Letter from the Editors:

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools across the country, we at the Foreign Policy Association wanted to support teachers as they transformed the way students learned. FPA pivoted its outreach to provide classrooms with interactive articles that engaged students in foreign affairs and current events. This collected edition gathers the first five issues of the Foreign Policy Association’s Great Decisions High School, originally published during the 2020-2021 school year. Together, they represent a snapshot of some of the foreign policy issues that made the biggest waves during an especially historic and tumultuous year, a time when it became dramatically clear that these global issues are more crucial than ever. We hope that through these articles, and through our Great Decisions TV series, a new generation of leaders will be inspired to face the world’s most pressing concerns head-on. This year, we look forward to bringing you and your classrooms more content, and we look forward to partnering with you.

Eliza Edel McClelland

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GREAT DECISIONS

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The planet is getting hotter.
The polar ice caps are melting.
Ocean levels are rising.
Floods and wildfires are more frequent and often more intense.
Plant and animal species are disappearing.
People are suffering.

HOW DID WE GET HERE, AND WHAT’S THE PATH FORWARD?

BY JOSH GREGORY
Could your hometown be uninhabitable in 50 or 100 years? Scientists fear that entire cities that once stood safely on dry ground could be permanently submerged in the decades ahead. Intense heat waves and massive wildfires are also deadly threats, as we’ve seen in states such as Oregon, Washington, and California in recent years.

The culprit is climate change, which is a slow change in global or regional climate patterns, such as temperature and precipitation, over a long period of time. (You’ve probably also heard the term global warming, which refers to just one aspect of climate change: the increase in Earth’s average temperature over time.)

For millions of years, Earth’s climate has cycled between warmer and cooler periods. Since the end of the most recent ice age 12,000 years ago, Earth’s climate has slowly been growing warmer.

But since the Industrial Revolution, the average temperature has risen much faster, by a little more than 2°F, with two-thirds of that increase since 1975. The two warmest years ever were 2016 and 2019, and September 2020 was the hottest on record.

A couple of degrees might not sound like a big deal, but it is: A drop of just 1 or 2 degrees sent the planet into the last ice age, and a couple of degrees of warming could be enough to make Earth largely uninhabitable for humans.

The primary cause of the rising temperatures? People. Many of the things we do every day—from eating and driving to texting and working in factories—contribute directly or indirectly to climate change. And we won’t have to wait 50 years to see climate change’s impact: Most scientists believe that climate change is already increasing the intensity and frequency of catastrophic weather events like hurricanes and wildfires.

Scientists also say that the longer we wait, the harder it gets to ensure humanity’s future. Young people around the globe have heard the message and are taking action.

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, the Tanzanian leader of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, summed it up for The New York Times: “We still need this planet to live on,” she said, “and we still need this planet for our children.”

*Weather and climate: Weather is what’s outside when you open the door; climate describes the weather conditions that are expected in a particular region at a particular time of year.
GREENHOUSE GASES

What’s causing Earth’s climate to get warmer? The answer is invisible greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, which make up some of the atmosphere.

We actually need a certain amount of these greenhouse gases. They act like the glass panes of a greenhouse, trapping heat from the sun and making Earth warm enough to support life.

But the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, especially carbon dioxide, has increased significantly in the last 250 years. Most of the increase is a result of humans burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas, which are used to heat and cool homes and schools, in electricity generation and manufacturing, and to power cars, planes, and internet data centers. (They’re called fossil fuels because they come from the remains of fossilized plants and animals, such as dinosaurs, that died millions of years ago.)

Deforestation—harvesting trees for timber and to make room for homes, farms, and mines—also contributes to climate change. Trees and other plants naturally absorb carbon dioxide. Fewer trees means less carbon dioxide gets absorbed, with more making its way into the atmosphere.

Of particular concern is deforestation in South America’s Amazon rainforest—an area so vast it’s known as “Earth’s lungs.” At the current rate of deforestation, more than a quarter of the Amazon’s trees could be gone by 2030.

YOUR BURGER . . .

Fossil fuels and deforestation aren’t the only climate change culprits. In fact, high on the list is . . . your hamburger. After carbon dioxide, the most common greenhouse gas is methane, which is primarily a byproduct of raising livestock. To put it bluntly, the methane comes from livestock.

Livestock produces 15% of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions.

THE DEBATE

SHOULD THERE BE LESS RED MEAT IN SCHOOL LUNCHES?

YES
✓ Reducing demand for red meat would help cut greenhouse gas emissions from cattle.
✓ A quarter-pound burger requires 65 square feet of land for grazing and feed crops.
✓ Eating red meat increases a person’s risk of cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

NO
✗ Millions of students love having burgers for lunch.
✗ Red meat is a good source of nutrients like vitamin B12 and iron.
✗ Modern cattle operations are much more efficient and environmentally friendly than they used to be.
from cow burps and farts!

Earth is now home to 1.4 billion cattle, all frequently eating—and constantly digesting. The U.N. says these animals produce 15% of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions.

What’s the carbon footprint of your quarter-pound burger? According to a 2012 study in the scientific journal *Animals*, it’s about 4 pounds of greenhouse gases.

**MELTING ICE CAPS**

One of the most serious effects of climate change is the gradual melting of the polar ice caps in the Arctic and Antarctica.

The melting ice harms Earth in two major ways. First, it causes ocean levels to rise. From Houston and New York to the South Asian nation of Bangladesh and the Marshall Islands in the Pacific, many places are feeling the effects, including more frequent flooding that destroys homes, farms, and factories. Climate change could eventually create millions of “climate refugees” who have been forced to leave their homelands.

The world’s most vulnerable coastal city is Miami, Florida, according to Resources for the Future (RFF), a non-partisan research institute in Washington, D.C. Indeed, RFF says that 300,000 homes, 30 schools, and four hospitals will be at risk in the next 20 years in Florida, which has an 8,500-mile coastline.

The second major way melting polar ice harms the Earth is that the ice stores greenhouse gases. As it melts, carbon dioxide trapped inside is released, adding to the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

**WILD WEATHER**

Heat waves, hurricanes, floods, droughts, and wildfires have all increased in frequency and strength in recent years. Summer 2019 saw record temperatures around the world and in August 2020, it was 130°F in California’s Death Valley, which may be the highest temperature ever recorded on Earth.

An intense summer heat wave in 2020, combined with an equally intense drought, left the forests on America’s West Coast primed to

*September 11, 2020: Desiree Pierce at what’s left of her home in Talent, Oregon, after massive West Coast wildfires in California, Oregon, Washington, and Colorado. “I just needed to see it,” she said, “to get some closure.”*
erupt in flames. In California, by mid-September, an area the size of Connecticut had burned.

Higher global temperatures heat not only the air but also the oceans. Hurricanes get their power from the evaporation of hot, moist ocean air, so warmer oceans may mean more frequent storms. And since warmer air can hold more moisture, storms may dump significantly more rain, which can result in more severe and more frequent flooding.

**ENDANGERED SPECIES**

Climate change is also a threat to countless species whose habitats and food sources are shrinking. Close to 7,000 of the more than 120,000 species currently tracked by the International Union for Conservation of Nature are critically endangered.

