



Natural Selections Salutes
Nobel Prize Winner Mike Young! **Read more on P. 3**



2017 NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSIOLOGY OR MEDICINE

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Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Word of the Month

DAKOTA BLACKMAN

Kakistocracy

[kak-uh-stok-ruh-see]

Noun, plural kakistocracies

Government by the worst persons; a form of government in which the worst persons are in power

Late this past June, journalist and MS-NBC correspondent Joy Reid tweeted the following: “Look up the definition of ‘kakistocracy’ today, my fellow Americans. Things will make much more sense.” The tweet, which was liked over 8,000 times and retweeted nearly 4,000 times, prompted such a significant spike in searches for the word that Merriam-Webster devoted an [entire article](#) to it. Briefly, the word is Greek in origin, combining the root *kakistos* (meaning “worst”) with the familiar English ending *-cracy* (meaning “form of government”), which itself is derived from the Greek *kratos* (meaning “strength” or “power”). Dictionary.com notes in its definition that the root may also be tied to the Greek word *kakos*, meaning “evil” or “unpleasant” (its derivatives are recognizable in English in such words as cacophony), and perhaps even connected to the Greek prefix *kako-*, a not-so-subtle origin of the English slang word for “defecation”. Taken together, kakistocracy quite literally translates to the worst government.

Reid’s tweet was published on June 29th, 2017, a date in which kakistocracy was indeed helpful in contextualizing the day’s news. Some highlights from the day—other than [the sale of an original R2-D2 model used in the *Star Wars* films for a whopping \\$2.76 million](#)—included the passage of the second



Joy Reid

@JoyAnnReid

Follow

Look up the definition of “kakistocracy” today, my fellow Americans. Things will make much more sense.

6:48 AM - 29 Jun 2017

3,704 Retweets 8,052 Likes



775 3.7K 8.1K

watered-down iteration of the travel ban. This action barred people from Libya, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Iran, and Somalia from entering the country without proof of “a credible claim of a bona fide relationship” with a person, job, or educational institution in the United States as well as the passage of two bills aimed at targeting undocumented immigrants. One of these bills, titled “Kate’s Law,” increased criminal penalties for undocumented immigrants previously convicted of crimes in the United States; the second, titled the “No Sanctuary for Criminals Act,” allowed for the withdrawal of federal funding to sanctuary cities, those which do not actively comply with the federal government in their enforcement of immigration laws.

These controversial immigration laws and others that have since been passed by the administration, along with the overall erratic behavior of the man in charge, must call into question why, upon Reid’s tweeting, the

Google searches spiked—and why this word resonated with so many. Perhaps it is the often flagrant dismissal of the conventions of our democracy (a meaningful or at least respectful relationship with the media, alleged collusions with foreign governments, the almost comical turnover of staff members, and the use of Twitter to disseminate thoughts, just to name a few); perhaps it is the type of legislation being advocated for and passed, much of which strips rights from those who already have little power (the work to further defund Planned Parenthood, public radio, and the arts, to revoke Obamacare and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), just to name a few); perhaps it is even what is not being said, or the latency to take what seems to be the obvious, just side (the lack of ability to disavow white supremacist groups and their support, for example). Perhaps this is a kakistocracy for most people because most of us believe that those in power are indeed “the worst persons.”

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Culture Corner | Television review: The Defiant Ones (HBO documentary)

BERNIE LANGS



PHOTO COURTESY OF HBO

Jimmy Iovine and Dr. Dre, featured in HBO's documentary "The Defiant Ones"

The HBO television network changed the landscape of TV programming for the better and for many years has offered innovative, well-written, and imaginative shows and documentaries that leave the cliché plagued series of the established networks in the dust. Its latest triumph is *The Defiant Ones*, a four-part documentary series, directed by Allen Hughes, covering the long careers of former music producer turned music mogul, Jimmy Iovine, and rapper, Andre Romelle Young, better known as Dr. Dre.

In his book series, *Parallel Lives* written in the second century AD, the historian Plutarch gives a biography of a Roman politician, general, or famous, personality and offers a corresponding history of someone from ancient Greece in an effort to expose their moral and ethical similarities, and examine their triumphs and failures in tandem. In *The Defiant Ones*, we similarly get a rendering of two men from extremely different backgrounds, but unlike those written about by Plutarch, these two lives eventually come together and intersect in the most unexpected ways. What stands out to me as the defining parallel quality of both men, each of whom approach music and its industry from different vantage points, is their unflagging commitment to artistry, stripped away from any monetary or social gain. Both have unrelenting pure visions of what com-

prises great music and neither is willing to compromise their ideals, often risking ruin to hold fast to their creative principles.

