Baron Von Opperean is a scientist/magician who travels space and time collecting technology and artifacts that catch his fancy. But the Baron has gone missing, and it’s up to visitors to solve the mystery of his disappearance by following his trail through a series of portals to different worlds. Or, you can just enjoy the ride, Reyes says. "We tried to pack as much as I could into this space. It’s multilayered to make it feel like you don’t know which direction you are going. I don’t want to explain it to people. I just want them to experience it."

Before the pandemic, Reyes had wanted the Multiverse to be a communal experience, but for now, it’s open on an appointment-only basis. Groups of up to 16 can book trips. "They have to be people you’re comfortable being around. I didn’t want strangers bumping into each other because in a portal, you’d be in a tight space. I’m losing money with only two people in there, but I don’t care."

Reyes says the reactions have been "overwhelming." At first, kids are reluctant to explore, but once they get comfortable, they start to ramble all over the maze-like space. "It was really fun. Lots of crawling," says Mike Pleasance, who recently visited with his wife, Virginia, and daughter, Vera. "There were so many little details. It was really cool how many parts are all coherently pulled together."

Reyes says this version is a prototype. He hopes to eventually create a permanent attraction on the scale of City Museum, which attracts a million visitors per year. "I’d like to put a giant multiverse in the Coliseum," he says. "Hopefully there’ll be people who recognize the potential that exists with immersive spaces. People want it, and with COVID even more so because they’ve been cooped up, and this makes them stop thinking about all the bad stuff in their lives."

program since before Reyes bought his condo. When the PILOT expired in 2016, the new owners exploited a loophole in the program:

"Technically, any building under a PILOT is owned by the Downtown Memphis Commission; the "beneficial owners" only lease it, with an option to buy at the end of the term. When the PILOT expired on 1 S. Main, Aparium claimed the building’s title and sued Reyes to take control of his condo. A bruising court battle ensued. Reyes and Fleming appealed for help to the Downtown Memphis Commission, whom they had worked with for years branding Downtown, but were rebuffed. The artistic community Live From Memphis had nurtured rallied around Reyes and Fleming, organizing street protests outside city hall. Broke, and fearing for the future of his children, Reyes was eventually pressured to settle with Aparium. Stung by the negative publicity, Aparium changed the name of the Madison Hotel to the un-Googleable Hu. The terms of the settlement are secret.

MAKING A WORLD
Reyes was adrift. To make matters worse, his father passed away in 2019. "I was going into my own world." Reyes says. "I needed to do something, I was talking about this idea I had about Baron Von Opperean a lot. Then my partner [Fleming] and I split up. It was really difficult because it was breaking up the family. I immersed myself in my project. Fortunately, Yvonne Bobo had just bought this building from the state and was fixing it up. She was really excited about it and wanted me to come look at it and said, 'Hey, let's do this project together.'"

Baron Von Opperean’s Exploratorium of Magic, Science, and the Multiverse is the culmination of all of Reyes’ skills. It combines sculpture, murals, projection mapping, sound design, and music to create an immersive experience. "I'm making a world. I just need to make all these elements that make my world exist."

Reyes’ creation is an example of what he calls experiential art. While researching the project, he visited the City Museum in St. Louis and Meow Wolf in Santa Fe. "When I saw my kids running around experiencing that joy at City Museum, I was like, that’s it. Whatever I make has to give people joy. It has to give them the sense that they’ve walked away from their problems, their troubles, and the reality of the world, and give them a new reality." Reyes started work on the project in 2019, with the goal of opening in March 2020. "I had no money and no materials when I started. All I had was this space that Off The Walls had given me. So I just put it out there to the community. The money came in slow, but the materials came in pretty fast."

The maze-like installation is made almost entirely of creatively reused materials — including a bundle of old Memphis Flyers transformed into a paper-mâché landscape. The University of Memphis supplied projectors for the ever-changing videos that combine with murals and sculpture to create an immersive environment. Donated sound systems provide each area with a unique soundscape. School children helped create alien flowers out of plastic bottles.