The most poignant symbol of species threatened by climate change may be the Arctic’s polar bears. As sea ice recedes earlier in spring and forms later in the fall due to warmer temperatures, changes in bear habitats and food sources are endangering their existence.

**WHAT’S BEING DONE**

Most responses to climate change involve decreasing the use of fossil fuels, especially coal and oil, and increasing the use of alternative energy sources. There’s already been real progress. For example, about 20% of the power generated in the U.S. in 2020 comes from coal, down from 31% in 2017.

Alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, hydropower, and nuclear don’t produce greenhouse gases. They’re playing a growing role in the U.S. and world economies, accounting for 20% of U.S. energy consumption in 2018.

Advances in technology and government incentives are encouraging that growth. Some governments offer tax breaks for using green energy. Electric- and hybrid-car buyers often get tax breaks and can use high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. Governments have also raised taxes on fossil fuels, including gas at the pump (see Debate below), to make them more expensive and discourage their use.

In 2015, representatives of many of the world’s nations met in Paris to sign a landmark agreement to combat climate change and move toward a sustainable, low-carbon future. The goal is to limit the global rise in temperature in this century to between 1.5°C and 2°C. The U.S. is one of 189 nations that have signed the Paris Agreement.

**THE DEBATE**

**SHOULD WE RAISE GAS TAXES?**

**YES**

- If driving were more expensive, people would drive less.
- Higher gas taxes would encourage the purchase of fuel-efficient vehicles.
- Higher gas taxes would encourage carpooling.

**NO**

- People will still need to drive, even if gas costs more.
- It would be a hardship for people who already struggle to pay to fill up their tanks.
- Climate-change costs should be borne by fossil-fuel companies.
In Congress, a resolution known as the **Green New Deal** was introduced in 2019. It calls on the federal government to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions as part of a “10-year national mobilization.”

There are, however, questions about the economic impact of the Green New Deal and efforts to combat climate change in general. Millions of jobs in the U.S. are connected to traditional energy sources—both their extraction (e.g., oil and gas drilling and coal mining) and their use (e.g., powering cars, homes, schools, and factories).

Concern is especially high in the top states for the production of coal (Wyoming, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania) and oil (Texas, North Dakota, and New Mexico). Green New Deal proponents say it will create millions of jobs in green technologies and rebuilding the nation’s infrastructure—such as roads, public transit, and buildings—to run on green energy.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO
Doing something about climate change doesn’t need to be left to governments, corporations, or even adults. Here are some simple ways you can help on a daily basis:

- **Turn off** lights and **unplug** devices when you aren’t using them.
- **Eat less** red meat and **waste less** food. Americans throw out 25% of their groceries, and food decomposing in landfills emits methane (just like cows!).
- **Bike, walk, take public transit, or carpool** instead of driving alone.
- **Buy a car** that gets good mileage. If you can afford it, buy an electric or hybrid car.
- **Calculate** your **carbon footprint** (how much carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere from your daily activities) and try to reduce it.
- **Write or call** your **elected officials** to let them know what you think.
- **Vote, when you are old enough!** With few exceptions, you can’t vote until you’re 18, but in many states you can register at 16 or 17, and you’ll be all set when 18 rolls around.

### THE DEBATE

**SHOULD THERE BE A NATIONWIDE BAN ON PLASTIC BAGS?**

**YES**
- Plastic bags are made using oil and are difficult to recycle.
- Americans use a billion plastic bags a year, with only 1% recycled.
- Plastic can take decades, even centuries, to break down.

**NO**
- Plastic bags are more sanitary than paper or cloth bags.
- Many people feel single-use plastic bags offer protection against COVID-19.
- Plastic bags are inexpensive, even when used only once.
“I want you to act as if the house is on fire,” says 17-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, “because it is.”

Thunberg’s 15-day Atlantic voyage to address the U.N. Climate Action Summit in New York in 2019 helped make her the world’s most famous young climate activist, but she has plenty of company. Here are three examples:

Felix Finkbeiner
In 2007, when he was in fourth grade in Munich, Germany, Felix Finkbeiner learned about climate change and deforestation. He tried to help by planting a tree at his school and encouraging other students to do the same. He then took his effort online with plant-for-the-planet.org, which has encouraged the planting of 12 billion trees around the world.

Liza Goldberg
As a middle-school student in Maryland, Liza Goldberg did a science fair project on the effects of climate change on red-maple saplings that caught the attention of a judge from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). She then began interning on a NASA research project that uses satellites to monitor the health of mangrove forests and helped create a system that alerts scientists when specific forests are threatened. Goldberg is continuing her work with NASA as a freshman at Stanford University in California. She’s also helping develop a program that lets K–12 classes use satellite imagery to study climate change.

Jerome Foster II
While he was a high school student in Washington, D.C., Jerome Foster II founded The Climate Reporter, an online magazine focused on the youth climate and environmental movement, and led weekly protests as the local youth organizer for Global Climate Strike. He also founded and serves as executive director of One Million of Us, a nonprofit that’s trying to get 1 million young people to vote in 2020 and works for several causes, including climate change. Foster is now a freshman at Columbia University in New York.
THE GRIM REAPER AT YOUR DOORSTEP?
1. Which does the man in the cartoon see as a bigger threat: climate change or the coronavirus? Do you think most people would agree with him? Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Do immediate threats like the global pandemic overshadow the need to address other critical issues like climate change? Is it possible to address both short- and long-term issues at the same time?
3. With so many people staying at or close to home because of the pandemic, there was a sudden decrease in greenhouse emissions. Do you think that offers any lessons for the fight against climate change?

NOW IT’S YOUR TURN TO MAKE GREAT DECISIONS
1. If you could make just one change in how we live or in government policy to address climate change, what would it be? Why did you choose this particular change?
2. Do you think addressing climate change should be society’s top priority right now? If yes, why? If not, which issue or issues seem more important to you, and why?
3. YOUR STORY: Has climate change impacted your life in any way? If yes, how so?
A six-year-old boy in Bangladesh works in a recycling facility, where he is paid about two dollars for 8 to 10 hours of labor.
When you unwrap a candy bar, you’d probably rather think about how good it will taste than wonder who picked the cocoa beans used to make the chocolate. But you might be surprised to find out that in African nations such as Ghana and the Ivory Coast, where cocoa is a major crop, farmworkers are often teens under the age of 16. In some cases, kids as young as five have been found working on the farms.

Many of these children live in impoverished areas, and some willingly take the jobs to provide money for their families. But other young people are forced to work on the farms for little or no pay. They fall prey to human traffickers—people who seek to make money off the forced labor of others. In the cocoa industry, some traffickers convince parents to let their children go to work at a young age. The parents often don’t realize that their children will face long work hours and potential injuries, with no time to pursue an education. In other cases, traffickers simply kidnap children and sell them to the farms.

In 2020, as many as 1.6 million children were involved in producing the world’s cocoa supply. And that’s just one industry. Around the world, more than 4 million children are currently being forced to take on dangerous jobs, such as working in mines or factories. The goods they help make include clothing, toys, foods, furniture, and leather products. Like chocolate, some of those goods end up on the shelves of U.S. stores, where your family might purchase them without ever knowing how they were made.