The series offers incredible footage and photographs from the early careers of both Iovine and Dr. Dre, and Allen Hughes was able to procure interviews with many of the main players throughout their lives, including Tom Petty, Bruce Springsteen, Bono, Pattie Smith, Stevie Nicks, and Trent Reznor for Iovine, and rappers such as Ice Cube, Sean Combs, Eminem, and Snoop Dogg for Dr. Dre. A host of behind-the-scenes music industry executives and business managers as well as friends and family also weigh in on the parts they played in this incredible musical odyssey. It is striking that all of the famous Rock 'N' Roll and pop personalities come across as genuine and emotional in describing how Iovine has one relentless, driving mission in his intersection with them: to find a way for them to best realize their artistic vision and get their work out to as many people as possible so that their audiences think about their work and enjoy it. The number of artists Iovine discovered and directed to success is astounding.

I am less familiar with the work of Dr. Dre and know much of his history from news stories here and there, from such films as *Straight Outta Compton*. *Compton* is a undeniably a great movie, but Dr. Dre's story, as

told in *The Defiant Ones*, actually inspired me as a composer and musician and in my modest efforts in music recording. Dr. Dre is a perfectionist in the recording studio, demanding and expecting excellence from himself and the artists he works with. I have to admit that I've never cared for rap or hip-hop, but on occasion I do see the art and beauty of it, especially in terms of its production values. There is an early film montage of Dr. Dre, pre-fame, masterfully DJing in his native Compton area, where he plays the classic girl group song "Mr. Postman." I never liked or appreciated that sound before, but he does it not only to perfection, but with obvious respect for the original recording. It was that very show that launched Dr. Dre's start in the business, since the club owner booked him for future gigs.

In Plutarch's *Lives*, there are examples of famous Romans and Greeks who either fell as victims of their character flaws or triumphed over them. *Straight Outta Compton* glossed over Dr. Dre's history of violence with women, but it is depicted in *The Defiant Ones*. It was interesting to see Dee Barnes, a hip-hop journalist, interviewed as an authority on the rap history timeline and then revealed to be one of the women who were assaulted by Dr. Dre in the past. Although Dr. Dre apologized at length for his past horrific actions, having realized it was something terrible that he had

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CONTINUED FROM P. 2

done and that he will always have to live with, viewers will certainly take note of his past pattern of inexcusable and downright awful, violent behavior. Iovine also struggled with how he handled the escalation of violence between East and West Coast rap recording artists, many of whom were tied to him and Dr. Dre. At its worst, the violence actually descended into murder. There are incredible interviews at this point in the series with Sean Combs and Snoop Dogg that are emotional and chilling, and the story of Tupac Shakur's demise is recounted in depth.

One of the great anecdotes in the series describes the origin of the wildly popular Beats by Dre. After his divorce, Iovine felt lost and was floundering as he wandered on a beach one afternoon when Dr. Dre saw him from his balcony and waved for him to come up for a chat. Dr. Dre explained to Iovine that he was getting approached for endorsements but didn't want to cheaply put his name on sneakers, etc. Iovine brilliantly suggests designing headphones with high-quality sound, an idea that would be right up

Dr. Dre's alley. They went on to found Beats Electronics in 2006, and after carefully crafting and tastefully marketing their product, which was sold to Apple in 2014 for \$3 billion. In May 2013, they donated a \$70 million endowment to the University of Southern California to create the USC Jimmy Iovine and Andre Young Academy for Arts, Technology, and the Business of Innovation.

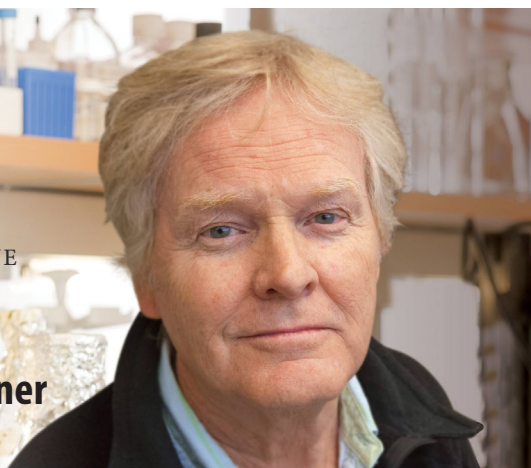
Throughout their extensive interviews in the show, Dr. Dre and Iovine never come across in with them in the show as pretentious or egotistically struck by their own success or stardom; Iovine has great comedic timing. I've always found Dr. Dre to be a brooding, soulful presence and though he has a lot of screen time in this series, he retains an air of mystery, professionalism, and magic. There is a fantastic shot of him in part four of the series where he hovers like a Zen master over a huge recording studio console.

