

# Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY



## Memories of the Golden State

OWEN CLARK

Armed with a DSLR camera, travel guitar, two Haight and Ashbury-acquired shawl-cardigans, and three of my oldest friends, I left the perpetual fog of the San Francisco Bay.

Having played out the scene a thousand times in my head, I had romanticized the drive down California's scenic Pacific Coast Highway to levels approaching cliché. But despite trading the flashy convertibles of Entourage's Vincent Chase or Californication's Hank Moody for a grey Hyundai Sonata rental car, it still failed to disappoint. Practically every bend on that winding road greeted me with a stunning scene of pure, rugged beauty. California's jagged cliffs are lined with earthy hues of bright red and orange, while each inlet of the vast Pacific Ocean contains a perfectly balanced array of turquoise and green pastels that one might have found on Winslow Homer's palette.

Despite navigating hairpin turns surrounded by 300-foot drops under cover of total darkness, we made it safely to Big Sur. My friends liked to joke that being the obsessive ball of neuroses that I am, I had already lived out the entire trip through the lens of professional photographers on Instagram prior to leaving, and was only in for disappointment at the real sights. The reality was the opposite—I couldn't shut up about how gorgeous it all was. Warming my hands with a dawn-break coffee on the porch of our log cabin surrounded by towering redwoods; driving up-and-down the coastline in search of that perfect photo; soaking up the previously elusive sun on the picturesque Pfeiffer Beach; capping off the day with fireside beers: everything just seemed to fall perfectly into place. Fitting on a day when one of my travel companions and I woke up to the bizarrely coincidental news that we had both become uncles overnight.



A smokestack towers above Mono Lake.

Though I had fallen in love with the California coast, we had to move on to the next stop on our long list. After stocking up on instant noodles and mac-and-cheese ahead of our first foray into camping, we headed out across the eerie plains of middle California's desert to the iconic Yosemite National Park. Having spent several hours driving down deserted roads, where the only sites of interest were dust devils and "Another Farmer for Trump" billboards, the granite rock formations of the Yosemite Valley were a welcome treat. As with many experiences, a departure from the beaten path yields the most satisfaction. I had that feeling in mind when I raced up 200 feet of granite rock face to capture the stunning panorama of Upper Cathedral Lake and the peaks beyond, away from the day tourist Valley crowds, in the

Tuolumne Meadows area of the park. After returning to my friends relaxing by the lake, we were instantly rewarded by the photo gods, with the arrival of an actual cowboy, actually leading his horses to water.

Keeping with the Western theme, we left Yosemite the next morning in search of gold. Well aware that the California gold rush had ended a good century ago, we thought we would give it a try anyway. After a quick stop off at the saline Mono Lake Tufa (as pretty as it was smelly), we navigated the three miles of bumpy dirt track leading to the historic High Sierra ghost town of Bodie. Blazing heat, dried-out long grass, corrugated iron shacks, a chapel, a school, a saloon; it was something straight out of a

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All Photos by OWEN CLARK/NATURAL SELECTIONS



The famous Bixby Bridge at Big Sur.

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video game. Though saintly patience was required for the authentic ghost town shot (i.e., minus groups of dawdling tourists) it was quite the experience. Once again our departure yielded an instant photographic gift. There aren't many days where you experience awe-inspiring natural phenomena while blasting Chris Brown's "Forever" from your car stereo, but this was one of them. As a blues guitarist, I was familiar with Howlin' Wolf's classic "Smokestack Lightnin'," but like many I had absolutely no idea what it meant. We had been monitoring a strange cloud throughout the day that was now towering above the distant Mono Lake and Yosemite, resembling the mushroom clouds of the early atomic bomb tests. As I proceeded to photograph/Snapchat away, a professional nature enthusiast informed me that a distant forest fire had generated enough smoke to form an entire cumulus cloud (smokestack) that then created enough thermal pressure to produce lightning! Touché nature, touché.

After a thrilling journey spent playing a profession guessing game through the twisty, scenic High Sierra roads and the strange casino-and-gun-shop lined small towns of Nevada, we arrived at our next major destination: Lake Tahoe. The relatively palatial luxuries of South Lake Tahoe were a welcome retreat from the cruel realities of nature that we had just experienced (camping), and we took advantage of the flowing booze and ubiquitous live music to try something that we hadn't really done all trip—relaxing. Stock images of Lake Tahoe always show someone diving into its crystal blue waters and this was a real bucket list item for me. I managed to get a near perfect dive on video despite a throbbing gin and tonic-induced headache. Definitely worth it for those two likes on Facebook.

That night I stayed off the booze in anticipation of what would be one of the biggest highlights of the trip: mountain biking the world famous Flume Trail. I had



High Sierra ghost town Bodie.



Secret Cove, Lake Tahoe.

seen YouTube videos of this classic, but like many things on the trip nothing could truly prepare me for the extreme multisensory experience of engaging in an adrenaline-pumping ride coupled with stunning 360 degree views 8,000 feet above the banks of a 200-square mile lake.

Sad to leave, we departed Lake Tahoe the next morning, down a winding mountain pass that led to the golden hills of Napa Valley. Navigating hectic Highway 1 back to San Francisco was a stark reminder that we were back to civilization. With my friends headed back to my homeland of England, I sat alone at the airport gate, waiting for my delayed flight, looking back over my many images of stunning landscapes and wild animals, and dreaming of my next adventure in this vast land.

**Natural Selections**  
Editorial

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Upper Cathedral Lake, Yosemite National Park.



Mountain biking the Flume Trail, Lake Tahoe.



A cowboy rides the dusty trail, Yosemite National Park.

# Creating Unnecessary Addictions in our Kids

GUADALUPE ASTORGA

When my younger brother was a child, he had a hard time following the teacher's instructions at school. He was not intellectually incapable, but a restless and vivacious youngster. When the teachers found themselves unable to create any method to capture the interest and attention of this little creature, he was evaluated by a psychiatrist. The result was categorical—he was one of the unfortunate kids diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). My mother had to choose between dealing with a lively child or having to medicate him with psychostimulants such as amphetamines. The risk behind these drugs is not only that they do not improve learning abilities or memory, but essentially that they cause strong addiction, psychosis, heart attacks, dysfunction of heart tissue, and even sudden death.

While brain disorders affect as many as one out of every five people, over-diagnosis boosts these numbers due to the lack of specific biological markers in the field, resulting in millions of people over-medicated with antipsychotics, psychostimulants, pain relievers, and tranquilizers.

Particularly alarming is the dramatic increase in antipsychotic prescriptions in children under eighteen, including infants between one and two years old. Stimulants like amphetamines are chronically prescribed to adults, children, and toddlers diagnosed with ADHD in order to improve their concentration capabilities. But, why obsess over a toddler's concentration? Do they need to be under the effect of one of the most addictive and destructive drugs to receive love and adequate boundaries as they grow up?