**A GLOBAL ISSUE**

Forced child labor is just one part of a much larger issue. Human trafficking and what is called modern enslavement occur in rich and poor countries alike. The word “trafficking” usually means that something is being moved from one place to another. But human traffickers often find victims in their own towns, and relatives might even take advantage of family members. It can happen to anyone, anywhere, from any walk of life.

Human trafficking includes several categories. One set of definitions for this crime comes from the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which became a U.S. law in 2000. Trafficking can involve using “force, fraud, or coercion” to recruit an adult or minor for labor. Under U.S. law, any situation involving a
minor in paid sexual activity is also considered trafficking. Additionally, because minors cannot legally consent to sex, it is considered rape.

Some people assume human trafficking is always about forcing someone to have sex for money, but trafficking can occur in almost any industry. For example, the U.S. has seen a number of legal cases involving nail salons, where immigrant workers—mostly from Asia—are forced to work long hours and to pay debts they supposedly owe their employers. Worldwide, other forms of forced labor are much more common than sexual trafficking.

Modern slavery is not defined by law, but it usually includes total control over the working and living conditions of those who are enslaved. The victims are not necessarily considered someone else’s property, as enslaved people once were in the United States and other countries. But people held under modern slavery can’t leave their jobs or travel freely, and their employers control all aspects of their lives.

In recent years, forced labor has overtaken sex trafficking as the most common form of modern enslavement.

PRISONERS IN THE HOME

Some 21 million adults around the world perform forced labor. Most of those workers are employed in four major job sectors: domestic work, construction, manufacturing, and agriculture. Almost 25% of the workers are in the first category—they work in people’s homes as maids, nannies, or other household help, often for wealthy families. This is called domestic servitude.

Neighbors passing by a home where domestic servitude takes place might never think anything strange is going on inside. After all, many families with money pay full-time housekeepers or nannies to live with them. But under domestic servitude, workers are virtual prisoners in the homes.

As a teenager growing up in Brazil, all Natalicia Tracy wanted was to get a good education. When a family she nannied for offered to take her with them to live in the United States, she jumped at the chance. There, she thought, she would have better opportunities than in Brazil. Instead, Natalicia found herself a victim of domestic servitude.

Natalicia’s employers said she would be like a member of the family. Instead, they slowly curtailed her freedoms and cut off her contact with the outside world. She couldn’t receive mail or make phone calls, and on many days the family forced her to work up to 15 hours straight. She cooked the family’s meals, but they would sometimes eat all the food and leave

THE DEBATE

WOULD YOU PAY A HIGHER PRICE FOR PRODUCTS MADE USING FAIR LABOR PRACTICES?

**YES**

✓ Goods created by skilled, well-compensated workers are often of higher quality.
✓ Supporting companies with fair labor practices will encourage other companies to follow suit.
✓ Inexpensive goods should not come at the expense of others’ freedom.

**NO**

✗ Many peoples’ budgets are already too tight.
✗ Consumers should not have to research every product they buy.
✗ In a capitalist economy, companies should be allowed to compete by keeping their prices low.
nothing for her. For all her work, Natalicia was paid just $25 per week, and she slept on the concrete floor of the family’s porch. She put cardboard on the floor and slept on a futon, but the porch was not suited for winter weather in Boston, where the family lived. “For many months each year, the floor was frigid,” Natalicia later recalled.

Natalicia felt trapped. Her work visa only allowed her to work for her traffickers, and she didn’t speak English. She also felt she could not challenge the authority of the educated people she worked for. If she did question her situation, the family berated her. “People don’t understand that you can’t just walk out,” she said. “There are constraints—economic, emotional, social—that keep women like me in place.”

Natalicia was luckier than many victims of domestic servitude. Her traffickers returned to Brazil and did not force her to go with them. She found work with another family who treated her well. They bought her a winter coat, which she had never had before. They also encouraged her studies. Years later, Natalicia earned a PhD at Boston University.

At age 21, Erwiana Sulistyaningsih left her native Indonesia to work as a maid for a family in Hong Kong. She thought it would be a great opportunity to earn money and save up to pay for college. Instead, her employer beat her and refused to let her see a doctor for the resulting injuries. After months of this treatment, the family abandoned her at the airport with nothing but a few dollars and a ticket home. Erwiana pursued legal action, drawing worldwide attention to her story and ensuring that her abuser would be punished with prison time.

Other victims are less lucky. The subtle signs of abuse often go unnoticed in cases of domestic servitude. As a result, it continues to be a major problem around the world.

**ENSLAVED AT SEA**

Adults and children alike are often trafficked into agricultural and manufacturing jobs, including in the commercial fishing industry. Many of the worst abuses take place aboard fishing vessels in Southeast Asia or at the plants where seafood is processed before being shipped around the world.

As with chocolate, some of the fish caught using forced labor ends up in U.S. grocery stores.

Like many traffickers, those in the fishing industry often lure or kidnap desperate and impoverished people by promising them jobs with good wages. In exchange for these jobs, victims agree to pay a fee. Once at work, this fee turns into a debt, and the workers’ wages are withheld as payment. Employers also charge the workers for such things as food and housing, so the debt grows. Workers are stuck in their jobs, unable to pay off what they owe and start making money for themselves. This situation is called bonded labor or debt bondage.

People enslaved on fishing boats often face horrifying circumstances. Victims remain at sea for months or even years at a time, and they are at the mercy of the captains that control the boats. They might work up to 20 hours a day, seven days a week, without receiving enough food and water. Some workers have even been killed by their captors, their bodies tossed overboard.

While working as a maid in Hong Kong, Erwiana Sulistyaningsih (center) was imprisoned and abused by her employers for several months before she was able to escape.
sometimes sexually assault or beat the victims under their control to maintain dominance. At times, just the threat of that kind of abuse paralyzes the victims, keeping them too afraid to go to the police or try to run away.

FORCED TO SELL THEIR BODIES
People have long paid others for sex. In some cases, people choose to perform sex acts in exchange for money, becoming prostitutes. But not all sex workers are willing participants. Around the world, almost 5 million people are forced to engage in sex work, including prostitution and appearing in pornographic films. Because these people are not consenting to have sex, this is a form of rape.

Most victims of sex trafficking are teenage girls. Traffickers promise money or other benefits, and many victims don’t learn that they will be forced to have sex until it is too late. Once they are forced into prostitution, victims often have little control over their lives. They may never be allowed to leave their homes. If they are, a handler called a pimp goes with them. Pimps sometimes sexually assault or beat the victims under their control to maintain dominance. At times, just the threat of that kind of abuse paralyzes the victims, keeping them too afraid to go to the police or try to run away.

A 2017 study found that almost 20% of homeless teens in the U.S. and Canada were victims of sex trafficking.

Sex trafficking takes place in wealthy countries, too. Between 2015 and 2019, the annual number of sex trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline almost doubled, reaching more than 8,000 cases. Thousands more people are likely victims of sex trafficking. Large events such as the Super Bowl are often settings for sex trafficking. Traffickers collect victims in the cities that host these events or bring them there. At these events, they find plenty of people who are willing to pay for sex. Traffickers in the U.S. often target runaways or homeless people. Many of them are victims of sexual or physical abuse before turning to the streets.

SHOULD FORCED SEX WORKERS BE SEEN AS CRIMINALS UNDER THE LAW?

