

STORM CURRENTS

A Student Publication of Torah Academy Bergen County



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Storm Currents

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Storm Currents is a debate magazine published at TABC. It is meant to provide analysis for a wide range of topics including politics, social issues, sports, and more. The intent of this magazine is to promote awareness of the world in which we live in without any kind of bias. Therefore, all issues addressed in Storm Currents are discussed from both standpoints. The opinions expressed in the magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of the respective authors. All topics are debated fairly, with no partiality displayed toward any particular ideology.

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Mainstream Media:

In the past couple of years, the mainstream media has been criticized more than ever before. There have been many controversies surrounding media coverage of late, such as the biased reporting of a confrontation between students from a Catholic high school in Nebraska and a Native American activist, where the media condemned the students before knowing all the facts surrounding the event. Furthermore, President Donald Trump has constantly lambasted the “fake news” media, calling them “the enemy of the people.” At the same time, some have denounced the President’s criticisms, stating that mainstream media is still extremely important and should be commended for its role in presenting the news to the American people. The question stands, does the mainstream media deserve to be criticized?

Yes: by Ezra Ratner

Mainstream media sources, including CNN, MSNBC, Huffington Post, The New York Times, and Fox News, have been proven countless times to generate false and biased news stories instead of reporting in an objective manner. Many news sources spend more time talking about President Donald Trump and other politicians than they do reporting on real, substantial news. Networks have been shown countless times to present only bits and pieces of events in order to confirm their bias, confusing and deceiving the American public in the process.

Since the Presidential election, CNN has spent 92% of its air time on President Trump, criticising him 96 times while only supporting him 7 times, according to the *Washington Examiner*: “After excluding commercials, teasers and promos, our analysts found 13 hours, 27 minutes of actual news coverage, an average of just over 40 minutes per hour. Of that, a whopping 92 percent (12 hours, 19 minutes) was devoted to the Trump Presidency, with a mere 68 minutes — a little more than three minutes per hour — devoted to all of the other news of the

day,"¹ said the report. This is extremely problematic for two reasons. First, there are many important news stories to report that do not include President Trump, and by spending minimal time on those, CNN and other media sources are actively deterring the public from being aware of and understanding current events. Also, when showing such a radical anti-Trump bias, it is impossible for the media to inform American citizens, as their bias often will get in the way of the dissemination of true information.

Moreover, even when media sources spend time talking about news taking place outside the White House, their reporting of the event ultimately reverts back to discussing politicians and pushing an ideology upon their viewers. For example, after the tragic shooting in a Pittsburgh synagogue, CNN briefly mentioned the tragedy and then spent the rest of the air time talking about President Trump and his reaction to the event. Additionally, coverage of shootings often turns into a debate about gun control, with sources on both the left and right advancing their ideology regarding the issue. While these are specific examples, they are indeed indicative of a larger problem with mainstream media. Newscasters do not truly care about informing American citizens; rather, they merely strive to gossip about politicians and share their opinion to the general public.

Also, network anchors often let their emotions and biases get in the way of objective reporting, causing them to make opinionated statements and have emotional outbreaks on air. After President Trump was elected, MSNBC correspondent Rachel Maddow stated, "This is not a dream, you are not having a nightmare. This is really happening, good luck." Furthermore, Jim Acosta, a CNN anchor, recently had an outburst in the White House Press Briefing room and was forced to rescind his press pass for a short while.² Even though reporters are supposed to present the news in a non-partisan way, mainstream media companies never punish or condemn these anchors for their clear bias, giving them freedom to say whatever they want. This makes it exceedingly difficult to watch the news from an objective standpoint without the anchor's political beliefs being shoved down your throat.