For a kid that is constantly bombarded with excessive information, duties and activities, focusing is not trivial. When I was a child (and that now feels like a long time ago), children had tons of free time to play and socialize with other kids, to struggle with their homework, to develop their creativity by building new toys from old pieces of wood or cardboard, and to think about the failures and victories in their hitherto short lives. Nowadays, modern society has brought technology deeply into our intimate spaces, even those of children. Surrounded by tons of



Modified from Dr Case/ **Kid Image CC**

electronic devices, video games, and TV shows, kids no longer struggle to create their own entertainment, they are constantly bombarded with more information than they can assimilate, and they don't have time to get bored. If we also consider that couples are having babies at older ages, often helped by fertility treatments, the scene looks very scary, with kids being a precious trophy that must be protected at any price. This is a well-known psychosocial phenomenon known as "helicopter parents", middle class couples that behave in an over-protective way, hovering above their kids at every moment, making them insecure, anxious, highly dependent and depressed.

We should ask ourselves as a society, as a health care and educational community, whether this form of parenting is responsible for the high levels of anxiety, depression and attention deficits shown by our children. How can we justify giving psychostimulant medication, such as Adderall or Ritalin, to toddlers? These drugs will not increase their learning capabilities, nor their memory capacities. Isn't this a case where the remedy is worse than the disease?

Before prescribing a stimulant drug to a toddler or a child, we must be aware of their psychosocial environment and ask ourselves whether chronic medication is going to make their lives better.

## Culture Corner

### *Blood Diamond* and the Epic Death of Danny Archer

BERNIE LANGS

Caution: spoilers ahead

In the fabulous comedy *Shakespeare in Love*, Queen Elizabeth boldly sets a wager to her obsequious courtiers: “Can a play show us the very truth and nature of love?” I’ve been wondering about a similar notion: Can a contemporary film show us the essence of human tragedy in the epic sense of the word?

Sometimes in the evening, I roll around through the cable stations on television and particular films grab my attention again and again. There are movies I’ve seen at least a dozen times and a great number I’ve viewed portions of 20 or 30 times. Recently, I’ve found myself transfixed with several films starring Leonardo DiCaprio, including *The Aviator*, *The Departed*, and *Inception*. DiCaprio also won an Oscar this year for *The Revenant*, a movie that in itself is a remarkable, stunning achievement.

But it is DiCaprio’s performance as Danny Archer in the 2006 film *Blood Diamond* that I find most fascinating. *Blood Diamond* is like no other movie I’ve ever seen and Archer is a unique, stand out character, with his strong Rhodesian accent, mannerisms, and mindset. *Blood Diamond* takes place in 1999 during the horrific unrest in Sierra Leone, and the title refers to the mined conflict diamonds illegally financing the combatants while enriching foreign companies that go on to sell the goods around the world. Jennifer Connelly portrays Maddy Bowen, a journalist set on exposing the trade in hopes of stemming it, and it is her efforts that show the modern audience how complicit we could be in the crime if anyone who innocently buys diamonds for a necklace, earrings, or engagement ring turns away blindly from knowing the terrible, often murderous source of the stone.

The movie’s plot centers on a poor fisherman, Solomon Vandy (played by Oscar-nominated Djimon Hounsou) whose young son is captured by the crazed Revolutionary United Front and forced to be a child soldier for their rampaging cause. Solomon is coerced to mine diamonds by the group and secretly, far out in a stream in the wilds, comes across an enormous, priceless stone which he conceals. In the meantime, Archer is a diamond smuggler working secretly with a large South African mining company and is a gunrunner for the fighting factions as well. He has formerly been trained as a soldier by the Afrikaner Colonel Coetzee (Arnold Vosloo) and works with the Colonel’s

smuggling efforts to get stones to Liberia and then, through a complex series of transactions, on to the European and American markets. Archer learns that Solomon, now freed from his slavery, has hidden the diamond deep in the country’s interior, and they team together (and for a danger-filled time, with the journalist, Maddy Bowen) to retrieve both Solomon’s son and the stone.

Archer has witnessed a lifetime of the terrors of war and violence, including the brutal murder of his parents as a child. He and Colonel Coetzee are as hard and tough as any man can be, their emotional dictionaries long shut after participating in years of battles, but bent now only on making their personal profit and, for the Colonel, managing wars in Africa for power and gain. When the lives of Bowen and Archer intersect, she is able to slowly bring him to a state of empathy for the long trail of innocent victims of war and to fully comprehend the horrors in Sierra Leone. Archer especially learns to feel for what Solomon is seeking in regaining his son and how willing Solomon is to risk death in the slim hope of reuniting his family.

Colonel Coetzee, when meeting Archer on the Colonel’s massive South African property, tells Archer that he must find the huge diamond and hand it over to compensate him for a deal gone bad. Archer notes that he wants to take Solomon’s stone to make his way out of Africa, as his ticket “off of this God-forsaken continent.” In a moment of intense drama, the Colonel has Archer crouch down on his farmland and as he runs a reddish soil through his hands, explains to him that its crimson tint is said to come from the area’s long history of bloodshed. He tells Archer to face that he’ll never leave Africa. Archer squints in resignation, and feigns acquiescence, saying, “If you say so, Colonel, if you say so.”

After much soul-searching and bloodshed, Danny and Solomon locate the diamond amid the rebel stronghold and retrieve Solomon’s son. The Colonel, who with his mercenaries, attempted to take the stone by murdering Archer and Solomon, is killed when shot by Archer, but not before firing a bullet into Archer’s abdomen. This is where we begin to find the essence of a modern tragedy.

The many camera shots of Africa shown in *Blood Diamond* are stunning, leading one to wonder how such a place so different from America could exist on the same planet, just a plane ride away.

As Solomon, his son and Archer flee the retaliating soldiers of the late Colonel in this lush landscape, Danny’s wound begins to incapacitate him. As they climb a steep plateau towards an airstrip atop of which Archer’s partner in stealing the diamond will soon be landing a small aircraft, Solomon is tasked with carrying Archer on his back towards the summit.

At one point during their desperate ascent, Archer demands that Solomon put him down and explains that he’ll fend off the approaching soldiers as Solomon and his son race to the plane and to safety. The final exchange between Archer and the African tribesman, Solomon, is one that can move the viewer to tears, and includes a laugh between them on how they both knew that Archer might just as well have stolen the huge diamond. Solomon and his son make it to safety and Archer is left leaning against a large rock, bleeding out. He takes a moment to use his army communications phone to call Maddy Bowen, now in Europe, and charge her with writing the exposé of the blood diamond in Solomon’s possession, and to see to the release of the rest of Solomon’s family being held in a massive internment camp.