YES
✓ Breaking the law is never OK, and prostitution is illegal in most of the world.
✓ All sex workers could claim to be victims of trafficking if they are arrested.
✓ Arresting people prevents them from continuing to perform sex work, whether it is forced or not.

NO
✗ Traffickers and paying customers should be the ones held accountable for these crimes.
✗ A criminal record could make it harder for victims to move on with their lives.
✗ Governments should focus more on the economic conditions that make many women potential victims.
Others have mental health issues or face extreme poverty. This leaves them highly vulnerable to traffickers’ promises of a better life.

**FIGHTING BACK**

There is a lot of debate over the best ways to fight trafficking and modern enslavement. Some people believe that the key lies in encouraging governments to enact stronger labor regulations. In many countries, including the U.S., there are already laws meant to keep employers from treating employees unfairly. But companies can get around these rules by operating in countries with less strict labor laws. For example, a U.S. technology company might work with a Chinese factory to produce phones using workers who earn less than the American minimum wage.

In 2019, the U.S. government issued a National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking. The plan noted that people in the U.S. who are particularly at risk of becoming victims include runaway children, undocumented immigrants, Indigenous Americans, and LGBTQ people. And Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) statistics show that unlike most of the world, the U.S. has a bigger problem with sex trafficking than other forms of forced labor. The action plan said the U.S. government would work to prevent trafficking from occurring, support survivors, and prosecute traffickers.

Governments aren’t the only ones fighting back. Countless independent organizations have formed to combat trafficking, each with its own perspective about the right way to address the situation. Many of these groups are led by former trafficking victims, who know just how widespread trafficking is and how serious its consequences can be. Activist Jennelle Gordon, a former victim of sex trafficking, says that abusers are “hiding in plain sight . . . kids are being targeted and even groomed by pimps, at schools, online, in their favorite parent-approved games, by their peers, on social media and the list goes on.”

During the 2020 Super Bowl in Miami awareness campaigns aimed to combat the predicted spike in human trafficking that typically accompanies celebrations surrounding the big game.

**The global human trafficking industry generates profits of about $150 billion per year.**

### SHOULD KIDS UNDER 16 BE ALLOWED TO HOLD JOBS IN THE U.S.?

**YES**
- Many younger teens are responsible enough to work.
- A job can be a valuable learning experience.
- The working age is already lower in some parts of the world.

**NO**
- It would be hard to keep employers from exploiting such young workers.
- Kids should be allowed to focus on learning and having fun, not working.
- Families might force kids to work to earn more money.
and modern slavery crimes. The proposed law would also let victims sue traffickers or others who knew trafficking was taking place. Writing in support of the bill, which has not yet become law, Ho said, “The protection of victims and the prosecution of those who seek to enslave and exploit the vulnerable is at its foundation an integral part of the ‘rule of law’ in Hong Kong.”

**Anuradha Koirala**
In Nepal, thousands of women and girls are trafficked every year across the border into neighboring India and forced into sex work. Anuradha Koirala decided to do something about it. In 1993, she founded the nonprofit organization **Maiti Nepal**, which works with law enforcement to monitor the Nepal-India border for trafficking, provides resources and education for former victims, and works to spread awareness of trafficking. Sometimes called Nepal’s Mother Teresa, Koirala has won worldwide recognition for helping to rescue more than 12,000 victims of trafficking and catch more than 700 traffickers.

**Bhanuja Sharan Lal**
Though parts of India’s economy are booming, millions of the country’s people still live in poverty. Those conditions make the nation ripe for human trafficking, and bonded labor in particular. As the head of **Manav Sansadhan Evam Mahila Vikas Sansthan (MSEMVS)**, Bhanuja Sharan Lal is trying to do something about trafficking in his homeland. MSEMVS is a nonprofit group that has helped end modern slavery in more than 100 villages since 1996. It has also worked with survivors to educate people about slavery and to call on local police to crack down on it. Today, Lal and his organization focus on ending forced child labor and helping its survivors. MSEMVS runs schools for the young victims so they can catch up in the education they missed while working.

**Patricia Ho**
Lawyer Patricia Ho has worked for several years to address human trafficking and modern slavery in her home city of Hong Kong. She became interested in the topic when she represented a victim of human trafficking who claimed the government of Hong Kong was not taking strong enough legal steps to stop it. In 2017, Ho helped write a bill to make human trafficking

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**WHAT YOU CAN DO**
Battling human trafficking and modern enslavement is not just something for governments to tackle. Anyone can get involved, either by educating themselves or taking concrete action. Here some of the things you can do to help.

- **Purchase** goods made with fair labor practices. You can learn which goods might have been made using forced or child labor by checking a list the **U.S. Labor Department** keeps.
- **Be careful** when interacting with people online. Traffickers might pose as recruiters for modeling or acting jobs, or try to convince victims to send photos or meet in person.
- **Learn** some of the signs that might indicate someone is a trafficking victim. These can include such things as untreated injuries or illnesses, signs of emotional abuse, or a lack of freedom of movement.
- **Call** the 24-hour National HumanTrafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or tell a trusted adult if you think someone may be a victim of domestic servitude or other forms of trafficking.
- **Volunteer** for local anti-trafficking organizations or bigger groups such as Amnesty International.
- **Hold a fundraiser** for groups fighting trafficking.
- **Write or call** your elected officials to let them know what you think.
- **Vote, when you are old enough!** With few exceptions, you can’t vote until you’re 18, but in many states you can register at 16 or 17, and you’ll be all set when 18 rolls around.

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**Anuradha Koirala**

![Anuradha Koirala](image)

**Bhanuja Sharan Lal**

![Bhanuja Sharan Lal](image)

**Patricia Ho**

![Patricia Ho](image)
NOT QUITE THE SAME . . .

1. Why do you think Jimmy says that homework is a form of child labor? Is it possible for people with different backgrounds to have different perspectives on what counts as forced labor?
2. In what situations, if any, should young children be allowed to hold jobs? How young is too young to work?
3. What makes regular, everyday work different from forced labor? Is there a clear line that can be crossed? Who should determine where that line is?

NOW IT’S YOUR TURN TO MAKE GREAT DECISIONS

1. Should governments make it more of a priority to fight human trafficking? Which kinds of regulations would be the best way to fight forced labor and modern enslavement?
2. What would make you change your mind about buying something if you knew it was made using forced labor? What if it was something you really wanted, such as a new phone?
3. YOUR STORY: Have you ever been treated unfairly at a job? Were you able to resolve the issue? What made the situation different from forced labor or modern slavery?
AI and other smart technologies are becoming more common every day. Will they change our lives for the better or the worse?

BY SANDY ONG
When you think of artificial intelligence (AI), you might conjure up images of a fantastical future involving cyborgs, space travel, and flying cars. But far from being science fiction, AI is already part of our everyday lives. Netflix uses AI to help you pick out a new movie, and Spotify uses it to suggest new songs for your playlists. It’s what enables Facebook to tag your friends in the photos you upload, and how Google Maps figures out the fastest route to your destination. It’s how Siri can listen to your questions and promptly find you an answer. In short, AI is nearly everywhere you look these days. The technology that enables these applications has been advancing rapidly in recent years, and some experts claim we are now in the midst of a new industrial revolution. Similar to how coal and steam power transformed the lives of those in the 18th century, and electricity brought about immense changes in the 19th century, AI, robots, and other smart technologies will revolutionize the way people work, live, and play.