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<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/cnn-obsessed-92-percent-of-airtime-on-trump-96-critics-to-7-supporters>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/07/media/trump-cnn-press-conference/index.html>

Finally, they often take quotes and news stories out of context for political gain. For example, President Trump was quoted on CNN saying he had “binders full of women.” CNN used this to say that he objectified women, when in fact, President Trump was referring to potential appointees for U.S government positions, and was not disrespecting women at all. Also, after the Mueller report was summarized by Attorney General William Barr, Fox News reported that President Trump was fully exonerated even though they didn’t have the full report. By doing this, mainstream news companies trick the American people and keep them uninformed, never knowing the full extent of news stories.

In conclusion, all news sources have been proven to give false information and present biased reporting to the American people. By doing so, they go against their duty as the press and to help keep Americans informed. Until mainstream media becomes more objective and less biased, they deserve to be criticized and known as “fake news.”

No: by Eitan Mermelstein

The truth is that every media outlet has a bias; however, having a bias is not necessarily a bad thing or a new idea. Mainstream media outlets simply report what they believe the truth to be and do not deserve to be called “fake news” or “the enemy of the people.” These insults have constantly been heaved at media outlets by President Donald Trump, and the American people suffer due to this outrage. President Trump calls any reported news that he disagrees with “fake news” and tells the American public not to trust numerous news sources, including CNN, the New York Times, and MSNBC. Seemingly, President Trump only berates media outlets that criticize him and report news that makes him look bad, but praises media outlets like Fox News simply because they agree with him most of the time. Clearly, President Trump’s constant outrage at the media is unjust, hypocritical, and extremely unnecessary.

Moreover, President Trump’s constant outrage against the media is unbecoming the office of President of the United States. The Presidency is meant to be a dignified, prestigious office; but instead it has become a mockery in the eyes of some because President Trump undermines the office by belittling the media.

Finally, President Trump violates the basic tenets of the First Amendment. Constantly berating the news media and calling what they report “fake news” hinders reporting by these news outlets, thereby stifling their voices and undermining the concept of free speech as guaranteed by the First Amendment.

While everyone is entitled to his or her views on various issues that come up in the 24 hour news cycle, constant criticism of the news media-- especially by the President of the United States-- is counterproductive. Criticism translates into fewer eyeballs viewing a particular news outlet and thereby inhibits the free flow of information that is essential for citizens to make sense of the many issues confronting us as a society and democracy today.

Marijuana Legalization:

Recently, numerous states have decriminalized and even legalized the recreational use of marijuana, including New York, California, Massachusetts, and more. Moreover, Congress has mulled over possibly legalizing marijuana throughout the country for both medicinal and recreational use. This issue has divided much of the country, with some saying that marijuana is no worse than cigarettes, which are legal, and others saying that legalizing marijuana would worsen our country's drug epidemic. The question stands, should marijuana be legalized?

Yes: by *Levi Langer*

The United States ought to legalize marijuana for both medicinal and recreational use. First of all, it safely treats cancer patients, lessening their pain, and therefore should be allowed for medicinal use. As for recreational use, the criminalization of cannabis is counterproductive, creating more crime and social problems than it prevents.

Consumption of cannabis is an increasingly popular treatment for cancer. From 2017 to 2019, medical marijuana sales grew nearly 50%, from \$3.1B to \$4.5B.³ This growth stems from more states and doctors recognizing cannabis's medical value, and because researchers are continuing to find additional medical applications. For example, a number of small studies addressing smoked marijuana found that it can be helpful in treating nausea and vomiting from cancer chemotherapy. Additionally, a few studies have found that inhaled (smoked or vaporized) marijuana can help treat neuropathic pain (pain caused by damaged nerves). More recently, scientists reported that cannabinoids (cannabis ingredients) such as THC and CBD slow growth and/or cause death in certain types of cancer cells growing in lab dishes. Other studies done with animals suggest that certain cannabinoids may slow growth and reduce spread of some forms of cancer.⁴ Thus, the future of medicinal marijuana is bright, and if legalized the medical potential of marijuana would be endless.