Reyes worked feverishly to finish the massive project, set to open on March 28, 2020. "I was doing 24-hour sessions to get it done, and then COVID hit. I was just like, ah, man, it’s over. I just can’t do it anymore. Then I was like, well, actually I could make the videos better. I could make the sound better." Reyes finished the project largely by himself, with final help from filmmaker John Pickle. The results are stunning — mysterious and immersive.
GODDESS OF TEARS, ONLINE VIA ZOOM FROM VOICES OF THE SOUTH, VOICESOFTHESOUTH.ORG, SATURDAY, SEPT. 26, 7 P.M., $7-$20.

It was written over the course of two years and goes on a journey to rediscover herself and her own fate. One of those freedoms is access to actors from all over the world. This performance features a team of actors from Memphis, New York, and Chicago collaborating across time zones. Some familiar names will be in this Cloud of Olympus, including Alice Rainey Berry, Ron Gephart, Christina Hernandez, Jenny Odle Madden, Gloria Swansong, and others.

Will Niobe conquer her passionless immortality? Let us see what the Fates have wrought.

Cry, Baby, Cry  By Julie Ray

Doesn’t it feel like 2020 is the result of mythological Fates standing over a cauldron stirring the pot of chaos as they use their knowledge of the future to toy with and destroy human beings?

Playwright, filmmaker, and performance artist Keegon Schuett certainly uses mythology to explain our fate at the moment in his original new work.

“This play is about how difficult it is to be isolated,” says Schuett of Goddess of Tears, which was written over the course of two months within quarantine.

The play reimagines Greek gods and goddesses as overwhelmed people working in the digital Cloud of Olympus and isolated from each other. Each has their own staggering department, but maybe none as staggering as Niobe, the goddess of tears, forced to approve or deny access to every single teardrop on Earth. Niobe cannot cry herself and goes on a journey to rediscover herself and her own fate.

“It is hard to make theater in Zoom,” Schuett says. “It’s just weird. But in those restrictions, there are freedoms.”

One of those freedoms is access to actors from all over the world. This performance features a team of actors from Memphis, New York, and Chicago collaborating across time zones. Some familiar names will be in this Cloud of Olympus, including Alice Rainey Berry, Ron Gephart, Christina Hernandez, Jenny Odle Madden, Gloria Swansong, and others.

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VARIOUS DAYS & TIMES  September 24th - 30th

Art for Jobs  advancedmemphis.org, Thursday, September 24, 5:30 p.m.
Browse art online or register to view in the gallery. Make a purchase from the virtual gallery to benefit programs at Advance Memphis promoting economic stability.

Opening Reception for  "Poetry of Horses"  Palladio, 2169 Central, Friday, September 25, 6-8 p.m., free
Exhibition of sculpture, drawings, and paintings by Fletcher Golden and Jeanne Seagle reminiscent of Golden’s cross-country journey on horseback.

Sunset Cinema Drive-In  Tiger Lane, 335 S. Hollywood, Friday-Saturday, September 25-27, 7-11 p.m., $25 per car
Drive-in theater that offers a family-friendly atmosphere featuring a different movie each weekend night; Jurassic Park (9/25), Talladega Nights (9/26), and Best Man (9/27).

Latin Soul Awards  cazateatro.org, Sunday, September 27, 6-8 p.m., free
The Premios Alma Latina (Latin Soul Awards) recognizes members of the Latino community and their allies for their achievements and support in making the Mid-South a better place to live. Watch via the Cazateatro Bilingual Theater Group Facebook page.
through the fog of pandemic confusion, a piercing signal goes out. Coming from Memphis, a voice echoes far and near via satellite: “Don’t touch the box, don’t touch the shelf, don’t touch the people, don’t touch yourself. Lysol sprayed on the wheel, no hugging, no shaking, hand holding, no feeling.”

The groove is mellow but driving, as ghostly sounds dart in and out of the soundscape. It pulls you in with the chorus: “You won’t know if you’re doing it right. You never know if you’re doing it right. You won’t know if you’re doing it right, if you’re doing it right.”