The love that had been growing between Danny and Maddy hits its peak as she realizes that he is doomed. Her final words to him: “I wish I could be with you,” to which he replies gazing out at the beautiful sight of Africa, “it’s alright, I’m exactly where I should be.”

Archer grabs some soil, the blood running off his hand to mix with the dirt, fulfilling the Colonel’s prophecy that Danny would never leave Africa and that very ground of the continent is mixed with the blood spilled over its riches, in the name of colonialism, and through tribal hatred. We last see Archer leaning against the rock, head tilted to the right, as the camera pulls away to expose the beautiful land with its one tragic son. Danny has come to know the love between a father and son, and the love of a woman who, although American, is very much akin to him. His heroic death is not in the vein of ancient tragedy, where a strong-headed king gets his comeuppance while the chorus weeps and wails, tearing their garments. Danny dies in the bright light of the lush African wild content from having learnt more about life and love than he could ever have believed was within himself and that his compatriots on the dangerous journey, are righteous, good, and set to change the world for the better.

## For Your Consideration

### Ones to Watch, Vol. 3 Edition

JIM KELLER

As laid out in last year's column, the Best Supporting Actor and Actress races are extremely unpredictable. Just take a look at the outcomes below in comparison to what was discussed to see for yourself. It is for this reason that I have chosen to keep the format adopted last year for this edition instead of laying out each actor's accomplishments and why I would, or would not, bet on them for a nomination, I have broken down the different circumstances these actors find themselves in and how that narrative may or may not ultimately influence Oscar voters. Various critics groups, including The New York Film Critics Circle (NYFCC), the National Board of Review (NBR), and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association (LAFCA) have announced their respective winners and The Broadcast Film Critics Association (BFCA) has announced its nominees. These events help to form a consensus of Oscar nominees and make the acting categories all the more clearer as we approach nominations on January 24th. Together with nomination announcements from the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (Golden Globes), these announcements signal the start of the Oscar race's second leg.

#### ~THE GENTS~

##### Last Year's Best Supporting Actor Results:

Mark Ruffalo and Michael Keaton — *Spotlight*: Both were nominated, but the latter in lead (due to category fraud).

Robert De Niro and Bradley Cooper — *Joy*: Neither were nominated because the film tanked with critics.

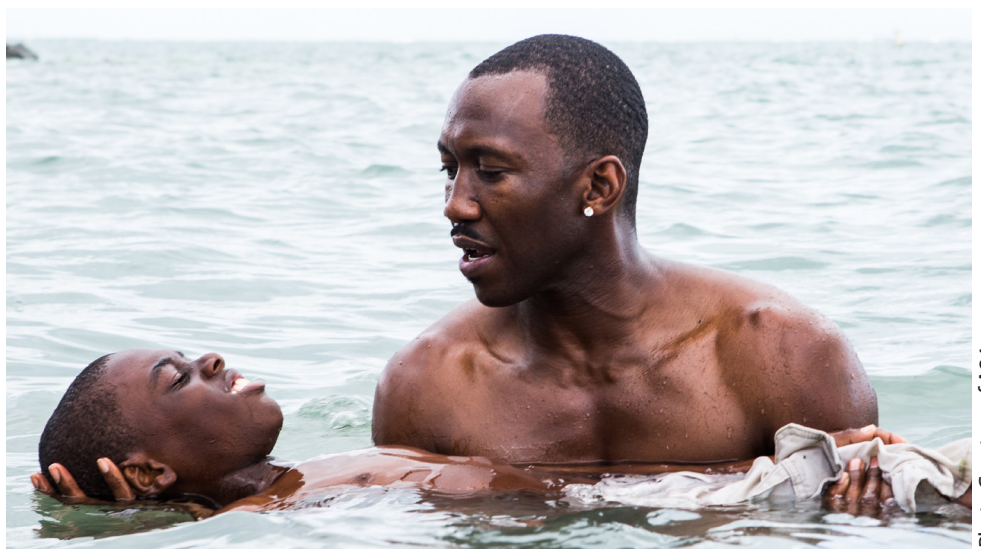
Mark Rylance — *Bridge of Spies*: Nominated and won.

Tom Hardy — *The Revenant*: Nominated

Idris Elba — *Beasts of No Nation*: Not nominated. Hollywood proved just how scared it was of streaming services by snubbing the film entirely.

Last year's fourth nominee was Sylvester Stallone for *Creed*, a film that saw its release after completion of this column. For many, Stallone became the frontrunner, and while the Hollywood Foreign Press, the BFCA, and the NBR dressed him up with their awards, Hollywood turned its back on Oscar night.

This leaves our last nominee, Christian Bale for *The Big Short*. Like *Creed*, the film wasn't



Mahershala Ali in *Moonlight* (2016)

Photo Courtesy of A24

released until after the completion of this column. However, of the film's sprawling ensemble, Bale's is the one that awards groups rallied around and he completed the all white acting category.

The results show that by the same time last year, it was pretty easy to determine more than half of the actors in supporting roles that would go on to be nominated by the Academy.

Before we delve into this year's contender list, allow me to refresh your memory regarding the supporting actor and actress races:

Two for one: The same film can often have multiple supporting nominees. The precedent was set back in both supporting categories in 1939 when Hattie McDaniel competed against Olivia de Havilland for *Gone with the Wind* and Harry Carey and Claud Rains were nominated for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. This has occurred 29 times for the ladies and only 16 times for the men in the 88 years of the Academy Awards' existence. The phenomenon last occurred in Supporting Actor for 1991's *Bugsy*, when Harvey Keitel and Ben Kingsley were nominated and in Supporting Actress for 2011's *The Help*, which yielded a win for Octavia Spencer and a nod for Jessica Chastain.

*Ride Along*: A Best Picture nomination can often yield supporting nominations for the film's actors, e.g., Rachel McAdams in *Spotlight*.

**Category fraud:** In years where there is an embarrassment of acting riches, Academy voters often nominate lead performances as supporting and vice versa to get the actor(s) a nomination. This year, this started early with Viola Davis and Dev Patel campaigning in the supporting category for their work in *Fences* and

*Lion*, respectively.

**Eyes on the newcomer:** Oscar voters will often rally around a newcomer and anoint them the prom king/queen, e.g., Alicia Vikander in *The Danish Girl*.

Here is a guide to the precursor awards that have already been awarded: BFCA (\*), LAFCA (\*), NBR (-), NYFCC (^). The symbols appear after the contender's name.