The Defiant Ones inspires one to stay true to oneself and to one's vision of life, whether it be as an artist or just in retaining a set of uncompromising positive values and to remain steadfast when these values are challenged.



2017 NOBEL PRIZE
IN
PHYSIOLOGY OR MEDICINE

**Natural Selections
Salutes Nobel Prize Winner
Mike Young!**



The Nobel Committee has awarded Professor Michael W. Young the 2017 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine on October 2. Together with Jeffrey C. Hall and Michael Rosbash, professor Young has made an outstanding contribution unravelling how the circadian clock anticipates and adapts our physiology to the different phases of the day.

Michael W. Young is the 25th scientist associated with Rockefeller to receive the highest accolade in science.

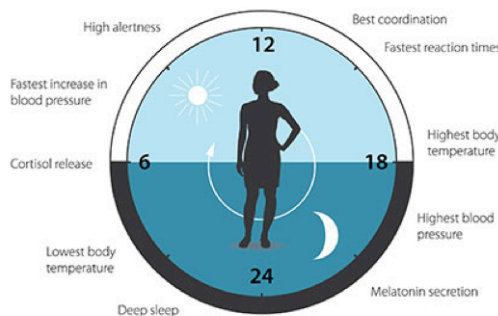


PHOTO COURTESY OF **NOBELPRIZE.ORG**

Our biological clock helps to regulate sleep patterns, feeding behavior, hormone release, blood pressure, and body temperature.

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New York State of Mind

This month Natural Selections interviews Kipchirchir Bitok, Postdoctoral Associate.

INTERVIEW BY GUADALUPE ASTORGA



How long have you been living in the New York area?

Five years now.

Where do you currently live? Which is your favorite neighborhood?

I first moved to Brooklyn before I came to

the Rockefeller housing. I like the Upper East Side, because it's convenient to go to work, I can go running to the Central Park and the East River esplanade, Randall's Island, even Brooklyn. You also have access to several subway lines, so it's very convenient.

What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated?

Overrated, I think is the subway. It's always crowded and delayed. I like the Citi Bikes over the subways. Underrated, the diversity of the city, there's people from all over the world, and a great variety of food. I really enjoy meeting people from far countries.

What do you miss most when you are out of town?

Even if I think the subway is overrated, I miss it when I'm out of town. When I go to a city without a subway I really miss it.

Has anything (negative or positive) changed about you since you became one of us "New Yorkers"?

Not really, I can't think of anything negative or positive that has changed. I thought I wouldn't like the city because it would be overwhelming. But, I really like it now, and I

know how to navigate the jungle, so that's positive.

If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be?

Pay fewer taxes. I feel I pay too much in taxes and get little out of it.

What is your favorite weekend activity in NYC?

I like finding hidden places with delicious food, I like to walk around different places, do my groceries. I like to run on bridges all around the city. I also enjoy getting out of the city and to go hiking.

What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC?

When my parents came, I enjoyed showing them the city and watching their surprise was a great experience.

Bike, MTA or WALK IT???

Run!

If you could live anywhere else, where might that be?

I would live outside the city. I like the area of Mountain Lake, upstate. The city can be overwhelming.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Nothing in the world is as soft and yielding as water. Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible, nothing can surpass it. The soft overcomes the hard; the gentle overcomes the rigid. Everyone knows this is true, but few can put it into practice.

Tao Te Ching, c. 6th century BC

Life on a Roll

The Old City of Quebec

QIONG WANG

Quebec is an authentic city of rich history, vibrant art, and French culture. It was my first visit to this old city, and I was pleasantly impressed. Quebec means “the narrowing of the river” and in this case it refers to the Saint Lawrence River. Its geographic heritage endows the city with its strategic significance in wars and economy. The entire old city is a UNESCO heritage listed site. The only fortified city wall in North America is preserved in Quebec.

Apart from French being spoken and written everywhere, the characteristic that struck me most is the rich art element infused in every detail of the city: from the landmark Le Chateau Frontenac to a vast painting on the side of a building, from restaurants to galleries, and from sculptures to street signs.