That’s right, kids, everyone around the world is doing the “Rona Pollona.”

Mike Doughty’s Ghost of Vroom drops new EP.

The track’s feel is both troubling, given the subject matter, and reassuring, given the groove’s roots in the transformative days of the ’90s. There’s something about its blend of the familiar and the uncanny that fits the present moment. And though you harren back to the ’90s on hearing it, you wouldn’t be far from the truth, for the voice is none other than Soul Coughing’s Mike Doughty. Like most of us, he left the ’90s behind him around the year 2000, but lately he’s been revisiting approaches that this, the band’s debut EP, is officially known as Ghost of Vroom. Before the quarantine era, Doughty and a different group of players made an album with Mario Caldato Jr., onetime Beastie Boys producer. Look for that to drop when touring becomes viable again. Until then, embrace the absurdity of “Rona Pollona” and a debut that’s a part two.

One thing that makes these new sounds snap and pop is that they’re very much played by a live band. After Doughty began assembling tracks with classic ’90s loops, he then added the live players, including his collaborator of 15 years, Andrew “Scrap” Livingston. “He auditioned as a bass player,” recalls Doughty, “but he just happens to be a cellist, a guitarist, and a keyboardist.” Lil Pepper plays live drums throughout, and some local players bring some grit and grind to the proceedings.


Contrarians and surrealists in the listening public will be delighted to know that this, the band’s debut EP, is officially known as Ghost of Vroom. Before the quarantine era, Doughty and a different group of players made an album with Mario Caldato Jr., onetime Beastie Boys producer. Look for that to drop when touring becomes viable again. Until then, embrace the absurdity of “Rona Pollona” and a debut that’s a part two.

Doughty explains it matter of factly. “I had just been getting into Soul Coughing sounds again,” he tells me. “There’s the old Scarface Beats and Breaks CD, which I think was completely against the law in the ’90s when it came out. It had Funky Drummer and all the famous breakbeats, completely pirated.” Revisiting that gold mine, he took the beats, “and just started looping them. I also started working with samples again. Working with the sampler’s really like an instrument, as opposed to just having loops and stuff, really triggering sounds like the Mellotron, that kind of a vibe.”

This was happening even before Doughty toured in 2019 with a live band in celebration of the 25th anniversary of Soul Coughing’s Ruby Vroom album, but that tour reinforced the new/old direction Doughty was headed. And so, though the players are different and the word flow is more contemporary, he’s dubbed his latest group, Ghost of Vroom. “Rona Pollona” and two other titles will drop this Friday on Ghost of Vroom’s debut EP.

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“One of the major distinguishing factors about this EP is that Logan Hanna plays guitar on it,” observes Doughty. “I auditioned banks of samples using a bunch of Memphis singers,” Doughty explains. “Raneem Imam came in and sang things like ‘ooooOOP!’ I got about 20 of those from her. Bailey Bigger’s on there. William McLain, an opera singer. And PreauxXX from Unapologetic.”

Contrarians and surrealists in the listening public will be delighted to know that this, the band’s debut EP, is officially known as Ghost of Vroom. Before the quarantine era, Doughty and a different group of players made an album with Mario Caldato Jr., onetime Beastie Boys producer. Look for that to drop when touring becomes viable again. Until then, embrace the absurdity of “Rona Pollona” and a debut that’s a part two.

Doughty explains it matter of factly. “I live in that kind of vibe. I’m extremely happy that Ghost of Vroom 2 is coming out before Ghost of Vroom 1. This is our second release. It’s just that the first release has not been released.”
THEATER
Hatillo Theatre
God’s Trombone, enjoy the original production of inspirational sermons by African-American preachers reimagined as poetry, reverberating with the musicality and eloquence of spirituals. Free. Ongoing.
66 S. COOPER (726-4656).

The Orpheum
Orpheum Virtual Engagement, join Orpheum staff, artists, and students for activities, interviews, and more on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Ongoing.
20 S. MAIN (525-3100).