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/596631/us-medical-marijuana-retail-sales-estimates/>

⁴ <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/marijuana-and-cancer.html>

The federal government is aware of the benefits of medical marijuana. In fact, the FDA has already approved of drugs that contain the cannabinoids CBD and synthetic THC, which is the main psychoactive chemical in cannabis.⁵ Additionally, several studies, including ones funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, have found that cannabis use decreases prescription opioid problems. For example, one NIDA-funded study suggested a link between medical marijuana legalization and fewer overdose deaths from prescription opioids. Another NIDA-funded analysis showed that legally protected medical marijuana dispensaries were also associated with a decrease in opioid prescription, self-reports of opioid misuse, and treatment admissions for opioid addiction.⁶ Thus, medical marijuana is replacing opioids, and legalizing it can help solve America's opioid crisis. And however bad cannabis use and misuse may be, opioid misuse is much worse, as they are more addictive and harmful. If opioids are prescribed for all sorts of pain, and fentanyl can be prescribed to cancer patients, then marijuana should absolutely be legalized for medicinal use.

Irrespective of its medicinal properties, the criminalization of marijuana use disproportionately harms young people and people of color, sporesultsensors massive levels of violence and corruption, and fails to curb youth access to the drug. Marijuana use is roughly equal among blacks and whites, yet Blacks are 3.73 times as likely as whites to be arrested for marijuana possession. Between 2001 and 2010, there were over eight million cannabis arrests in the U.S., ensnaring eight million non-violent offenders in the already overcrowded criminal justice system. Yet, all of these arrests have failed to diminish the use or availability of marijuana.⁷ In fact, American illicit marijuana sales reached \$46.4B in 2016.⁸ Moreover, adolescents use marijuana at roughly the same rate now as they did in 1995.⁹ All of this illegal distribution carries crime and gang violence with it. Clearly, criminalization of marijuana is detrimental to youth, minorities, and the country as a whole.

⁵ <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/marijuana>

⁶ <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana-medicine>

⁷

<https://www.aclu.org/report/report-war-marijuana-black-and-white?redirect=criminal-law-reform/war-marijuana-black-and-white>

⁸ <https://www.inc.com/will-yakowicz/marijuana-sales-2016-50-billion.html>

⁹ <https://www.vox.com/2014/12/16/7402145/cannabis-legalization-teen-use>

In contrast, legalization of marijuana for recreation reduces crime and curbs adolescent use. In several states that have legalized recreational use, convictions and court filings for crimes related to the production, distribution, possession, and use of cannabis have plummeted. For instance, in Colorado, the number of criminal cases related to marijuana fell by 85% in the first full year of legal sales (2014) compared with the average number of criminal cases in the three years prior to legalization (2010–2012). Based on this evidence, it is clear that legalization dramatically diminishes the illegal production, distribution, and sale of marijuana.¹⁰ It is also clear that many people who, under normal circumstances, would be arrested for cannabis-related crimes, are perfectly willing to take the steps necessary to buy marijuana safely and legally. Thus, these would-be offenders do not threaten their communities and perform their marijuana consumption in a safe and private manner.

Moreover, legalization relieves the burden placed on courts, law enforcement, and prisons, allowing for greater focus on other, more serious crimes. Indeed, legalization has led to an improvement in the prioritization of police resources in Washington and Colorado.¹¹ Additionally, legalization in states on the southern border drastically reduces violent crime, and homicides related to the drug trade fell by 41% after legalization.¹² Last, since legalization in Washington in 2012, the percentage of 12-to-17-year-olds using marijuana has declined from 16.5% to 13.5%, not increased.¹³

Legalizing marijuana for recreational and medicinal use will benefit the United States. The criminalization of marijuana is counterintuitive and stunts medical and social progress more than it encourages improvement in those areas. Furthermore, medically, cannabis is a safe drug that can help cancer patients and divert the populace from opioids. Finally, recreational use of cannabis presents no danger to the country and can actually decrease crime and other social plagues.

