



# Natural Selection

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

## Word of the Month

DAKOTA BLACKMAN

### smitten

adjective smit·ten \ smi-tən \

deeply affected with or struck by strong feelings of attraction, affection, or infatuation

The month of February often conjures up the all too familiar images related to Valentine's Day: heart-shaped chocolates and balloons, bouquets of flowers, and Hallmark cards passed between young children at school and between romantic partners. In the United States, Valentine's Day is a day dedicated to celebrating love—often, to celebrate the state of being smitten.

I am interested in this particular word because, in addition to its form as an adjective, smitten is also the past participle of smite. Smite, a verb, has two definitions, the first of which is “to be strongly attracted to somebody or something” or “to captivate.” In the context of this definition, the derivation of the adjective smitten is intuitive. However, smite's second definition takes a dramatic 180° turn, from something soft to something harsh and violent: “to take,” or “to strike with a firm blow.”

According to Merriam-Webster, smite originates from a twelfth century Middle English word meaning to smear or defile; the dictionary likens it to an Old High German word with a similar meaning. As it relates to romantic love, this definition is almost paradoxical. Perhaps “captivate” or “take” make sense (Merriam-Webster's example sentence cites being captivated by a woman's beauty), but for this word to also be defined by violence produces a fascinating contradiction: why are the two linked?

To answer this question, we can look to another common Valentine's Day symbol that stems from Greek and Roman mythology: the God of love, Cupid. Usually portrayed as a young and winged boy, Cupid is armed with a bow and arrow; anyone who is struck by one of his arrows, mortal or not, is overcome by af-



Greek statue entitled 'Eros (Cupid) Sleeping' from the 3rd-2nd century B.C.

fection and love. Cupid's very existence takes into account both sides of smite's definitions: the first being the gentle inspiration of love; the second being the violent mechanism by which love is inspired. In some depictions, he is wearing armor as he works to matchmake. This begs the question: does this interpretation fall into the softer definition of smite, suggesting that love is invincible or impenetrable? Or does it fall into the harsher one, likening love to war?

Perhaps these definitions cannot be parsed into a binary. Instead, perhaps they must be considered together, particularly in the context of romance, of love, and of relationships generally. In the past six months in the United States, there has been a massive eruption of reports of sexual misconduct, particularly regarding high-profile and powerful men. The catalyst was Ronan Farrow's [exposé on Harvey Weinstein](#) in the New Yorker, and from it has stemmed a resurgence of activist Tarana Burke's social media hashtag #MeToo. Now known as the MeToo movement, the premise is, according to Burke, to “promote empowerment through empathy” by sharing among women, particularly those who are vulnerable (for example, young women

of color), the all too prevalent experience of sexual misconduct. Alyssa Milano, an actress who encouraged spreading the hashtag after the stories of Weinstein surfaced, explained it as follows: “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too.’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.”

It is important to dissociate from love the type of behavior displayed by Weinstein (and many, many others). However, it is equally important to remember the duality of smite's definition, and to remember Cupid's bow and arrow, and armor when thinking about love and relationships as they exist today, particularly in the context of the MeToo movement. Those in positions of power have been forced to confront the issue of accountability, some for the first time, and these considerations will then hopefully trickle down into more of an awareness when it comes to fair and healthy relationships.

When one is smitten, one is, according to the word's definition, “deeply affected” by feelings. It is imperative to take into account the depth of this impact. As the language suggests, relationships—and love—hold great power. ■

# A Little Less Laughter in the Halls! Rockefeller Mainstay Isaiah Curry Says Goodbye

AILEEN MARSHALL



Photo by Aileen Marshall | NATURAL SELECTIONS

What can one say about Isaiah Curry? Almost everyone on campus knows him. Many of us know him as “that guy you always hear laughing in the hallways.” And we also know him as the person who handles much of the hazardous waste we generate in our work. He’s always there to greet us with a smile, a joke, or even some helpful advice. If you want to know a tidbit of campus information such as where a certain room or facility is located, or who to contact to find help with different issues, or the history of how the campus has evolved, you can always ask Isaiah. He knows almost everyone at Rockefeller, past and present. After forty-four years of being a campus icon, Isaiah retired on January 31, 2018. I had a conversation with Isaiah one night in the Faculty Club and this is what I learned about his history here. Of course, several people stopped by during the interview to joke with him.