#### #OscarsSoWhite

Mahershala Ali (*Moonlight*) \*+ ^, Dev Patel (*Lion*)\*:

If you've paid any attention to this column, you know that the Academy's big problem for the past two years has been their inability to diversify the list of nominees in the major categories. The twenty slots that comprise the major acting categories have been filled by white nominees, which has been well-documented with the use of the #OscarsSoWhite on Twitter. Further, our nation has plunged into turmoil following a brutal election that saw the president-elect incite violence and hatred among his supporters and white supremacy dusted off, repackaged as "alt-right," and, most unforgivably, accepted as a trait of some of those shoved into the president-elect's cabinet. This latter point is poignant because this year is one where the zeitgeist could play an important part in determining who the Academy chooses to vote for. For my money, the Academy will choose to not only take the opportunity to address #OscarsSoWhite, but stand up to the normalizing of white supremacy in America. Take a look at the Academy's [move to increase membership](#) in January coupled with [the action it took in June](#), which represents a

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\* CONTINUED FROM P.5

7.5% membership increase. Enter *Moonlight*, one of the year's best reviewed films with a 99 [Metacritic](#) score and therefore, a serious Best Picture contender. The film chronicles the life of a young black man who struggles to find his place in the world while growing up in a rough Miami neighborhood. Like *Spotlight* last year, it has already won the Gotham Jury Award for Ensemble Performance at this year's Gotham Awards

and, with a slew of BFCA and Independent Spirit Award nominations under its belt, looks be a strong player this Oscar season. Because the film is a true ensemble piece, with Alex Hibbert, Ashton Sanders, and Trevante Rhodes all playing the same character through different stages of his life, it's difficult to pinpoint a lead. The result is that all of the actors inhabit supporting roles. Unfortunately, as brilliant as their performances are, actors from the same film can cancel themselves out in the Oscar race, leaving room for only one to get awards attention. For *Moonlight*, that is Ali's drug dealer come father figure Juan, who provides Hibbert's Little with a foundation to build on, thereby acting as a shining beacon of hope for the young boy. Ali, who was nominated for a Primetime Emmy award for his supporting role in Netflix's *House of Cards*, is a newcomer to the Oscar conversation, but is the frontrunner after the precursor announcements to date. Combine that with the Academy's goal to beat back #OscarsSoWhite, and you have a path to victory.

With Patel's work in *Lion* also catching a bump from the precursor awards, it's comforting that Ali isn't the sole chance for a person of color to be nominated. The film recounts the true story of a five-year-old Indian boy (Patel) who was lost on the streets of Calcutta and survived many challenges before being adopted by a couple in Australia; 25 years later, he set out to find his lost family. Patel, who is British but of Indian descent, first came on the scene through his work in 2008's *Slumdog Millionaire*, which earned him a best supporting actor SAG nomination and a best actor BAFTA nomination. He also won the Best Young Actor/Actress (Under 21) BFCA award in 2009 for the role. *Lion* premiered at this year's Toronto International Film Festival, where it was first runner up for the People's Choice award. It earned six BFCA nominations, including Best Picture and is on many pundits' lips for Best Picture. If it gets in, Patel could follow.

Wanted: White Male Supporting Performances



Photo Courtesy of FOCUS FEATURES

Michael Shannon in *Nocturnal Animals* (2016)

Lucas Hedges (*Manchester by the Sea*) \* and Michael Shannon (*Nocturnal Animals*) \*: With only 14 acting credits to date, you're probably unfamiliar with Hedges. Maybe you saw him in the background of either of Wes Anderson's last films, *Moonrise Kingdom* or *The Grand Budapest Hotel*? Perhaps you glimpsed him in *Labor Day*, or *The Zero Theorem*? Outside of those films, sightings of Hedges are slim pickins. That is about to change: countless pundits have raved about his performance in Kenneth Lonergan's latest concerning an uncle (Casey Affleck) who is forced to take care of his nephew (Hedges) when the teenager's father dies. Even though Hedges film is a Best Picture contender (as evidenced by its eight BFCA nominations, including Best Picture), young actors are often not given the same amount of weight as adults in the Oscar race. So even if #OscarsSoWhite were to rear its ugly head again, Hedges would face a steep climb.

Unlike Hedges, who will likely benefit from a Best Picture nomination, Shannon stands to be the sole nomination for *Nocturnal Animals* in the major categories. Not only does he deliver a nuanced performance as Detective Bobby Andes in Tom Ford's second film, but his performances over the years have been consistent in caliber. Shannon was nominated in 2009 for his supporting role in *Revolutionary Road* and has been in the Oscar mix ever since. On paper, with one nomination under his belt, Shannon has the strongest probability for a win, but critic response to the film has been divisive, which is never good in the Oscar race. It's worth mentioning that Ford's first film *A Single Man* racked up a best actor nomina-

tion for its star Colin Firth. Still, last year four out of five supporting actor nominations were accompanied by a Best Picture nomination. Because this isn't a likely path for *Nocturnal Animals*, you can do the math.

#### Old Favorites

Jeff Bridges (*Hell or High Water*) \*: Although Bridges is also white, I chose to separate him out for some contrast. The actor plays a Texas Ranger hot on the heels of two brothers (Chris Pine and Ben Foster) who set off a desperate bank robbery scheme to save their family's ranch. The film is a surprising Best Picture contender and recently earned six BFCA nominations, including Best Picture. Bridges has a long and storied history with the Academy that began in 1972 with a nomination for Best Supporting Actor for *The Last Picture Show* and continues to this day.

He has three Best Supporting Actor and three Best Actor nominations, including a Best Actor win for *Crazy Heart* in 2010. Bridges was last nominated for Best Actor in 2011 for *True Grit*. Given his high profile with the Academy, I would count on him taking one of the five slots, and if there is any wiggle room, he could unseat Ali.

Other considerations: If Martin Scorsese's *Silence* becomes a Best Picture nominee, look for the film to pull along Liam Neeson. If Academy voters remember the first half of the year, Ralph Fiennes performance in *A Bigger Splash* might spark with them.

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~THE LADIES~

Last Year's Best Supporting Actress Race Results:

- Rooney Mara – Carol: Nominated
- Alicia Vikander – The Danish Girl: Nominated and won
- Kate Winslet – Steve Jobs: Nominated
- Jane Fonda – Youth: Not nominated
- Jennifer Jason Leigh – The Hatefule Eight: Nominated

Last year's fifth nominee was Rachel McAdams for *Spotlight*, the lone female nominee for the eventual Best Picture winner, and a classic example of ride along when she did next to nothing throughout the film.

The results illustrate that by the same time last year, it was pretty easy to determine almost all of the actresses that would make up the eventual supporting actress nominees.