¹⁰ <https://reason.org/wp-content/uploads/does-legalizing-marijuana-reduce-crime.pdf>

¹¹ <https://reason.org/wp-content/uploads/does-legalizing-marijuana-reduce-crime.pdf>

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/14/legal-marijuana-medical-use-crime-rate-plummets-us-study>

¹³ <https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/how-pot-legalization-has-affected-washington-youth/281-505046352>

No: by Noam Barenholtz

The Preamble to the Constitution states that one of the goals of the United States government is to “promote the general Welfare.” This duty includes a responsibility for the government to ensure the safety of the medicine American citizens are consuming. Any drug must be deemed safe before entering the market and becoming available to consumers. However, these guidelines have not been fulfilled in the case of marijuana, as sufficient data to determine its safety are lacking. Therefore, in the absence of research to establish exactly what the effects of the substance are, legalizing marijuana would be extremely irresponsible.

All drugs must be reviewed and approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) before being sold. Pharmaceutical companies must perform substantial testing on their products on factors such as toxicity, dosage, absorption into the bloodstream, and speed of excretion. They then must inform the FDA of the results of the testing. The FDA subsequently reviews these results before deciding whether to approve the drug or not. This entire process can take years, but it allows the government and pharmaceutical companies to ensure that consumers are receiving the best, safest medication possible. It is absolutely necessary that medicinal drugs undergo substantial testing before being legalized, as it is the job of the government to protect the citizens of the United States from the possible dangers of any item possibly available to the public.

Marijuana is a form of medication, just like anything else produced by a pharmaceutical company. Proponents of the drug tout its alleged medicinal properties, such as easing insomnia, anxiety, and chronic pain. Some even claim that it can treat more serious issues, like epilepsy. However, marijuana use is also subject to side-effects, including an association with “large airway inflammation, increased airway resistance, and lung hyperinflation.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, advocates for the legalization of cannabis assert that the drug should not be discriminated against because of the possibility of unwanted results in its consumption, as any form of medication presents some downsides. If these supporters are correct, then marijuana should be treated the same way ordinary drugs are treated, and be subject to rigorous research, only being allowed to hit the market once its safety is determined.

¹⁴ <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/what-are-marijuanas-effects-lung-health>

The problem is that almost nothing about marijuana can be proven with much certainty. This is perhaps best shown by the *New Yorker* article from January 14, 2019, titled “Unwatched Pot”:

The report [sixteen leading medical experts convened by the National Academy of Medicine] prepared...simply stated over and over again, that a drug North Americans have become enthusiastic about remains a mystery...the panel pointed out...“very little is known about the efficacy dose, routes of administration, or side effects of commonly used and commercially available cannabis products in the United States.” The caveats continue...“insufficient evidence...limited evidence...maybe.”¹⁵

Unlike other many commercially available drugs, virtually nothing is absolutely known about the proper dosage of marijuana, nor is there sufficient knowledge of the actual medical or the potential unwanted effects of consumption. Although there is much speculation surrounding the medicinal capabilities of the drug, cannabis is indeed a substance shrouded in uncertainty.

Obviously, the prudent thing for Congress to do is to hold off on legalizing marijuana, as there is no chance the FDA would approve any medicine with such ambiguous evidence surrounding its efficacy. Such an action would be completely irresponsible and would be considered an abandonment of the government’s job to protect the public. If different drugs are being condemned for insufficient evidence, marijuana should be condemned as well. Legalization of marijuana should be seen as just as irresponsible as legalization of any drug whose effects are unclear.

Research regarding marijuana is uncertain, and leaves many questions regarding the drug unsettled. Congress, whose job it is to ensure the safety of the public, cannot legalize this substance. Doing so would be reckless, and a contradiction of this duty to protect society. Until cannabis comes out of the shadows, and effects are more clearly demonstrated, marijuana must remain illegal.

¹⁵ Gladwell, Malcolm. “Unwatched Pot,” *The New Yorker*, January 2019.