Playhouse on the Square
66 S. COOPER (726-4656).

Tennessee Shakespeare Company
In a Purple Mood: Alice Walker, a celebration of the author of The Color Purple, will be presented both in-person on the Tabor Stage and simulcast online followed by a talkback. tennessee-shakespeare.org. $15-825.
Sun., Sept. 27, 3 p.m.
7950 TRINITY (795-0604).

Theatre Memphis
Online on Stage, a Theatre Memphis Facebook group that serves as a clearinghouse for performers wanting to share their talents. Featuring storytellers, readings, or performances. Ongoing.
630 PERKINS EX. (982-3323).

Virtual & Online
Goddess of Tears, a reimagining of the Greek gods and goddesses as overwhelmed people working in the digital Cloud of Olympus. Niobe, the goddess of tears, approves or denies every single teardrop. (484-7284), 57-S20.
Sat., Sept. 26, 7-9 p.m. VOICESOFTHESOUTH.ORG.

Memphis Flyer Coloring Book
Order your book today benefiting local artists and journalism. $35. Ongoing.
memphisflyerstore.com.

Novel at Home: Lawrence Wells and Carl Rollyson
Authors Lawrence Wells (In Faulkner’s Shadow: A Memoir) and Carl Rollyson (The Life of William Faulkner: Thirtieth Anniversary of the Death of William Faulkner) discuss books via Zoom. Free with registration. Mon., Sept. 28, 6 p.m.
NOVEL 387 PERKINS EX. (922-5526), NOVELMEMPHIS.COM.

Novel at Home: M. Randal O’Wain with Carl Auge and Grant Gerald Miller
Author discusses debut short story collection, Hallowed Station and Other Stories, in conversation with guest artists via Zoom. Free with registration. Fri., Sept. 25, 6 p.m.
NOVEL 387 PERKINS EX. (922-5526), NOVELMEMPHIS.COM.

OTHER ART HAPPENINGS
First Brush of Fall: Plein Air Season at the Garden
Set up your easel through Sept. 28. Breezy, Yummy. “Space limited. RSVP required.”

Tour Detour
Tours: Central Gardens: Home Tour Detour
Self-guided virtual retrospective of more than 100 homes from the past 20 years of CGA tours. $30.
SEPT. 26, 12-5 p.m.
CENTRAL GARDENS, ALONG CARR AVE., CENTRALGARDENS.ORG.

SPECIAL EVENTS
“The Poetry of Horses,” with Fletcher Golden and Jeanne Seagle, at Palladio Gallery, Friday, September 25th, 6 p.m.
Reader Meet Writer: Connor Towne O’Neill
Author discusses Down Along with That Devil’s Bones: A Reckoning with Monuments, Memory, and the Legacy of White Supremacy. Free with registration. Tues., Sept. 29, 4 p.m.
NOVEL 387 PERKINS EX. (922-5526), NOVELMEMPHIS.COM.

WE Boutique
WOMEN’S EXCHANGE ART GALLERY, 44 ROCHE (327-5401).

Traveling Event: “My Mother’s Journey” with That Devil’s Bones: A Memoir
Author discusses her book, down along with that devil’s bones, a reimagining of the musicality and eloquence of spirituals. Free. Ongoing.
66 S. COOPER (726-4656).

Send the date, time, place, cost, info, phone number, a brief description, and photos — two weeks in advance — to calendar@memphisflyer.com or P.O. Box 1738, Memphis, TN 38101.
DUE TO SPACE LIMITATIONS, ONGOING WEEKLY EVENTS WILL APPEAR IN THE FLYER’S ONLINE CALENDAR ONLY.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS: September 24 - 30

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MEETINGS

Churches from the Presbytery of the Mid-South: Sunday Worship Livestream
Combined livestream worship. Visit website for more information and livestream link. Sun., 11 a.m. IdlewildChurch.org.