**Two Birds, One Stone**  
**Viola Davis (Fences) \*:**

Going back to the Academy's objective this year, Davis not only stands the biggest chance for a nomination because her role is really a leading role (see last year's winner Vikander whose role was just as meaty), but she is the frontrunner. Back in 2008, Davis burst out on the Oscar scene with her searing Oscar nominated supporting performance in *Doubt*. Davis was last nominated in 2012 for *The Help* alongside Meryl Streep who was campaigning for her third Oscar for her leading role in *The Iron Lady*. Streep famously won that year after a neck and neck season. It was the only year that I bet against Streep, and I, like many others, learned to never bet against her. Afterward, Davis found success starring in ABC's *How to Get Away with Murder*. Between 2015 and 2016 the role netted her back-to-back SAG wins for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Drama Series, as well as Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series – Drama Golden Globe nominations, and a Primetime Emmy Award in 2015 for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series. Now, Davis returns with a stock of hardware that includes a Tony Award for playing the same role on Broadway in 2010, and this time Streep is in the Best Actress race for *Florence Foster Jenkins* giving the Academy the opportunity to award Davis. Here's hoping!

**Old Favorites**

**Nicole Kidman (Lion) \*:** Kidman plays the adoptive mother of Patel's Saroo in this first

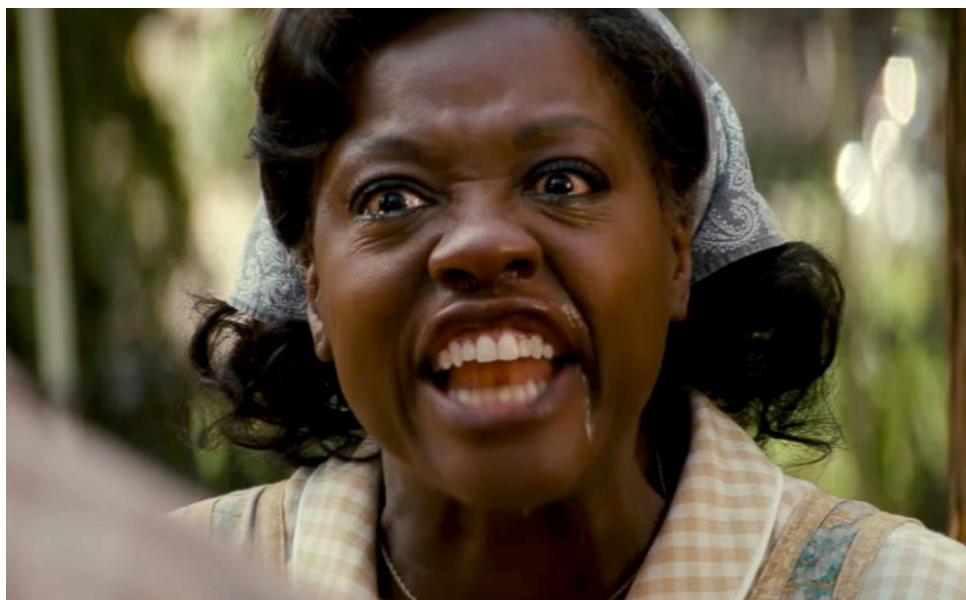


Photo Courtesy of PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Viola Davis in *Fences* (2015)

feature film from Garth Davies. Kidman was first nominated in 2001 for Best Actress in a Leading Role for *Moulin Rouge!*, and won the following year (by a nose, har har!) for *The Hours*. She was last nominated for Best Actress in 2011 for *Rabbit Hole*. Given her star power, she stands a very good chance of being nominated, but as with anyone, a much stronger one if her film lands a Best Picture nomination.

**Michelle Williams (Manchester by the Sea)**

**\*^:** Williams has three nominations under her belt: Best Supporting Actress for *Brokeback Mountain* in 2006 and Best Actress for *Blue Valentine* and *My Week with Marilyn*, in 2011 and 2012, respectively. She gives a wallop of a performance in *Manchester*, seriously, bring tissues. Some pundits have complained that Williams doesn't have nearly enough screen time in the film to warrant a nomination, but Beatrice Straight, who holds the record for the shortest amount of screen time: five minutes and two seconds of screen time, was only nominated for Best Supporting Actress for *Network* in 1977, but she won!

**Newcomers**

**Naomie Harris (Moonlight) \*~^:** The British actress won much acclaim for her role as the drug addled mother of *Moonlight*'s protagonist. Having previously been honored with BAFTA's rising star award in 2007, you can pencil her in the top five, for her star has most definitely risen.

**Janelle Monáe (Hidden Figures) \*:** Monáe is a Grammy nominated musician who made her acting debut this year, both in *Hidden Figures* and the aforementioned Best Picture contend-

er *Moonlight*. While she certainly struck a chord with critics, she may find herself on the outside of the top five come Oscar nomination morning.

**Greta Gerwig (20th Century Women \*):** Gerwig's leading role in *Frances Ha* earned her a Golden Globe nomination for Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture - Comedy or Musical and a BFCA nomination for Best Actress in a Comedy. These accolades give her a slight edge over Monáe, but anything can happen.

A number of other men could feature this year including Ben Foster in *Hell or High Water*, British heartthrob, Hugh Grant in *Florence Foster Jenkins*, and newcomers, Stephen Henderson and Jovan Adepo in *Fences*. For the ladies, other contenders include Molly Shannon for *Other People*, newcomer, Lily Gladstone for *Certain Women*, and Octavia Spencer for *Hidden Figures*.

Something to keep in mind: The Academy may nominate people of color, but until they start awarding them as well, #OscarsSoWhite should get comfy.

On a sincere note: I recognize that we are standing on the precipice of what could be a very dark time in our nation's history. I encourage everyone to build relationships with those with similar ideals and to remain vigilant. Remember to laugh, that it's OK to cry, and always share your voice. If you're afraid, remember that you're not alone and I stand with you. Together we will weather the storm and come out stronger because of it.

# Christmas Holidays in Italy

FRANCESCA CAVALLO

This is my favorite time of year. There are so many great aspects to the Christmas season: good food, good music, and the special traditions that come along with the “reason for the season.” Come experience and discover how Italians celebrate the holidays.

The Christmas atmosphere is really felt in the *Bel Paese* (beautiful country) since the holiday is one of the most important ones in my country. Although there are common traits, the magic of *Natale* (Christmas) is different all over the world. Christmas, for every Italian, is like Thanksgiving in the United States. It is a big family reunion that no longer reflects the symbolic religious tradition of the nativity, although many services still run on *Vigilia di Natale* (Christmas Eve). There is a famous phrase: “*Natale con i tuoi, Capodanno con chi vuoi*” (Christmas with yours [relatives], New Year’s Eve with whoever you want). Italians really feel the spirit from late November, but the Christmas season officially starts on December 8, the Day of Immaculate Conception. We decorate our homes and trees, bake cookies, wrap presents, and schools and offices are formally closed. From this day on, up to December 26, the holiday spirit grows. On many Italian streets decorations and huge Christmas trees are displayed, *presepi* (Nativity scenes) are placed outside for all to see, and the smell of chestnuts, wine, and Italian delicacies, is apparent on every corner. People hurry across the streets with lots of packages in their hands, *zampognari* (double chanter bagpipers) play Christmas melodies all around, and *Babbo Natale* (Santa Claus) gives candies to the children. *Natale* and *Vigilia di Natale* are observed in different ways all over the country, depending on where you are. Some Italians start celebrating with a nice dinner on December 24. My family and I prefer a light meal without meat and wait for a huge Christmas lunch the day after. However, the midnight Mass at the local church is a tradition from the North to the South. Afterward we *brindiamo* (make a toast) with a glass of *spumante* (Italian sparkling wine), a slice of *panettone* or *pandoro* (sweet treats), and open presents. When I was a child I was so excited by Santa’s arrival that I used to prepare a glass of milk, and place a slice of Christmas cake under the tree to thank *Babbo*



*Abbacchio al Forno (Roast Lamb with Potatoes)*

Photo Courtesy of Food52.com

*Natale* for the gifts.