MLB Free Agency

MLB free agency got off to a slow start, as many players could not find destinations that would give them the money they were looking for. In professional sports, and especially in baseball where the owners possess considerable funds, elite players receive large contracts when they become free agents. However, this offseason, star players such as Bryce Harper and Manny Machado struggled to receive offers from teams, and elite pitchers Craig Kimbrel and Dallas Keuchel may sit out the entire 2019 season because no team has offered them the amount of money they requested. Many players have spoken out against MLB owners, stating that they have been too cheap and do not have the players' and fans' best interests in mind. However, others have stated that the owners are merely being prudent and that the players are overreacting. The question remains, are cheap MLB front offices at fault for the players' struggle to find fitting destinations?

Yes: by Ezra Luber

Free agency, a period where professional sports players can search the market and sign with any team they want, happens in almost all professional American sports leagues, including in the MLB. Usually, MLB players find teams willing to pay them an enormous amount of money; however, owners and management have recently become a lot cheaper in free agency, causing many elite players to not be signed until late in the free agency period or not be signed at all. Almost all owners are multi-millionaires and billionaires, and while many of them have made their money through shrewd, low-risk, high-reward investing, that does not mean they should take the same approach in managing a baseball team. Nevertheless, numerous owners have indeed used that approach, believing that their teams could compete without elite players signed to large contracts. However, that is not the case, as rarely have MLB teams won the World Series without star players. Additionally, it is unfair to baseball fans, who passionately support their teams, that front offices are not actively trying to sign and display the best talents in

the league. Cheap owners, who have refused to pay elite players, are at fault for this year's failed free agency and the players and fans have a right to be angry at them.

For some reason, owners are extremely stingy with their money despite being extremely rich, and consequently they often do not sign the most talented players, but rather cheap players who only play at a decent level. This is unfair to players who have played brilliantly their whole career and deserve a hefty contract that matches their skill level. For example, Craig Kimbrel and Dallas Keuchel have been two of the best pitches in the MLB for many years, yet they have still not been signed since becoming free agents due to their demanding of a substantial amount of money. At the same time, numerous mediocre players who do not possess the same talent as Kimbrel or Keuchel received contracts during this free agency because they were not demanding as much money. This refusal to pay elite players sets a dangerous precedent because it can deter players from working hard and reaching their highest potential, as there is no guarantee that they will be paid adequately for their performance on the field. Moreover, when children and teenagers show promise in both baseball and another sport, they will likely not choose to pursue baseball. For example, Kyler Murray, who was both a football and baseball star in college, ultimately decided to play in the NFL instead of joining the MLB. It is very possible that due to top MLB players not being satisfactorily paid, he recognized that he had a greater potential for monetary gain in the NFL, and therefore pursued a football career. MLB owners' refusal to open their pockets and pay star players both lowers the talent level in professional baseball and puts the future of the game in jeopardy, as the practice is deterring athletes from reaching their full potential in the sport.

In addition to not being fair to the players, MLB front offices are not being fair to fans of the league. Fans are one of the most critical aspects in professional sports, since without fans, the leagues, owners, and players would not make any money. Moreover, many teams play in taxpayer funded stadiums. However, MLB fans have not been recognized for their dedication and importance; though when they invest money and time into their respective teams, they do not see the same commitment from the owners. Instead of using their considerable funds to build a competitive team that gives fans a reason to cheer, many owners are greedy and provide fans with awful teams that mainly contain young players on cheap contracts. For example, the Miami

Marlins have been terrible for many years, yet instead of adding more talent that would help the team compete, owners Bruce Sherman and Derek Jeter traded away all of the Marlins' good players and did not sign any elite players in free agency. Marlins fans are understandably angry about this cheap approach, and attendance to their games reached an all-time low this and last season. While the Marlins are an extreme example, they are certainly indicative of a larger problem in professional baseball. Because to most owners are not trying to acquire top-level talent, most teams are mired in mediocrity or are just plain awful, and there are only a couple of teams that can realistically win the World Series this season. This lack of effort from owners and management is unfair to the fans who allow the MLB to exist and deserve to be treated to great baseball.