Virtual-T
Weekly Zoom gathering for anyone 18+ who identifies as a member of the trans or GNC community. For login information, email ahauptman@outmemphis.org. Tuesdays, 6 p.m. OutMemphis.org.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Latin Soul Awards
The Premios Alma Latina (Latin Soul Awards) recognizes members of the Latino community and their allies for their achievements and support in making the Mid-South a better place to live. Watch via the Cazateatro Bilingual Theater Group Facebook page. Free. Sun., Sept. 27, 6-8 p.m. (901-545-1303), Cazateatro.org.

Concert: Opera Goes to Broadway
Music celebrating the crossover between opera and musical theater, from La Bohème and Rent to West Side Story and Romeo and Juliet featuring Say Cheese! food truck. $10. Sat., Sept. 26, 5 p.m. Germantown Performing Arts Center, 1801 Exeter (751-7500).

RISE Evening of Change Gala: Mission Possible
This black tie affair marks 20 years of empowering people to become self-sufficient through financial literacy and education. $100. Thurs., Sept. 24. The Great Hall and Conference Center, 1900 S. Germantown, RISEmemphis.org.

FOOD & DRINK EVENTS

Concourse Outdoor Grilling Class Series

Memphis Dawah Association: Mobile Food Pantry
A weekly mobile food pantry organized by Memphis Dawah Association and Mid-South Food Bank. Volunteer opportunities available. Saturdays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Memphis Dawah Association, 837 Craft (601-672-0259).

FILM

Family Night: Annie
A foster kid who lives with her mean foster mom sees her life change when a business tycoon takes her in. Featuring Dance with Hoops & Taps, Mempops, and El Mero Taco food truck. Picnics welcome. $10. Fri., Sept. 25, 5 p.m. Germantown Performing Arts Center, 1801 Exeter (751-7500).

Sunset Cinema Drive-In
Drive in theater that offers a family-friendly atmosphere featuring Jurassic Park (9/25), Talladega Nights (9/26), and Best Man (9/27). $25 per car. Fri., Sept. 25, 7-11 p.m.; Sat., Sept. 26, 7-11 p.m.; and Sun., Sept. 27, 7-11 p.m. Tiger Lane, 335 South Hollywood, 901sunsetcinema.com.
Popcorn Lady

Pop's Kernel was created with love.

Creating a popcorn business popped into Timeko T. Davis-Wade's mind after a flood destroyed her family's house and left them homeless in 2011. She thought, "What are we going to do? Being an entrepreneur, I need to figure out how I'm going to be a helpmate to my husband."

Now known as the Popcorn Lady, Davis-Wade, 48, is founder of Pop's Kernel, a nationally known online popcorn business that includes 50 flavors. She and her husband, Jamason, and their two children, Devin and Zoe, were living on three acres in a flood zone in North Memphis. "We were doing pretty well. At the time, both kids were in private schools."

Her son was a special-needs student at Concord Academy, and her daughter was at Hutchison. "When they found out we were having trouble and our house had been flooded, both schools, along with our church, started helping. Hutchison put us at a hotel for the whole summer of 2011." The next year, Davis-Wade traveled to her hometown of Chicago to visit family. While there, she said, "I want to bring a little piece of Chicago home."

That led to her creating other flavors. She lavishly spent $100 on Chicago Mix popcorn from Garrett Popcorn Shop for her family to enjoy. While eating popcorn on the train, she thought, "I can do this. I can make popcorn."

Davis-Wade told her idea to her husband, but it wasn't until the next year when she returned to it. They were having a party and Davis-Wade wanted to make popcorn. Her husband found a recipe for caramel popcorn online. She made it, and it was a success.

She tweaked that recipe and began making popcorn to help raise funds for missionary trips for her church, Life Church.

That led to her creating other flavors. To make her first batch of caramel cheesecake popcorn, she bought 25 boxes of macaroni and cheese just for the cheese powder.

She named the business Pop's Kernel because her children call their dad Pop. Her son had a difficult time finding jobs because of his special needs, so she put him to work making popcorn. Eventually, the whole family took part.