The joy of this time reaches a fever pitch on December 25, which is a day for eating! This is the perfect occasion to meet up with your family, sit around the table almost all day long and enjoy good food. This happy and peaceful atmosphere lasts late into the evening, while households play board games, taste Italian delicacies and unwrap presents! On Christmas Day, the table abounds with different entrees: *insalata di mare* (seafood salad), types of *salami*, cured meats, and flat breads. The main course, depending on the region, consists of the famous *tortellini* in broth, *lasagna* or *pasticcio* (the amazing baked pasta prepared following grandma’s style), and lamb. Normally, after the main meal, a tasty variety of meat is served. Whatever the menu, all Italians cannot end their lunch without some famous Christmas treats: *pandoro* and *panettone*. The former is a traditional Veronese sweet yeast bread, whereas the latter is a tall sweet bread enriched with raisins and dried fruits, hailing from Lombardy. One of my favorite things is to add more sugar to my sweet meal, with *torrone* (classic Italian nougat), hazelnut chocolate, and homemade cookies.

December 26, *Santo Stefano Day*, is a national holiday in Italy, and obviously another occasion to gather with your loved ones and taste other homemade specialties, and sometimes the *Natale*’s leftovers. Celebrations are not over yet! After these three days of merrymaking, the next date

is December 31. This is another crazy opportunity to meet with friends and families and have a big party all night long. *Capodanno* (New Year’s Eve) normally starts late in the afternoon with the famous *aperitivo*, followed by a traditional big meal called *cenone* (big dinner), and the right party to welcome the new year! The day after, if you still have the energy and your stomach is up for more food, it’s time for another substantial lunch! If each Christmas meal differs from one family to another, each New Year’s Eve dinner is carefully thought out to serve the right food that promises to bring you luck, such as *cotechino* (pork sausage) *lenticchie* (lentils), and *uva* (grapes). January 1 is a day to relax, stay with the people you care about most, and have some traditional food and dessert.

As we approach the last day of the year, you may think that the holidays are over, but they are not. Christmastime in Italy is not complete until January 6, *giorno della Befana* (Epiphany Day). On this night, children wait for the *Befana*, who, according to Italian folklore, is an old witch-like woman who arrives on a broomstick, climbs down chimneys and fills kids’ stockings with sweets, chocolate, or a lump of coal for those who have been naughty. It is a story of the good witch versus the bad witch, depending on how you behaved during the past year. After her arrival, there are many parties and Italians go from home to local squares

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celebrating with family and friends. A famous sentence that marks an end to the holiday season is: “l’epifania tutte le feste si porta via” (Epiphany takes away all the holidays). We have to wait until Easter to celebrate again with family and friends.

I leave you with a typical Italian nursery rhyme that children will sing for “La Befana” and my preferred Christmas recipe: Roman Lamb.

Enjoy your holidays everybody!

Italian nursery rhyme:

La Befana vien di notte  
con le scarpe tutte rotte  
col cappello alla romana  
viva viva la Befana!

Translation:

The Befana comes at night  
wearing old broken shoes  
dressed in Roman (hat) style  
long live la Befana!

How to make Roman Lamb

Ingredients:

Rosemary potatoes and lamb  
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) extra virgin olive oil  
2 rosemary sprigs, each about 12 cm (4½ inches)  
8 garlic cloves, unpeeled  
1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) roasting potatoes, peeled and cut into 4 cm (1½ inch) cubes  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 kg (2 lb 4 oz) shoulder of spring lamb, bone in, cut into 2 cm (¾ inch) pieces (ask your butcher to do this)  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
6 sage leaves  
1 tablespoon plain (all-purpose) flour  
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) white wine vinegar  
6 anchovy fillets

Methods

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F/Gas 4). To make the rosemary potatoes, pour the olive oil into a large baking pan, add the rosemary, garlic and potato and toss to coat. Transfer to the middle shelf of the

oven and bake for 30 minutes. Turn the potatoes, sprinkle with sea salt and bake for a further 30 minutes, or until crisp and golden.

Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a heavy-based frying pan with a lid. Add the lamb and cook in batches over medium heat for 3-4 minutes, turning to brown all over.

Return the lamb to the pan and add the garlic, sage and rosemary. Season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, stir well and cook for 1 minute.

Using a small, fine sieve, dust the lamb with the flour, then cook for a further minute. Add the vinegar, simmer for 30 seconds, then add 250 ml (9 fl oz/1 cup) water. Cook, partially covered, over low heat for 50-60 minutes, or until the lamb is tender, adding a little more water if needed.

When the lamb is almost cooked, mash the anchovies to a paste with 1 tablespoon of the cooking liquid using a mortar and pestle. Add to the lamb and cook, uncovered, for a further 2 minutes. Serve immediately, with the rosemary potatoes.



## NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

This Month Natural Selections Features Stefannie Moak, Research Assistant, Gilbert Lab.

INTERVIEW BY GUADALUPE ASTORGA



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

Seven months now.

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

I live in the Upper East Side and my favorite neighborhood is SoHo.

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

The excess of urbanity and the convenience of the city.

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

The multicultural spaces and the Sunday brunch restaurants.

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

It has expanded my view in general about the diversity of people. There are people from every walk of life.

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

I would make people take a deep breath before their morning commute. It would be a better start to the day if everybody was less stressed.

**What is your favorite weekend activity in NYC?**

Playing ice hockey at Lasker Rink in Central Park.

**What is the most memorable experience you’ve had in NYC?**

Seeing my first Broadway show and watching Garth Brooks perform at Yankee Stadium.

**Bike, MTA or walk it?**

Definitely walk! You see so many more things.

**If you could live anywhere else, where would that be?**

I’m a Canadian so I’m biased, therefore I would like to try living in Vancouver.

**Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker?**

Maybe not yet, but getting there.