It is obvious that MLB owners and management staff deceive players and fans alike. They encourage young players to work hard and achieve their dreams of playing professional baseball, yet refuse to pay them adequately when they reach their full potential. They also encourage fans to root for and invest time and money in their teams, then take advantage of their fans by not showing a commitment to building a team that can contend for a place in the World Series. For the league to become truly great and to inspire players to play exciting, exceptional baseball, owners must first to be willing to spend money on the best and most successful players. Otherwise, the MLB will never improve and will face a dire future.

No: by Avi Tepler

This year's MLB free agency was one of the most exciting in recent memory. The gigantic deals given to players, including 430 million dollars to Mike Trout, 330 million to Bryce Harper, and 300 million to Manny Machado will be remembered forever. However, originally, one of the biggest stories of free agency was the inability of players to attract large offers from big-time markets. Almost every player signed with his respective team late in the free agency, and a record number of free agents remained in January and February after not garnering the contract offers they felt they deserved. This lack of signings sparked criticism from many prominent players like Kris Bryant and Evan Longoria,¹⁶ who claimed their counterparts deserved to be paid. MLB all stars like Craig Kimbrel, one of baseball's top closers, and former Cy Young award winner, Dallas Keuchel, still remained jobless weeks into the MLB season. Many baseball players and critiques have blamed the free agents' struggle on cheap MLB front offices; however, that is clearly not the case. The controversy surrounding free agency stems from overvalued players requesting excessive amounts of money, as well as those players' unwillingness to explore all options when looking at teams with which to sign.

Despite the lack of early signings, the overwhelming theme of free agency was still the absurd contracts being dealt to numerous baseball players. Many players, such as A.J. Pollock, Yasmani Grandal, and Patrick Corbin requested and received generous contracts. However, many have argued that these and other players aren't necessarily deserving of the gigantic contracts they requested. Oftentimes in free agency, mediocre players and their agents ask for more money than the player is actually worth. In this year's free agency, MLB owners have merely been prudent, not handing out massive contracts to underachieving players.

Also, many players are only interested in signing for a handful of teams, limiting their options in free agency. When every player wishes to get exorbitant contracts from specific teams which may not be interested in them or have the money to sign them, obviously free agency will move slowly. If players want to sign for a team early in free agency, they must consider every destination, as well as be willing to accept less lucrative contracts.

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<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/mlb/columnist/bob-nightengale/2019/02/05/mlb-free-agency-freeze-out-embarrassment-baseball/2778045002/>

Additionally, nowadays, numerous MLB players want long-term deals that span five or more years. However, MLB front offices logically reason that signing players to long-term contracts is simply not worth it. Age is a huge factor in player performance, and oftentimes players signed for many years stop performing at a high level in the final years of their contract. Moreover, there have been countless instances of long-term contracts turning out very badly for the team. Some examples include the awful contracts given to Jason Bay, Jacoby Ellsbury, Bobby Bonilla, Alex Rodriguez, and Chris Davis. Although many biased MLB players believe that free agents deserve huge, long term contracts, giving out those contracts does not make sense from an owner's perspective. Nevertheless, many owners did, indeed, give players-- such as Bryce Harper, Manny Machado, and Mike Trout-- long-term contracts, proving that they are absolutely willing to spend their money. However, front offices believe that only the MLB's best are deserving of the long-term deals, as they carry the least risk. Clearly, poor history regarding long-term contracts supports MLB front offices' tendencies not to hand them out.

Finally, it is not a crime for MLB front offices to take advantage of the free agency system in order to develop a better, cheaper roster. The MLB specifically has a longer free agent period than any other sport and allows clubs sign players throughout the entire period. Even though teams in the past have opted to sign available players as quickly as possible, it is absolutely fair for owners to take their time and act prudently in free agency in order to do what is best for their franchise.