AI holds the immense potential to change our lives for the better—from helping individuals work more efficiently to tackling climate change and other big issues. However, it also has some potential drawbacks. For example, many worry that AI will perpetuate discrimination and bias, while others fear for their privacy.

With AI’s role in our lives continuing to expand, humankind must figure out how to reap the technology’s benefits while learning how to manage the risks it brings.

What exactly is artificial intelligence, and how does it work? Broadly speaking, the term is used to describe computer systems that can absorb information, process it, and respond in ways similar to humans. For example, you have probably played video games where you compete against computer-controlled opponents. These opponents pay attention to your actions and react differently depending on the situation. This is the result of programmers creating detailed instructions for the game to follow. But what if a computer could learn and improve instead of...
just obeying a set of rules?

In recent years, researchers and inventors have focused heavily on an area of AI called **machine learning**. First, programmers create **algorithms** designed to identify patterns in data. Then they start feeding data into the algorithms. The more data the program analyzes, the more it learns and the better it gets at completing a task. For example, the speech-recognition technology that powers Siri, Alexa, and other AI helpers was built using machine learning. At first, these systems struggled to understand people who had accents or used unfamiliar words. But as they have spent years listening to millions of people talk, they have improved greatly.

AI systems can be fed many different types of information, including numbers, text, or images. This enables AIs to carry out many different functions—from identifying the faces of people in video footage to figuring out which products different people will want to buy.

**GREAT POTENTIAL**

One useful application of AI has been to help climate change scientists make better predictions of the future. Scientists gather large amounts of data from the atmosphere, oceans, land, and even ice. They use this information to construct models so they can estimate how much sea levels will rise or which places will be most vulnerable to hurricanes, heat waves, and other extreme weather events. Machine learning algorithms can help make these predictions more accurate.

Additionally, AI is helping expand our range of transport options. Already, companies such as Waymo and Tesla are experimenting with **autonomous vehicles**, which rely on sensors, radar, machine learning, and other sophisticated technology to detect their surroundings. Cars that drive themselves offer many potential benefits: they free up people’s time, cut down on traffic by figuring out the clearest routes, provide greater fuel efficiency, and possibly even make driving safer.

Autonomous trucks could one day be particularly useful. Long-haul trucking is an exhausting and dangerous occupation—in 2018, nearly 5,000 people in the U.S. died in accidents involving commercial trucks. More than 90% of the

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**THE DEBATE**

**SHOULD FULLY AUTONOMOUS CARS BE ALLOWED ON THE ROAD?**

**YES**

✅ They can travel at consistent speeds and distances from one another, making driving more eco-friendly.

✅ They could reduce accidents caused by human error, fatigue, and drunk driving.

✅ Commuters will be free to do other things while traveling.

**NO**

❌ Self-driving cars are potentially vulnerable to hackers and cyberattacks.

❌ Taxi drivers, long-haul truckers, and others may lose their jobs.

❌ AI might struggle to make decisions such as whether to hit a pedestrian or avoid them by swerving into a concrete barrier instead.
cases were caused by human error. By contrast, self-driving trucks will be able to operate around the clock without getting fatigued like people do.

Another useful application of AI is in the medical field. Analyzing chest X-rays for pneumonia, mammograms for breast tumors, or CT scans for brain bleeds is a tedious and time-consuming task. Instead, machines can be trained to do a first pass of such scans and flag cases for doctors to take a closer look at, saving precious time when it comes to diagnosing disease.

AI can also help researchers discover new treatments more quickly. For a drug to be effective, it has to bind to the bacteria or virus that has infected someone. Think of it as two puzzle pieces fitting together—to ensure a good fit, scientists have to first understand the shape of the target protein. But a protein can assume countless different shapes, and calculating its most likely structure can take a very long time. AI helps accelerate that process. This proved especially useful during the Covid-19 outbreak, when time was of the essence. Google’s AI system DeepMind helped predict the protein structure of the SARS-Cov-2 virus within a few short months. With that knowledge, scientists could then rapidly develop vaccines.

AI is also being used to help fight crime and make cities safer. Law enforcement agencies apply machine learning algorithms to the images they obtain from surveillance cameras, using the technology to search for similar faces in databases of mugshots, social media pictures, and other images. Recently, the FBI relied on facial-recognition technology to identify rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol in January. And pop star Taylor Swift is said to have used facial recognition to identify stalkers at concerts.

“...black and brown people are more likely to be inaccurately identified, and thus unfairly targeted.”

USE WITH CAUTION

AI has led to some extremely positive developments. But as with many other technologies, its misuse can pose serious risks. One major concern is how AI can encourage discrimination and racial bias. There have been calls to ban facial recognition tools because studies have shown they perform badly when it comes to identifying women and people from ethnic and racial minorities, as compared to how well they can classify white, male faces. “This means that black and brown people are more likely to be inaccurately identified, and thus unfairly targeted,” says Michal Strahilevitz, a professor of marketing at St. Mary’s College of California. “This may not be intentional, but it ends up having a racial bias that is dangerous and unethical.” Bias has also been identified in systems that use AI to screen applicants for jobs or bank loans. The reason this happens is because such AI-powered systems are fed data that isn’t diverse enough, and so they tend to “pick” only certain types of candidates—the ones they are familiar with.

Others voice concern that AI violates basic privacy rights. Closed-circuit television cameras are everywhere these days. But
markets and airports, people can’t explicitly consent to having their every step monitored.

There has also been outcry over social media companies violating their users’ privacy. One way these platforms make money is by allowing third-party companies to post ads on their sites. For example, you have probably seen promotions for clothes, shoes, and other products when using social media. These ads are usually targeted at specific users after the platforms use AI to analyze their posts and tweets, likes and shares, professional and educational history, demographic information, and other details. Some social media platforms have harvested this personal information—without users’ consent—to sell to other companies. Facebook, for example, was fined $5 billion in 2019 for mishandling its users’ personal data. The social media giant sold data to a British consulting firm called Cambridge Analytica, which then used it to influence voters during the 2016 U.S. elections.

The elections also thrust fake news into the spotlight. AI algorithms can be designed to create fake news—content that is believable but simply untrue. Analysts believe that Russian hackers used hundreds of thousands of AI-controlled Twitter accounts, called bots, to spread propaganda and disinformation during the 2016 U.S. elections and Britain’s Brexit vote.

AI can also be used to generate deepfakes. These are photos or videos that have been artificially doctored to superimpose the face of one person onto another, or to alter their speech. They are sometimes so realistic that it’s hard for people to distinguish if they are real or not, even when paying close attention. Paired with fake news, deepfakes create nearly limitless opportunities to spread misinformation. For example, people have used deepfake technology to place the faces of celebrities in pornographic videos. Such activity could be used to ruin the reputation of almost anyone.