Having grown up nearby in upper Manhattan, Isaiah had heard of the Rockefeller University through his mother, who had worked here at one time. He started in 1974, originally in the custodial department. In 1976, the Radiation Safety Department was established on the 11th floor of the Weiss Building (then known as the Tower Building), with only five people. One of them invited Isaiah to join the team, where he was trained to handle the radioactive waste. Later, the department changed its name to Laboratory Safety, to encompass more aspects of that area. Then Isaiah added the processing of biological waste to his responsibilities. The department is now called Laboratory Safety and Environmental Health, and Isaiah has been managing biological waste material for the entire campus ever since.

In the early years, despite being assigned a large grey cellular phone, which was cutting edge technology for its time, Isaiah still had

to push all those carts that transported the biological waste materials manually. Later he was upgraded to a flip phone, and eventually the university provided a Power Tug and a small electric truck to help pull and push those large grey carts that transported the material. Isaiah also learned to do his job more efficiently, such as processing the waste after pickup from each building, rather than waiting until he had picked up waste from the whole campus. He often stayed late to finish his work and came in on holidays so there wasn’t a backlog when he returned. He learned early on that students and postdocs work on holidays. “It has nothing to do with overtime, it has to do with staying ahead of the labs...I don’t quit until I’m finished.” He has noticed over the years that the radioactive waste is decreasing and the biological waste is increasing, an indicator of how research techniques have changed. He has always been trustworthy and reliable, and is always glad to help anyone with questions or errors in their waste disposal. Isaiah has returned after several surgeries over the years. Even two hernia operations, a torn knee meniscus repair, and a hip replacement could not keep him away from his duties for long.

Isaiah is known for greeting everyone he knows with a smile and a joke. Isaiah often jests that he used to be shorter before he started picking up the radioactive waste. Over the years he has gotten to know the likes of Robert Darnell, Günter Blobel, Roderick MacKinnon, Charles Rice, Ali Brivanlou, Michael Young, and Jeffery Friedman. Friedman always invites him to his lab barbeques. Darnell, head of The Laboratory of Molecular Neuro-Oncology, commented “I will forever remember the generous, humorous, and wonderful spirit Isaiah brought to the laboratory every single day, year in, year out. He helped make Rockefeller a spe-

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cial place for the scientists, nurturing the feeling that we were all on the same team, friends and colleagues working together to do something important.” We all know him as one who could make us laugh during the work day. Victor Cisneros, from Information Technology, relayed one humorous episode with Isaiah. They were chatting in the hallway between Greenberg and Founders when a “well-suited gentleman” approached them and asked for directions to Founders. Isaiah gave him directions. After the man left, Isaiah wondered if the man would “get his act together.” Victor said “Isaiah! That’s our new president, Marc Tessier-Lavigne. It’s his first day on the job!” Susan Powell of the Proteomics Resource Center remembers how he helped her after she was mugged in 2007 on York Avenue and 64th Street. “Isaiah constantly finds me walking the halls looking downward. For years he warned me, “Look up, Sue!” meaning, be aware of my surroundings. He also showed me ways to defend myself using keys. “Carry your keys in your hand so they protrude between the fingers, and if you need to defend yourself, aim for the eyes.” She added “They say laughter is healthy, it relieves stress, it helps the immune system, it helps to heal, it contributes toward a longer life. If all this is true, Isaiah will be around for a very long time.”

Isaiah has always been active in campus life. Some members of campus might remember Isaiah being involved in the basket-

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ball league that began sometime in the 1980s. Isaiah remembers that Patricia Murskey, then head of the Rockefeller library, donated money in memory of someone who had died to have a basketball tournament. They would play teams from other institutions, on a small basketball court, where the Greenberg building is now. And those of you who use the gym might know that Isaiah has always taught a class there. In the early 1980s, when

the gym was located in the Graduate Students Residence, where the Child and Family Center is now, mailroom attendant Jose Santos would practice karate there, piquing Isaiah's interest. Isaiah would work out with him, trained in Santos's dojo, and eventually became a black belt. Even after Santos left, Isaiah continued to work out and practice in the gym, and other people liked what he did and asked to join him. Thus his class evolved, over thirty years ago. He has never charged, and faithfully shows up, no matter how much

work he has to do. He often goes back to work after class.