In conclusion, MLB front offices should not be blamed or criticized for this year's slow free agency. By not giving enormous, long-term contracts to mediocre players, they were simply acting in the best interests of their franchise and recognizing that those contracts often are detrimental to the team. Moreover, large contracts were eventually given to the very best players, showing that owners are willing to spend their money in a shrewd fashion. If players want to be signed early in free agency, they must stop requesting outrageous amounts of money and keep an open mind.

Book Day 2019

TABC Book Day is an amazing day that allows students to learn about a variety of topics relating to a specific book. While this year's Book Day had no shortage of interesting topics and shiurim, there was some controversy surrounding it this year. Many have said that the contents of the book, *Spare Parts*, as well as the statements made by the first speaker, Englewood Mayor Michael Wildes, were highly politically charged and did not fairly represent both sides of the immigration issue. However, others have stated that both sides of the issue were fairly represented, and that the topic was just another aspect of an exciting Book Day. The question stands, was Book Day 2019 unfairly politically biased? (**Note from the Editor in Chief:** Dr. Master, Mrs. Moskovits, and the Book Day committee did an amazing job on this year's Book Day, and we thoroughly enjoyed Book Day 2019. I hope that the views presented here are constructive and do not offend anyone who was involved in organizing this year's Book Day.)

Yes: by Liev Markovich

Although Book Day 2019 was a thoroughly enjoying event, one problem was the one-sided nature of the presentations regarding the immigration issue facing the U.S. The contents of the book *Spare Parts*, as well as the opening speech by Mayor Michael Wildes, showed political bias on the immigration debate. Both the book and the speech skewed facts and evidence in order to fit their respective political narrative, which ultimately undermined what both had to say and were negatives in what otherwise was a great Book Day.

Spare Parts by Joshua Davis was unnecessarily political, which got in the way of the of the story of the journey and friendship as experienced by the four boys in the book. Rather than just illustrating the boys' struggles and triumphs from an objective point of view, the author felt necessary to provide political anecdotes that had nothing to do with the actual story. For example, in order to fit his narrative that ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) is

discriminatory and is too eager to deport illegal aliens, Davis provided a story about illegal immigrants on a class trip who got arrested by ICE. Other than the illegal status of the children, this anecdote had absolutely nothing to do with the boys and was completely tangential to the main plot of the book. Moreover, this story did not even prove any point, as the children were later released and allowed to stay in the United States. Extraneous stories to score political points are littered throughout the book and truly take away from the reading experience. Not only did the bias take away from the reading experience, but it also took away from the experience of Book Day. Book Day does not typically involve controversial political issues such as immigration; however, due to the political nature of *Spare Parts*, it was impossible to stay away from the issue this year. Moreover, despite Dr. Master and Mrs. Moskovits' best efforts, discussion of the issue could not quite stay neutral, as shown by Mayor Michael Wilde's speech at the beginning of the day.

Rather than providing insight as to how the immigration process works from a practical standpoint, Mayor Wildes delivered a politically charged speech in which he addressed only one side of the immigration issue. In his speech, Mayor Wildes made his political views clear, stating that he is a proud Democrat and is against President Trump and his immigration policies. This may have been okay, had he still maintained an objective view on the immigration issue and discussed both sides of the matter. However, he did not do so, and instead presented unfounded facts, such as asserting that illegal immigration does not cost the U.S. any money. Moreover, Mayor Wildes criticized only Fox News for biased reporting, when numerous other news sources, such as CNN and MSNBC, are liable to the same criticism. When addressing questions from the student body, Mayor Wildes's answers were tinged with his political views, rather than addressing more substantive aspects of the immigration issue. While I understand the appeal of bringing Mayor Wildes to the school, as he is an extremely accomplished immigration lawyer who has represented numerous important clients, including John Lennon, Pele, and Melania Trump's parents, his speech was partial and not instructive on the overall immigration debate.