She came up with other flavors, including Tuxedo — white and milk chocolate and caramel. People began ordering her popcorn for weddings, birthdays, and graduations.

Davis-Wade, who had only one air popper at the time, recruited helpers after a women's conference ordered 1,400 bags. "That was myself, my husband, my two kids, my mother-in-law, my mom, my two sisters-in-law, some of their kids. It was a whole house full of people."

Her business took off after Cynthia Daniels invited her to participate in Memphis Black Restaurant Week in 2016. "We had about 1,000 bags of popcorn. Within three hours, we sold 989 bags."

Business got so good Davis-Wade moved into a commercial kitchen. She began doing events for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Methodist Hospital, Junior League of Memphis, and International Paper.

She now has eight air poppers and 50 popcorn flavors, not all of which are sold at the same time. I Love Tuscan is "olive oil base, sun-dried tomatoes, basil, parsley, and garlic."

Her business boomed during the quarantine. "More and more people were staying home watching movies."

Davis-Wade operated her business at a pop-up at Wolfchase Galleria, where people picked up their pre-paid popcorn curbside.

After Daniels mentioned Pop's Kernel as one of Memphis' Black businesses in a HuffPost article, Davis-Wade began getting orders from all over the U.S. "This year, in the middle of the pandemic, it's been crazy-busy. I have orders every day. We're shipping all over America. I only advertise on Instagram and Facebook."

Pop's Kernel comes in various size bags, which range from $7 to $19.

Davis-Wade hired other young adults with special needs to help with the business. "They're the ones doing a lot of the labeling for us on the packaging. So I always tell people, 'If you get a label a little crooked, it was done with love. We're working with special needs.'"

To order, go to popskernel.com.
Airport Rules!

COVID-19 has turned world travelers into day-drinkers.

ack when the lockdown was really in lockdown, I saw a tweet announcing that Quarantine Drinking Rules = Airport Drinking Rules. Which makes sense. After this year’s alcohol intake, we all feel like we’ve Crunch a few time zones.

These days, however, the airlines are struggling with everyone avoiding those “COVID cabins” in the sky. The travel I’d normally put in for the release of Hant Punch is causing me to zoom more than fly. This isn’t a problem with the East Coast, but the people in Los Angeles take it as a matter of pride not to take unwieldy time zones into consideration. I always make it a point to have a beer in the shot just to let them all know I’m taking a damn meeting during cocktail hour. If you field a call from Egypt, remember that that time zone is so wide of the mark it’s more constructive to just get back on a plane.

In Europe, Carlsberg and Heineken are the universal airport beers. Stateside, Heineken is also pretty ubiquitous. It’s a well-made pale lager out of the Netherlands that is drinkable, refreshing, and has more presence than the mass-market American beers trying to imitate it. At 5 percent ABV, it’s also a little higher in alcohol. Granted, Heineken used to be known for the odd “skunky” beer, but they’ve fixed that problem. The issue wasn’t quality control or even the beer itself, but those green bottles which were less effective than the brown ones at keeping out harmful sunlight.

If you want to drink local, even on the road, American airports are great showcases of homegrown beer wherever (and whenever) you happen to land. If you ask, the barkeep will point you to a beer you’ve probably never heard of (and whenever) you happen to land. If you ask, the barkeep will point you to a beer you’ve probably never heard of and try to sell you a 24-ounce glass of the stuff. This is because airlines seem to like their passengers sleepy and fairly floppy. If you don’t feel like a 24-ounce beer gamble over breakfast, there is always Sweetwater.

Maybe it’s the Atlanta connection, but Sweetwater 420 Extra Pale Ale seems to be America’s go-to airport craft beer. And why not? It’s a West Coast style, dry-hopped ale — more interesting than the standard lager, but light enough to keep drinking without getting that bitter aftertaste. Depending on where you’re headed to (sales calls, class reunion, holiday with family crazies) or coming from (war zones, vacation, a night of designer drugs with L.A. sorts who can’t do time-zone math) this sort of thing is important. You have to maintain.