The use of AI also raises many ethical issues. For example, what if it falls into the wrong hands and is used for dangerous purposes like creating heat-seeking missiles? And as machines become more intelligent, how should they be treated? Can a robot or an autonomous vehicle be held to blame

**THE DEBATE**

**SHOULD TECH COMPANIES BE ALLOWED TO COLLECT AND SHARE YOUR DATA?**

**YES**

✓ It’s what helps them earn profits so they can provide their services to users for free.
✓ Companies can use the data to better understand customers’ needs and wants, and offer products accordingly.
✓ If customers don’t want to share data, they shouldn’t use a company’s products or services.

**NO**

✗ People own their data and should have a say in how it’s used.
✗ Companies are often unclear about which kinds of data they are collecting or how they are using it.
✗ Leaked information, such as bank details, can have serious repercussions.
if it causes an accident—as a self-driving Uber car did in March 2018 when it struck and killed a pedestrian? Or should the people who programmed them take the rap? And is it possible that we are creating AI and robots that will one day outthink human beings? As renowned physicist Stephen Hawking pessimistically predicted about AI: “It would take off on its own and re-design itself at an ever increasing rate. The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race.” Could this really happen? All these are questions that society must collectively consider as we move forward into a future with increasingly powerful AI technology.

KEEPING AI IN CHECK

To ensure we don’t end up in a dystopian future, policymakers around the world are starting to introduce laws to control how AI systems are developed and put to use. For instance, the European Union passed a law in 2018 stating that tech giants must be able to explain how the machines they design make decisions. And in 2019, the U.S. government introduced the Algorithmic Accountability Act, which requires companies to assess their machine learning systems for security and privacy risks. In addition, firms need to regularly examine their algorithms and take corrective actions if discrimination is detected. Some cities have gone one step further. In May 2019, San Francisco became the first city in the world to ban facial recognition. Several other California cities soon followed suit.

Private companies, too, are doing their part to develop AI in a responsible manner. For example, Google unveiled a tool in 2019 that helps news organizations tag stories with potentially misleading information. It also partnered with fact-checking networks and changed its AI to stop promoting fake news and hoax videos on YouTube.

To develop AI systems with fewer biases, computer programmers are now looking to use more diverse datasets in machine learning. They are also more mindful of how the systems are trained. For

THE DEBATE

SHOULD AI-POWERED ROBOTS BE ALLOWED TO REPLACE HUMAN WORKERS?

YES

✓ Computers don’t get tired and can work more efficiently than humans.
✓ Robots can do repetitive or dangerous tasks, freeing up people to do more meaningful work.
✓ Robots are cheaper than humans in the long run, helping companies reduce costs.

NO

✓ Face-to-face human interaction is an important part of customer service, medical treatment, and many other jobs.
✓ Many people will lose their jobs.
✓ AIs cannot handle situations they haven’t been trained for.
example, some companies use a software platform called GapJumpers to “blindly audition” potential job candidates based on their skill sets, instead of using personal data such as where they grew up or studied.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**
Tackling fake news, privacy issues, and other AI-related challenges isn’t just limited to the realm of governments and big tech firms. You can play a role too, by taking these simple steps:

- **Don’t believe** everything you read on social media or messaging apps. Instead, get your information directly from trustworthy news outlets.
- **Think twice** before reposting or retweeting. Verify that the information you’re about to share is real by double-checking it with reliable news sources.
- **Learn** to spot deepfakes. **Telltale signs** include unnatural eye movements or facial expressions, awkward posture, abnormal skin tone, blurred edges, and inconsistent audio.
- **Review** your privacy settings on social media.
- **Be careful** about giving newly downloaded apps access to your contacts, photos, location, and other personal information.
- **Write or call your elected officials** to let them know what you think.
- **Vote, when you are old enough!** With few exceptions, you can’t vote until you’re 18, but in many states you can register at 16 or 17, and you’ll be all set when 18 rolls around.

**Tarr’s program** can analyze a video and detect if it contains faces that have been swapped or voices that have been dubbed. It’s up to 10 times quicker than other state-of-the-art detection systems, and more accurate. For his work, the 17-year-old won this year’s BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition.

**Sophie Zhu**
In 2019, 16-year-old Sophie Zhu launched a project to find out how AI might one day reshape our world. The California teenager emailed 130 of the world’s leading AI experts, academics, and journalists, asking questions such as: “Do you believe that androids and human-level AI, once available, will be weaponized?” and “What is the most likely reason why they could harm humanity or threaten the survival of the human race?” Zhu, now a freshman at Duke University in North Carolina, collated and analyzed the replies she gathered, and wrote an illuminating research paper on the topic.

**Jerry Di**
When 15-year-old Jerry Di was diagnosed with Tourette syndrome a few years ago, he was disappointed to find that treatment options were limited, expensive, or “downright ineffective.” To make matters worse, no one was looking to improve treatment for the neurological disorder, which causes repetitive, uncontrollable movements called tics. In response, Di decided to do something about the problem himself. The teen from Ontario, Canada, founded a biotech startup called **Unitic**. The aim: to use machine learning to diagnose Tourette patients and come up with treatment plans tailored specifically for them.

**Gregory Tarr**
As a young boy growing up in Ireland, Gregory Tarr taught himself how to code using online tutorials. He soon became interested in AI, and after more than five years of research, he created a computer program to detect deepfakes.

**Example, some companies use a software platform called GapJumpers to “blindly audition” potential job candidates based on their skill sets, instead of using personal data such as where they grew up or studied.**

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CAN YOU COUNT ON AI?
1. What is this cartoon trying to say about our increasing use of AI? Do you agree with the message?
2. Why is it important for people to learn how to do things themselves, even if they can be done more easily by AI?
3. How much do you rely on AI helpers like Alexa and Siri? Have they ever answered your questions incorrectly or messed up a command you gave? Which resources do you turn to when AI services let you down?

NOW IT’S YOUR TURN TO MAKE GREAT DECISIONS
1. Do the benefits of AI outweigh the potential drawbacks? Why or why not? Are government regulations needed to keep it in check? If so, what kinds?
2. Are you excited for the future of AI? Why or why not? What ways do you think it will change the way people live?
3. YOUR STORY: Have you ever been fooled by a deepfake or similar misinformation online? How did you find out? How did you feel when you realized what had happened?

KEY WORDS & TERMS
- algorithms
- artificial intelligence
- autonomous vehicles
- bots
- deepfakes
- fake news
- industrial revolution
- machine learning
- propaganda
For more than a year, the COVID-19 pandemic has upended normal ways of life. Is there finally an end in sight?

BY ISOBEL WHITCOMB
In 2020, life ground to a halt. School and work, graduations and weddings were canceled or moved online. The culprit? A mysterious new sickness called COVID-19.

The disease blazed across national borders. By March, only four months after the earliest cases were reported, COVID-19 had spread to more than 170 countries. That same month, the World Health Organization, an international agency responsible for public health, declared the outbreak a pandemic—a disease occurring across many different countries and infecting large numbers of people.

Scientists believe that COVID-19 originated in China, but they aren’t sure exactly how it formed. They do know that the pathogen causing it is a coronavirus—a family of viruses that cause illnesses such as the common cold. Scientists suspect that this new coronavirus is zoonotic. That means that it comes from animals. Mutations in its genetic material allowed it to jump over to humans.