## Lesson 3

## New York City Dialect New York-ese

AILEEN MARSHALL

Hey, how ya doin? Or in other words, welcome back to our series on learning the New York City dialect. Hopefully by now, you have your ears trained to pick up more words you hear about town.

To recap last month's lesson, the G is dropped in words ending in "ing." Our vocabulary words were doin, callin, and walkin. Here are some more examples of them used in a sentence.

How are you doin? (a greeting)

I've been callin you for hours.

I wouldn't go walkin through Central Park at night.

Other examples of the dropped G are thing and building. Here are some examples of these words used in a sentence.

The only thin that doesn't belong on pizza is pineapple.

The Empire State Buildin used to be the tallest in the world.

This month's lesson:

The R is dropped from some words in New York City. It sounds more like an Ah or Aw sound.

Here are some examples of dropped R words used in a sentence. Some examples of these words are: beer, here, river, and morning. Click on the links to hear the pronunciation.

Get your beah heah. [\[Sound\]](#)

I am takin a rivah cruise up the Hudson. [\[Sound\]](#)

I only get the Times on Sunday mawnin. [\[Sound\]](#)

While learning the dialect of this great city, you might as well enjoy all it has to

offer. Visiting small neighborhood stores and restaurants in the outer boroughs is probably the best way to experience the language. The outer boroughs have a lot to offer. There is a zoo, and Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. There is a huge park in Queens, called Flushing Meadows. Queens also has Citi Field and Arthur Ashe Stadium. There is an aquarium, and the boardwalk at Coney Island in Brooklyn. One can take a ferry ride to Staten Island and see the Staten Island Yankees, the New York Yankee's farm team. This is just a small representation of attractions in the outer boroughs. Whenever you have the chance, take the subway past Manhattan and explore a neighborhood.

Watch next month for a lesson in the elongated A sound.



Photo from Wikipedia Commons



### Quotable Quote

"Where after all do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: the neighborhood we live in; the school or college we attend; the factory, farm or office where we work. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world".

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884 – 1962)

# Life on a Roll

Shaoxing—the Venice in the East

QIONG WANG



During my recent trip to China, Shaoxing was a pleasant surprise. The city sits nicely over a complex water canal system, woven together by stone bridges. Until today, local residents inside the old town often used canal water for their daily life activities. Just like Venice, man-powered gondolas are the only vehicles that could fit and roam in these narrow canals, mostly for tourist purposes. Shaoxing was the capital city of the Yue kingdom over 2,000 years ago. Many important historic scholars and important figures were born there or had resided there, which left an incredibly rich cultural heritage in and around the city. Shaoxing is also geographically convenient to get to, only one hour train ride from Shanghai and twenty minutes from Hangzhou. Don't miss it if you happen to be in the area.



# Crossward

GEORGE BARANY AND FRIENDS



The three politically themed puzzles that follow come to you from a consortium of progressively-minded friends of Rockefeller alum (1977) George Barany, who is currently on the faculty of the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Prepare to laugh and cry. For more information, including links to the answers, visit [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). More Barany and Friends crosswords can be found [here](#).

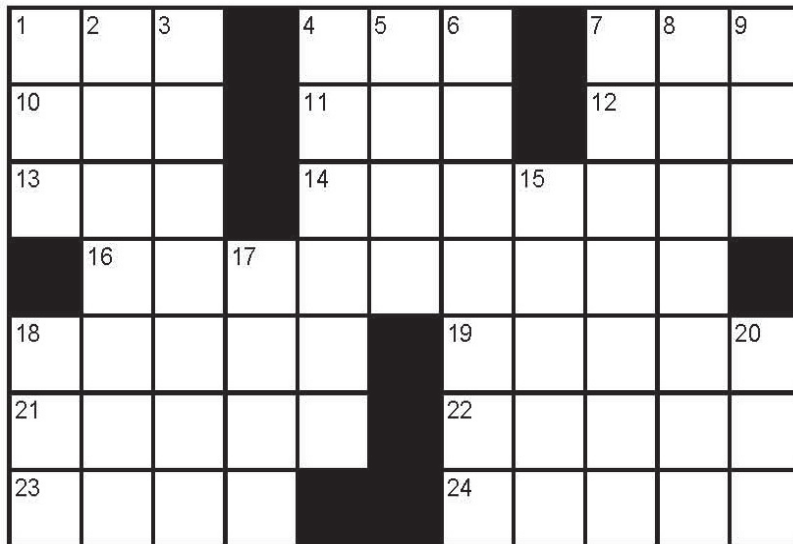
## Debate and Switch

### Across

1. Shack
4. Refused to make one's taxes public, e.g.
7. Plays a sophomoric prank on, informally
10. Lennon's lady
11. Suffix with Capri
12. Mens \_\_\_\_ (criminal intent, in law)
13. Bee's channel
14. Moving to the beat
16. Field for Krugman
18. Academy head
19. Collapse an arch
21. Wing it
22. U.S. Grant adversary
23. Word frequently used by The Donald, and about The Donald
24. Lock

### Down

1. Inappropriate adjective, when applied to one's teenage daughter
2. One fine day, to Puccini
3. Proportional
4. Schmooze with the elite
5. Hughes poem reprinted on a full page in "The New York Times" (September 22, 2016)
6. Literally, with 7-Down. catch-phrase introduced by Hillary at Hofstra
7. See 6-Down
8. Pascal collection
9. Grp. once headed by Ronald Reagan
15. One who mopes
17. Big name in elevators
18. Hang (around with)
20. "\_\_\_\_ we can"



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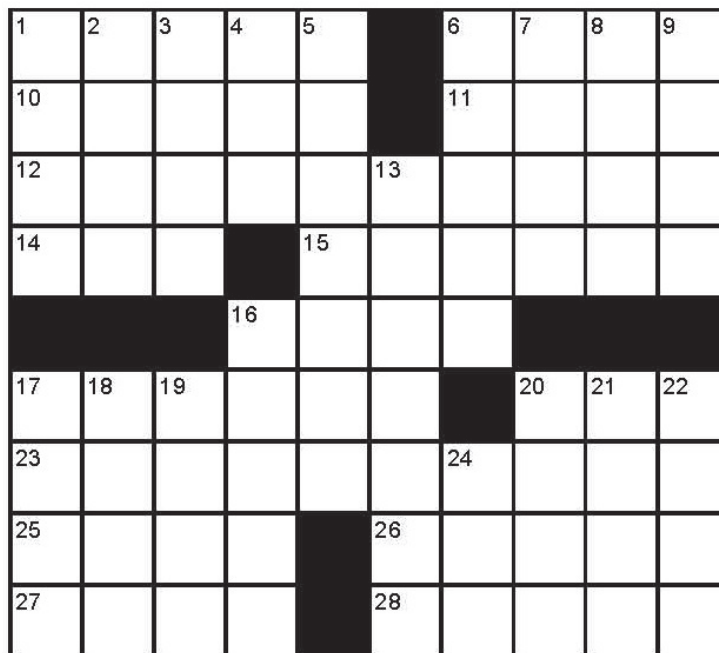
## What Happened in Vegas?