One of the highlights of Book Day was having Oscar Vasquez, a student from the book *Spare Parts*, speak to the student body at TABC. His descriptions of his early life, attempts to join the military, and actual experience in the military were interesting and unbiased, exhibiting

to the student body the true story of a man who achieved the American dream. Oscar's story helped make Book Day very enjoyable because his personal journey was not presented in a partisan way. Having an actual immigrant who went through the difficult immigration process in order to serve his country underscored the messages of courage and perseverance that were the focal points of this year's Book Day.

In conclusion, some aspects of the presentations during Book Day 2019 were biased toward one side of the immigration issue, which was unfortunate considering that the day was an overall success. Dr. Master, Mrs. Moskovits, and the Book Day committee intended to keep discussion of this heated topic neutral, but the political bias shown by Joshua Davis, the author of *Spare Parts*, as well Mayor Wildes in his speech made it difficult to do so. I hope that next year Book Day is more politically neutral so that we can enjoy it even more.

No: by Benji Grin

Book Day has been a staple at TABC for the past 9 years. Book day is a day in the school year where we, the students, can bond over and discuss a specific book chosen by a committee. The Book Day book for this year was *Spare Parts*, by Joshua Davis. The book documents the story of four high-schooler immigrants who unexpectedly won a robot-building competition against colleges such as MIT. At Book Day this year, we had various interesting speeches, presentations, and demonstrations about topics relating to the book, and nearly everyone had an awesome time. However, this year, there was some contention surrounding Book Day, due to the fact that the book covered the highly debated topic of immigration. Nevertheless, the issue was addressed objectively, and Book Day 2019 was not politically biased at all.

Spare Parts was a great choice as the centerpiece of Book Day 2019. It was engaging, was heartfelt, and gave readers a taste of what it is like to be an illegal immigrant in this country. Nonetheless, there are still those in school that believe that *Spare Parts* was not a good choice due to its bias regarding immigration. However, these students are wrong for a number of reasons. First, the book was not biased, as it merely stated facts regarding immigration and had minimal opinionated text. Also, other students and faculty disagree with them, as a committee of students chose *Spare Parts* and the book was vetted by Dr. Master and Mrs. Moskovits. The committee and faculty represent the student body's interests, and would not have picked the book if they thought it was biased. Dr. Master, when asked about the book choice, said that it was picked because of its relatability towards us as high school students. There were no political motives behind the book choice and both students and faculty agreed that *Spare Parts* was not biased.

Moreover, while the keynote speaker-- immigration lawyer and mayor of Englewood Michael Wildes-- expressed his beliefs regarding immigration to the student body, his speech was not politically biased. Mayor Wildes helped introduce Book Day in a stimulating way by sharing his unique experiences as an immigration lawyer and mayor. However, there are those that say that he stepped over the line when he shared his political beliefs. They argue that his opinions concerning immigration and President Donald Trump could have been left out of the

speech. Nevertheless, expressing his political opinion did not make the lecture or Book Day biased, as he answered questions at the end pertaining to politics. Therefore, people who disagreed with Mayor Wildes were able to share their opinion.

Finally, there were also other speakers and presenters throughout the day who articulated opinions opposed to those of Mayor Wildes. For instance, there was presenter from Israel who talked about politics in his Iron Dome presentation. He expressed conservative views, whereas Mayor Wildes represented more liberal viewpoints. Also, there was an activity where two students debated about immigration, with both of them articulating different opinions on the issue. If Book Day as a whole was biased, then speakers on only one side of the political spectrum would have presented. However, it was not biased in any form, as students were able to chime in during Mayor Wilde's opening speech and there were presenters with a variety of political views.

In conclusion, this year's Book Day was not politically biased. The book, *Spare Parts*, was fair minded and was chosen by the students and faculty for its relevance to students our age, not for an underlying political reason. While keynote speaker Michael Wildes expressed his political views, the students were able to respond and there were other presenters throughout the day with opposing views. I hope that all students at TABC understand that Book Day 2019 was not politically biased and fully appreciate the amazing experience that the day offered.