Experts say that a particular suite of characteristics helped this coronavirus spread so quickly. First, coronaviruses are airborne, meaning they can spread on particles of saliva and mucus tiny enough to float in the air. We spread these particles when we cough or sneeze, laugh or sing. Also important is the fact that people can spread the virus before they develop any symptoms. In other words, those who are infected can feel fine and still get others sick.

COVID-19 has overwhelmed hospitals around the world. Many of them simply didn’t have enough beds, equipment, or staff to care for the number of patients coming in with the disease. As of April 22, 2021, more than half a million people have died of COVID-19 in the U.S.—and more than 3 million have died worldwide. The disease has hit some populations much harder than others. Older adults, people with health conditions, and pregnant women are all at higher risk of severe disease. COVID-19 has also disproportionately impacted people of color—particularly those who are Black, Hispanic, or Native American.

Thankfully, there may finally be an end in sight. Each week, fewer people are testing positive for COVID-19. That’s largely thanks to vaccines—and the monumental effort of governments, scientists and health care workers to deliver them to the public.
SHOULD REGULAR COVID-19 TESTING BE REQUIRED FOR STUDENTS TO ATTEND SCHOOL?

YES
✓ Weekly testing in schools could reduce infections by 50%, some models suggest.
✓ Kids and teens with COVID-19 often develop mild or no symptoms and may accidentally come to school sick.
✓ When outbreaks shut down schools, learning suffers.

NO
✗ COVID-19 tests can cost more than $100 each.
✗ Regular testing requires a high level of effort and organization on the part of schools.
✗ It can take days to weeks to receive results from the most accurate tests. Rapid tests produce results in minutes, but are less accurate.

A scientist at Moderna’s laboratory in Cambridge, Mass., works on a potential vaccine in February 2020.

GEARING UP THE IMMUNE SYSTEM
Vaccines train our bodies to fight infection by introducing harmless parts of a disease pathogen, such as proteins from a dead virus. The immune system responds by building up an army of antibodies. Antibodies are proteins designed to destroy that specific pathogen, or at least block it from attacking our cells.

“It’s a little bit like showing a picture of a known bank robber to security guards at the bank,” says Ryan Demmer, an epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota. “It helps the security guards recognize when a threat is coming, and allows them to quickly call in more reinforcements and target their response.”

If enough people receive them, vaccines can put a total end to an outbreak—even if some people remain unvaccinated. With more people immune, the disease runs out of people to infect, essentially reaching dead ends. Ideally, it then dies out in the community. This phenomenon is called herd immunity.

“We don’t just need vaccines to protect ourselves, we need to get them to protect everybody,” says Josh Snodgrass, an expert in global health at the University of Oregon.

THE DEBATE

A HISTORIC EFFORT
Normally, vaccines take 10 to 15 years to develop. During this period of time, scientists run clinical trials. They test the vaccine on larger and larger groups of people to determine whether it works, identify side effects, and study how long immunity lasts. The final stage, called phase 3, compares the effectiveness of the vaccine to a placebo, a harmless substance that looks like a vaccine but has no effect on the body. This stage includes tens of thousands of people and takes years.

But ending the pandemic couldn’t wait a whole decade. So on May 15, 2020, the White House announced its plan to develop a vaccine by January 2021. The mission was named Operation Warp Speed. The U.S. government poured billions of dollars into the effort. Scientists had access to nearly unlimited resources. They worked fast, but they didn’t cut any corners.
They already had a solid understanding of similar coronaviruses and decades of experience perfecting the vaccine technology they planned to use. This earlier scientific research allowed scientists to shorten the vaccine development process.

Finally, scientists were able to streamline clinical trials by overlapping the different stages, so that different trials happened at the same time. “But the safety component was always front and center,” says Jason Varin, a professor at the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy. Scientists still conducted rigorous evaluations of safety data at each stage of the process.

By November 2020, multiple vaccines were in development, and tens of thousands of people had received them in clinical trials. But were the vaccines ready to be delivered to the public?

THE FIRST VACCINES ARRIVE

When the results of phase 3 clinical trials started rolling in, they exceeded scientists’ expectations. Scientists were hoping for a vaccine that was 70% effective. The first vaccine to arrive, produced by pharmaceutical company Pfizer and biotechnology company BioNTech, was 95% effective after two doses. Soon after, pharmaceutical company Moderna announced that its vaccine was 94% effective after two doses.

During the clinical trials, neither vaccine showed severe side effects. Some participants reported mild symptoms, including chills, headaches and tiredness. These symptoms are uncomfortable, but they aren’t harmful. In fact, they mean that a vaccine is working. As your body gears up to fight the foreign substance, it produces many of the same symptoms as the flu—even though you’re not fighting a real infection.

Normally, a vaccine requires approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration before it can be distributed to the public. But a drug can’t be approved until phase 3 trials are complete. We already know that the vaccines are effective, but scientists have to continue to monitor trial participants for long-term side effects and to see how long immunity lasts—a process that could take years. So Pfizer and Moderna applied for emergency use authorization, special permission to distribute a drug before long-term trials are complete.

In December 2020, a board of scientists determined that the benefits of curbing the pandemic outweighed the potential risks of the vaccines. Shortly after, Sandra Lindsay, an ICU nurse in New York, became the first person in the U.S. to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. “It feels surreal,” she told The New York Times that same day. “It is a huge sense of relief for me, and hope.”

Nurse Sandra Lindsay receives her second dose of vaccine on January 4, 2021, greatly reducing her risk of contracting or spreading the virus while working.

“People need to get vaccinated as quickly and as expeditiously as possible.”
—Dr. Anthony Fauci, Chief Medical Advisor to the President
off to a slow start. Federal officials pledged to vaccinate 20 million people by the end of 2020. They fell short of that goal by more than 17 million. Despite these challenges, the U.S. currently has outpaced most countries in its distribution of vaccines. As of April, more than 40% of the population was at least partially vaccinated.

**GETTING THE COUNTRY VACCINATED**

Distributing vaccines to 328 million people is no small feat. First, there’s vaccine production itself. For instance, it takes around 110 days to manufacture the Pfizer vaccine. (In February, Pfizer announced its plan to cut production time in half.) Then, there are the logistics of shipping the vaccines to hospitals. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has to be kept at ultra-cold temperatures, no warmer than -76° Fahrenheit until it is almost ready to be used.

Confusion ensued when the vaccines were first shipped out. Hospitals and other distribution sites received little direction on how to organize this stage of the process. At one site, 42 people were mistakenly injected with the wrong treatment. At others, vaccines went to waste as they sat unrefrigerated for too long. As a result, the vaccination process got

**WHO GETS VACCINATED FIRST?**

Who needs the vaccine more? A frontline worker who is young and healthy, but at high risk of being exposed to COVID-19? Or a 70-year-old with heart disease who is careful not to leave the house? Because vaccine supply is limited, these were the kinds of decisions public health officials were forced to make when vaccines first became available.

Ultimately, most states opted to prioritize health care workers first. Then came people living in long-term care facilities such as nursing homes. These populations were at particular risk of contracting COVID-19. More than one-third of all COVID-19 cases occurred in long-term care facilities, and in 2020, more than 2,900 health care workers died of the disease. Next on the list in many states were teachers, older adults, grocery-store workers and people with health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe illness.