Isaiah's last official day at Rockefeller University was January 31, 2018. He vows to keep working out, and is toying with the idea of moving Florida. Considering that the Rockefeller is practically Isaiah's second home, I wouldn't be surprised if we still see him popping up here from time to time. He has always been a thread that unites us. As many people have commented "it won't be the same here without him". ■

## For Your Consideration | *And They're Off!* Edition

JIM KELLER

I maintain that one can liken the Oscar race to a horserace with each studio betting on its thoroughbreds hoping to place. In the analogy, the studio is the owner, public relations is the jockey, and the horse is the actor or film. Here I've included my rankings as they stood on the eve of Oscar nominations—the number in parentheses indicates my placement following nominations. I chose eight nomi-

nees for Best Picture out of a possible ten. All other categories reflect five nominees. The picks that appear in black text within the table were my original nominee picks, and those in red represent actual nominees that I had not chosen.

Because Christian Bale and Michael Shannon have history of sneaking in at the last minute, I chose to go with them. (See

Bale's Best Actor nomination in 2014 for *American Hustle* and his Best Supporting Actor nomination in 2016 for *The Big Short* and Shannon's supporting role last year for *Nocturnal Animals*). That's the thing about the Oscar race: just because you try not to get burned, doesn't mean you won't in the end.

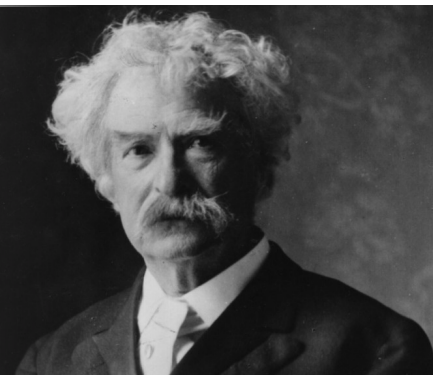
With that, I give you my current Oscar predictions:

2018 OSCAR CONTENDERS						
	Best Picture	Best Director	Best Actor	Best Actress	Best Supporting Actor	Best Supporting Actress
1	Lady Bird (A24) [1]	Guillermo del Toro - The Shape of Water [1]	Gary Oldman - Darkest Hour [1]	Frances McDormand - Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri [1]	Sam Rockwell - Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri [1]	Allison Janney - I, Tonya [1]
2	Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (Fox Searchlight Pictures) [3]	Christopher Nolan - Dunkirk [2]	Timothée Chalamet - Call Me by Your Name [2]	Sally Hawkins - The Shape of Water [2]	Willem Dafoe - The Florida Project [2]	Laurie Metcalf - Lady Bird [2]
3	The Shape of Water (Fox Searchlight Pictures) [2]	Greta Gerwig - Lady Bird [3]	Daniel Day-Lewis - Phantom Thread [3]	Margot Robbie - I, Tonya [3]	Richard Jenkins - The Shape of Water [4]	Mary J. Blige - Mudbound [3]
4	Dunkirk (Warner Brothers Pictures) [4]	Martin McDonagh - Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri	James Franco - The Disaster Artist	Saoirse Ronan - Lady Bird [4]	Armie Hammer - Call Me by Your Name	Octavia Spencer - The Shape of Water [4]
5	The Post (20th Century Fox) [5]	Jordan Peele - Get Out [4]	Daniel Kaluuya - Get Out [4]	Meryl Streep - The Post [5]	Christopher Plummer - All the Money in the World [3]	Hong Chau - Downsizing
6	Get Out (Universal Pictures) [6]	Luca Guadagnino - Call Me by Your Name	Christian Bale - Hostiles		Michael Shannon - The Shape of Water	Lesley Manville - Phantom Thread [5]
7	Call Me by Your Name (Sony Pictures Classics) [8]	Paul Thomas Anderson - Phantom Thread [5]	Denzel Washington - Roman Israel, Esq. [5]		Woody Harrelson - Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri [5]	
	Mudbound (Netflix)					
8	Darkest Hour (Focus Features) [9]					
9	Phantom Thread (Focus Features) [7]					

### QUOTABLE QUOTE

"The modern patriotism, the true patriotism, the only rational patriotism, is loyalty to the Nation all the time, loyalty to the Government when it deserves it."