In the mid-’90s, Sweetwater jumped ahead of the craft beer boom by bringing the West Coast “micros” as they were then called, to Atlanta. Is Sweetwater local? No. It is regional and they are still privately owned. They have become one of the top brewers in the country without hitching up with one of the macro brands. And that matters.

As if air travel hadn’t gotten surreal enough this year, I understand that the airlines are now doing home takeout, so would-be travelers can experience reheated, rubbery food fresh out of the microwave in their own home. If you’re going to do that, at least pair it with a gigantic beer. For breakfast.

Murff takes a meeting.

I almost miss sitting in the Amsterdam airport at 8:30 a.m., drinking a Carlsberg when your body thinks that it’s last night in New York. Airport drinking isn’t for the faint of heart, and it’s not something you want to do daily, unless you are entering a Hunter S. Thompson’s liver look-alike contest. This is drinking with a purpose: to maintain a certain state of mind while avoiding another. Sure, there are those awkward moments when you make eye-contact with some perfectly lovely Dutch lady over her coffee and you can hear her thinking, “Oh … he’s one of them.” She won’t say it of course, and you wouldn’t know if she did. Dutch sounds like a Swede trying to speak German.
Doomscrolling
It’s surveillance capitalism vs. humanity in The Social Dilemma.

H
i, my name’s Chris, and I’m a social media addict.

It started back at the dawn of the internet. I’ve always read compulsively — books, magazines, ingredient labels, whatever. So it’s no coincidence that I’m a writer. At first, the internet was just a place where I could get more stuff to read. At the turn of the 21st century, the promise of the world wide web was that it would democratize the flow of information and give everyone a voice. I frequented message boards, where the important topics of the day were discussed — by that, I mean the Star Wars prequels and Peter Jackson’s Lord of the Rings trilogy. This was social media at its most primitive — and most fun. I skipped Friendster, didn’t really get the hype of MySpace, and then dove into Flickr, the early photo-sharing site. I made friends, whom I referred to as “internet friends.” Sometimes we met IRL (in real life), but mostly we knew each other only by screen names. Then, in 2008, came Facebook, and we had to give up the privacy of our real names.

Facebook’s quick success led to the launch of Instagram and Twitter. Later, I got a very lucrative gig producing social media content. It was good for my bottom line, but now I see that being immersed in social media for eight hours a day has had a lasting effect on my psyche. Like many writers and journalists, the flow of breaking news and scalding hot takes on Twitter pushes my buttons. I have an internet friend who was offered a job at Twitter while it was still a start-up, but he decided not to take it because he says he couldn’t figure out what the app was for. I’m not sure I can answer that question today, except to say, Twitter is for more than just Twitter. But what is all this stuff doing to us?

What were once esoteric questions about emerging technological platforms have taken on new urgency in the increasingly chaotic world of 2020, and The Social Dilemma meets them head-on. Director Jeff Orlowski, who previously tackled climate change with his documentaries Chasing Ice and Chasing Coral, goes straight to the source. His star witness is Tristan Harris, a graduate of Stanford University’s Persuasive Technology Lab, where he studied ways to make online ads work better. While working as a design ethicist at Google, he wrote a memo entitled “A Call to Minimize Distraction and Respect User’s Attention.”

He no longer works at Google. Harris’ basic point is that the drive to “make online ads work better” has led to a dangerous set of incentives for tech companies. “Positive intermittent reinforcement” is a powerful hack of the human brain that both powers slot machines and keeps you coming back to see who has liked your selfie. But it’s deeper than that. In order to sell ads that are guaranteed to hit their marks, Facebook and Google have created what amounts to “human futures markets.” They use the reams of data they collect about you to predict your actions, and they sell that knowledge to their advertising clients. Sometimes those clients are bad actors, like Vladimir Putin. Even worse, the platforms whose business models depend on user engagement have discovered that more extreme messages produce greater engagement. From Brazil
You may have heard some of these arguments before, but when Orlovski serves them all up together, it's beyond chilling. Less effective are the cinematic sequences, where a “typical family” deals with problems like Snapchat-induced body dysmophoria and political radicalization. These parts help clarify the problems with relatable examples, but the dramatizations undermine the documentary’s claim to truth-telling even as it attacks disinformation.