### Across

1. Escalante who inspired "Stand and Deliver"
6. Muslim leader
10. Ancient Mexican
11. Like the first 44 US Presidents
12. Deportation targets?
14. Bro, for one
15. Sickened feeling
16. Got up
17. Punctual
20. "Bingo!"
23. Hillary, to Donald
25. "L\_\_\_\_ c'est moi" (Louis XIV)
26. Rip from the mother's womb, rhetorically
27. Type of details
28. Goes high

### Down

1. Campaign issue
2. Jai \_\_\_\_
3. With .com, web site for cinephiles
4. Verbal shrug
5. Campaign issue
6. Saturate
7. Opportunity visited it
8. On the quiet side
9. Large butte
13. Attack bigly
16. Quick with quips
17. What a Jewish astronaut celebrates returning to
18. Defense alliance in the news: Abbr.
19. Russian autocrat
20. "Famous" cookie maker
21. Fabled loser
22. Formicary denizens
24. Samurai's sash



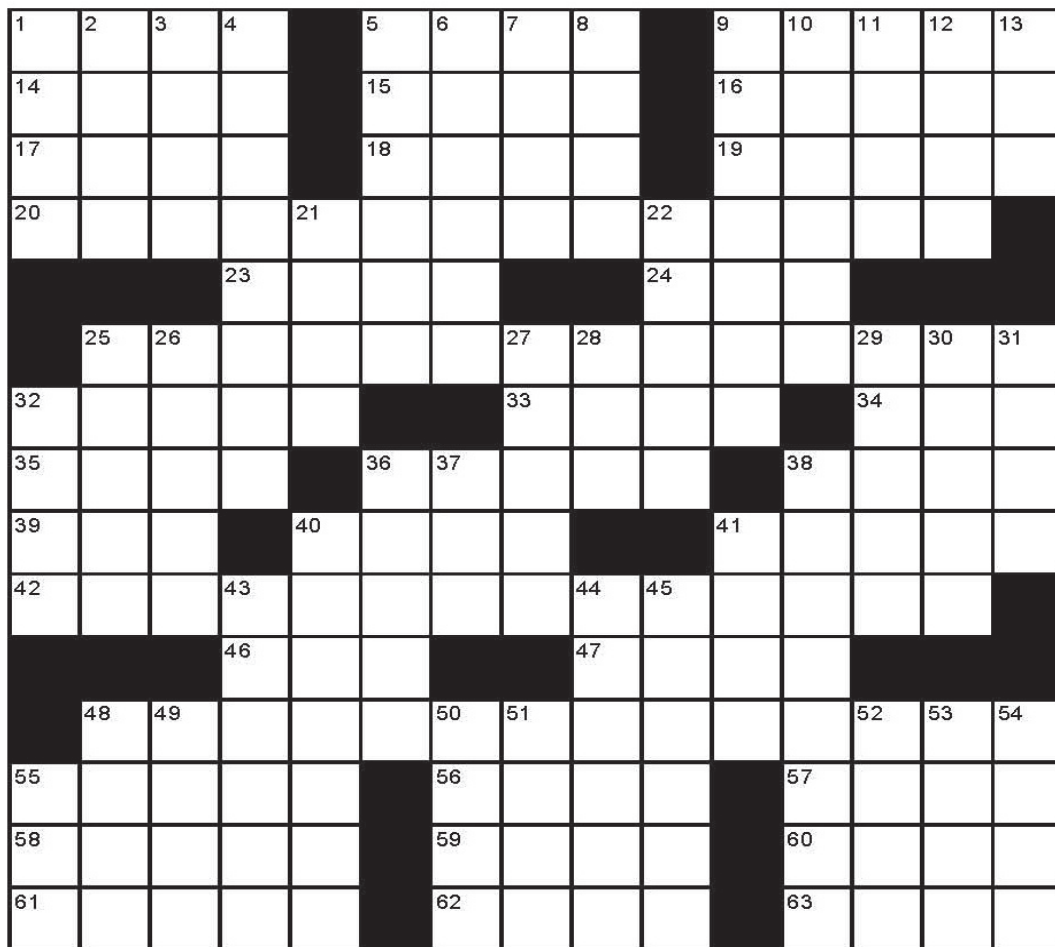
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## In a Blue State

### Across

1. Enthusiasm
5. Point of view
9. Macho military type
14. Khayyám or Sharif
15. "Goldfinger" fort
16. Certain Alaskan
17. It means everything
18. Like some rumors
19. Composition of a metaphorical ceiling yet to be broken
20. Title for 48-Across on January 20, 2017 ... we wish
23. "Star Wars" princess
24. Holiday quaff
25. Bill, to 48-Across ... we wish
32. DC VIP
33. Target of Cain's mutiny?
34. Year-round quaff
35. Has \_\_\_\_ with (is connected)
36. Majority leader, ironically?
38. Cultivate
39. NFL six-pointers
40. Piano, to a pianist
41. "Soave sia il vento" and "Hab mir's gelobt," for two
42. Anthem for 48-Across ... we wish
46. Be under par?
47. Palindromic Indian bread
48. One who won the popular vote on November 8, 2016
55. In a musical key
56. Make well
57. Lesbos, e.g.
58. Jeb, to Jenna and Barbara
59. Ultimatum word
60. Hounds
61. "The View" co-host Joy (anagram of REHAB)
62. Parodied
63. Mardi \_\_\_\_



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### Down

1. Whiz (by)
2. Statue of Liberty poet Lazarus
3. Novelist who was romantically involved with Chopin
4. Dress rehearsal
5. "Let's not go there"
6. Costumed for "La Cage aux Foies," perhaps
7. He had a cameo in "Wordplay"
8. Donald and Ivana, e.g.
9. Ann or Andy, e.g.
10. Profess without proof
11. Like the Grinch
12. Arrest
13. Tiebreakers, briefly
21. Cluttered condition
22. Hacker's harvest, briefly
25. Henry of "Fail-Safe"
26. Formal "Who's there?" answer
27. "\_\_\_\_ in the Balance" (1992 book by Gore)
28. Draft org.?
29. Nobelist Curie
30. Distant
31. A lot of it was fake
32. Way to go
36. Cabbage
37. Frequently, in verse
38. Like the Cheshire cat
40. Ben or Jerry
41. Spicy Asian cuisine
43. "I can't hear you!"
44. Sheathe
45. Matched, as a poker bet
48. Sharpen
49. Creep
50. Big bird
51. Website for customer reviews
52. Russian autocrat
53. Russian name meaning "holy"
54. An "Untouchable"
55. Place to soak



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