Mark Twain, 1835-1910



# When Winter Makes You Feel Like Crap:

## A Look at Seasonal Depression

ANTONIA MARTINEZ

A text message stopped me dead in my tracks: “The moving truck is coming next Friday.” So soon? Wasn’t it only a few weeks ago that my cousin mentioned the idea of relocating to Nevada? She has lived in New York City her entire life. Now, here she was nearly all packed and ready to leave for good. “What made you want to leave now?” I asked. “It’s the cold,” she said, revealing that heading for warmer pastures had been a secret desire for years. “I get so depressed in the winter time.” Coincidentally, I had just been reading about people like her. “That’s a thing,” I told her. “Yeah,” she said. “I know.”

That “thing” is seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a pattern of recurring depression that coincides with the change of seasons. Winter SAD, or winter depression, is the most common. Symptoms appear in fall or winter then subside with the return of spring or summer. Reverse SAD, or summer depression, is rare, accounting for only one-tenth of cases. SAD affects an estimated 1-10% of the global population, predominantly those living far from the equator. It is more prevalent in women than men and more frequently starts in young adulthood. Roughly 10 million Americans suffer from SAD.

The clinical definition of seasonal affective disorder began appearing in the scientific literature in the 1980s, but the phenomenon of illness triggered by seasonal change has been described since ancient times, including by Hippocrates himself. Yet, the exact cause remains elusive. Many scientists believe that seasonal shifts in the amount of available sunlight create imbalance in the hormones that affect our mood and internal clock, triggering depression. Reduced sunlight reduces levels of our “happiness hormone,” serotonin and increases levels of the ominous-sounding “hormone of darkness,” melatonin, which affects sleep patterns. However, some scientists question if SAD really exists.

### Signs and Symptoms

If you find yourself desperately seeking brightly lit or sunny places every winter or keeping the lights burning all night at



Photo by Guadalupe Astorga | NATURAL SELECTIONS

home, you might have SAD or a less severe form of the condition called “winter blues.” In his book, *Winter Blues*, SAD research pioneer Norman Rosenthal, M.D. says many sufferers instinctively gravitate toward light in an effort to feel better, but don’t necessarily make the connection. Some people worsen their condition by withdrawing to dimly lit or dark places in response to their darker mood. Other unhealthy attempts to self-medicate include overeating and excessive use of stimulants. Common signs and symptoms of SAD include:

**Winter SAD:** low energy and extreme fatigue, difficulty waking up, increased cravings for sweets and starches, increased cravings for alcohol, caffeine, nicotine or recreational drugs, weight gain, poor concentration, feeling down or depressed, social withdrawal, decreased sex drive, and unexplained aches and pains.

**Summer SAD:** poor sleep or insomnia, loss of appetite, weight loss, and anxiety.

### Treatment and Prevention

If left untreated, SAD can become more severe, leading to other problems, including serious mental health issues such as eating disorders and suicidal thoughts. Treatment may include light therapy, medication, psychotherapy, and mind-body techniques such as meditation and relax-

ation techniques. Light therapy, the go-to treatment for SAD, exposes the patient to full-spectrum bright light in an attempt to rebalance hormone levels and readjust the internal clock. However, people may mistake SAD for conditions that have look-alike symptoms, among them: seasonal bipolar disorder, hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia, and chronic fatigue syndrome. So it’s important to consult your physician if you think you may have seasonal affective disorder. Preventative measures you can take to help reduce symptoms or your chances of triggering SAD include: exercise regularly, spend more time outdoors, stay socially active, restrict your sleep to 7-9 hours a night, eat a balanced diet, reduce stress, use full spectrum light bulbs and home and work, get plants, and add color to your walls and wardrobe.

### Explore these resources to learn more about SAD:

[Winter Blues: Seasonal Affective Disorder and How to Overcome It](#), Norman Rosenthal, M.D.

[Seasonal Affective Disorder](#) (NIH) [Seasonal affective disorder \(SAD\)](#) (Mayo Clinic)

[Why Winter Makes You SAD: Seasonal Affective Disorder Explained](#) (The Royal Institution YouTube Channel) ■



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## ***Life on a Roll***

### **THE LOST SKY CITY OF INCA**

NAN PANG

Machu Picchu is arguably the most famous historical ruin not just in Peru, but in the Americas. Since the re-discovery of this Inca citadel by American historian Hiram Bingham in 1911, this iconic lost city in the sky has been attracting visitors non-stop for the past century.

From the stunning view at the top of Huayna Picchu, to the carefree llamas chilling in the lawns, Machu Picchu possesses magical enchantments hardly describable by words. Peru prides themselves as “the richest country in the world” in their recent marketing campaign. Well, it was. It truly was. ■