Quibbles aside, The Social Dilemma delivers a vital perspective on how we live both digitally and IRL.

Now pick up your phone and turn off all notifications. The Social Dilemma is streaming on Netflix.
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Imagine living in a country where a minority group that comprised a mere 6 percent of the population was in complete control. A country where a full 94 percent of the populace had no say whatsoever in their own governance. Does this sound like some future dystopian version of America, given our present trajectory? Sorry. This was the political reality of America at the time of the first presidential election in 1789.

Many of those who signed our Declaration of Independence would have argued that the phrase “all men are created equal” only referred to land-owning Christian white males. At the time, the Colonists were still bound to that lowest form of oligarchical governance, the monarchy. The above statement was not penned as an enlightened declaration of inclusion, but solely to invoke a political break from that monarchy.

Thankfully, Thomas Jefferson, though himself a slave owner, was also a student of the Enlightenment. He understood that the prophetic words, however he had to spin them at the time, would eventually come to be taken more literally. Fifty years after the signing, Jefferson said of the Declaration: “May it be to the world the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government.”

At the time of the Revolution, free Americans were divided into two classes. You were either somebody, which almost exclusively meant being born into wealth and privilege, or you were nobody. And nobodies, even white male nobodies, were not allowed to vote. Additionally, prior to 1828, some states’ “religious tests” required voters to be professed Protestants. The last vestige of the property ownership exclusion was not abolished until 1856. Even then, some states continued to disallow non-taxpaying citizens the vote for another half-century.

The Fourteenth Amendment of 1868 opened the voting booth to naturalized, non-native-born citizens. Although the Fifteenth Amendment extended the right to vote to former male slaves in 1870, most Southern states — Tennessee being foremost among them — concocted such Jim Crow-era stumbling blocks as poll taxes and literacy tests that persisted until the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Women, regardless of race or status, could not vote prior to ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. The final expansion of American voter eligibility did not occur until 1970, when the minimum voting age was lowered from 21 to 18.

Now try to imagine living in a country where only 43 percent of the population was in control. Even after all of our incredible progress in the ensuing 227 years since the first presidential election, that’s the percentage of the total population who voted in 2016. Certainly an improvement, but still hardly representative.

So here we are, 20 years into the 21st century, and still we have to ask ourselves to what degree do “ignorance and superstition” continue to rule our lives? Although Tennessee ranks 14th in the nation in terms of our number of eligible voters, we are 49th when it comes to actual voter turnout. In 2016, 2.4 million Tennesseans stayed home and did nothing, which is not only inexcusable, but unacceptable. The next time anyone tries to convince you that Tennessee can’t be “flipped,” consider the fact that nearly twice as many of our people failed to uphold their civic duty as voted for Trump in 2016.

As we continue to transform into a more enlightened and egalitarian nation, the pace of this effort will be wholly dependent upon the action, or inaction, of every eligible voter. We can only “assume the blessings and security of self-government” when every person who can legally vote, votes. Without question, 2020 will be the single most significant election since 1860 — the election that was immediately followed by the bloodiest decade in American history. And the outcome could very well be determined by those who, in the past, for whatever reason, have chosen not to participate.

If you care about your country, if you care about preserving democracy for future generations, your job this election is not only to vote, but to motivate every other citizen who sat out 2016, especially those who would not have had the right to vote in 1789, to vote in 2020 like their lives depended on it.

Voter registration deadline is October 5th. Early Voting is October 14th through October 29th. Last day to request an absentee ballot is October 27th. The election is November 3rd. Aaron James is a seventh generation Tennessean, retired architect (Texas and New York), self-published author, and Independent Centrist candidate for U.S. Senate.

If we want real majority leadership, America needs to vote like it never has before.

Thomas Jefferson
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