**THE DEBATE**

**IS IT ETHICAL TO PRIORITIZE VACCINATING ESSENTIAL WORKERS?**

**YES**

✓ Essential workers, such as those working in health care and transportation, are vital for our economy and to COVID-19 relief efforts.
✓ These groups are dying at higher rates than the general population.
✓ Many essential workers risked their lives to save people and keep the economy running.

**NO**

✗ Some essential workers are young, healthy, and at low risk of severe COVID-19.
✗ Not all essential workers are highly exposed to coronavirus.
✗ Prioritizing a whole group of workers tends to overlook “hot zones”—locations where COVID-19 is spreading most rapidly.
**THE ROAD AHEAD**

COVID-19 isn’t going to disappear anytime soon. At our current vaccination rate, it’ll be June before 70% of the U.S. population is vaccinated—the point at which experts estimate we’ll reach herd immunity. Even then, the virus could persist in communities with lower rates of vaccination.

**Variants**, or mutated versions of the virus, also pose a risk to vaccination efforts. Variants started appearing in multiple countries in late 2020. While the current vaccines appear to work against most of them, it’s possible they won’t be as effective against future variants. Every time the virus replicates, there’s a risk it’ll develop another mutation that helps it evade our immune systems.

Still, there are a lot of reasons to feel hopeful. Case counts have declined significantly since the beginning of January, and experts expect that they will continue to do so as the vaccine is rolled out. As more people get vaccinated, we’ll also see fewer variants. “The less viral spread there is, the less the virus replicates, the fewer new variants we see,” Demmer says.

We may be headed towards a very different summer than that of 2020—one where it’s safe for us to once again gather with friends and family, attend sports games and concerts, and dine at restaurants. “I’m feeling very encouraged,” Demmer said.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

All of us have a role to play in ending the pandemic. Here are some things teens can do to save lives—and help life get back to normal.

- **Wear a mask.** Masks prevent coronavirus-containing droplets of saliva and mucus from reaching others. Even after vaccination, it’s important to keep your mask on. Though the vaccine
prevents us from getting sick, it’s possible that a vaccinated person could unknowingly transmit the virus.

**Pay attention** to guidance from your state health authorities and from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov). As COVID-19 cases drop in number, health authorities may announce that it’s safe to gather indoors and relax social distancing. Wait for that green light—then you can go back to hugging friends.

**Be a vaccine ambassador.** With false information floating around, many people are hesitant about getting the new vaccine. Teens can play an important role in spreading scientifically sound information on vaccine development and safety. The faster everyone is vaccinated, the faster the pandemic ends.

**Socialize safely** with others until you all are vaccinated—or until case counts are way down. Because we don’t know whether vaccinated people can transmit coronavirus, it’s safest to continue gathering outdoors, six feet apart. While you wait for your vaccines (or for COVID-19 to stop spreading in your area), try picnics, hiking and trips to the beach.

**Write or call** your elected officials to let them know what you think.

**Vote, when you are old enough!** With few exceptions, you can’t vote until you’re 18, but in many states you can register at 16 or 17, and you’ll be all set when 18 rolls around.

TEEN TRAILBLAZERS

**Avi Schiffman**

Avi Schiffman, an 18-year-old living in Washington State, was 7 years old when he started teaching himself about computers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he put his skills to use: He designed a website that tracks COVID-19 case counts around the world.

Schiffman developed a computer code that scrapes data from the websites of various countries’ health authorities. His website displays all these stats in one place, updating on a minute-by-minute basis. You can check out his work at [nCoV2019.live](http://nCoV2019.live).

**Sarah Shapiro and Skye Loventhal**

When the pandemic forced students to attend school from home, it placed a heavy burden on many parents, who had to juggle childcare and homeschooling on top of work. Sarah Shapiro and Skye Loventhal, 17-year-old best friends living in Los Angeles, stepped in to help. They recruited more than 100 other teens to offer free online tutoring to kids around the world. Their organization, called the **COVID nineTEEN Project**, has helped more than 800 students in subjects ranging from history to yoga, taught in 15 different languages.

**We Stand With Her**

At the beginning of the pandemic, millions of migrant workers in India lost their jobs as factories were forced to temporarily close. On the long trek back to their home villages, access to food and water was scarce—and many women were left without menstrual period products, like pads.

Six teens in Gurugram, a city in northern India, wanted to draw attention to the menstrual hygiene crisis. They started an Instagram campaign under the account name [@We_StandWithHer](https://www.instagram.com/We_StandWithHer). Since then, they’ve raised enough money to provide hundreds of women with reusable, biodegradable sanitary pads.

**Sarah Shapiro and Skye Loventhal**

Credit Annie Poole/The MIHS Islander

Credit Sarah “Lemon” Daks

Credit Sarah “Lemon” Daks

Credit Sarah “Lemon” Daks
GETTING BACK TO NORMAL
1. How has daily life changed for most people during the pandemic? Which changes have been for the better, and which ones have been for the worse?

2. After more than a year of living under pandemic conditions, what will be the hardest adjustments people need to make as the world goes back to normal?

3. Which ways do you think life will remain permanently changed even after the pandemic is over? What lasting effects could these changes have in your community?

NOW IT’S YOUR TURN TO MAKE GREAT DECISIONS
1. How has the pandemic affected people of color and people in certain countries more than others? Why have these people faced greater struggles?

2. What, if anything, could have helped prevent the pandemic from getting so bad? Who is to blame, and why?

3. YOUR STORY: Did you or anyone you know get sick from COVID-19? What was the experience like?
IMMIGRATION

The United States wouldn’t exist without immigration—so why is it still such a controversial issue?

BY MELISSA MCDANIEL
A 16-year-old boy named Garcia arrives home at six o’clock in the morning after working all night in a food-processing plant. An hour later, he is out the door, on his way to high school. It’s a grueling routine, but he has no choice. Garcia came to the U.S. on his own from Guatemala at age 15. After getting caught crossing the border, he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle in Illinois while his asylum case wound through the courts. They struggle financially, so he must work to help pay for food and rent. He also has to repay the $3,000 his parents borrowed to hire a smuggler to take him across the border.

Garcia fled Guatemala to escape the violent gangs, to get an education, and to help support his family back home. He is one of approximately 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. The nation is home to another 35 million legal immigrants. Many have become citizens, while others have green cards, which allow them to live and work here legally.

Immigration has always been central to the American story. Unless you’re Native American, you or your ancestors came from somewhere else. For much of history, immigration to the U.S. was mostly unrestricted. If you showed up, you could stay. By 1890, nearly 15% of the U.S. population was foreign born. But even then, some racist laws, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, banned people from specific countries. Laws limiting how many people could immigrate were enacted for the first time in the 1920s. Americans have been arguing over how many people to let in, and from where, ever since.

Some people believe that the U.S. should allow less immigration because the newcomers take jobs from people who are already here. Many recently arrived immigrants work in tech jobs and

A Timeline of U.S. Immigration

1565 Spain establishes the first permanent European settlement in what is now the U.S. in St. Augustine, Florida.

1600s England establishes colonies along the East Coast.

1619 The first enslaved Africans are brought to Virginia Colony.

1882 The Chinese Exclusion Act bars Chinese laborers from entering the U.S.

1890 The U.S. foreign-born population peaks at 14.8%.

Late 1800s–early 1900s Large numbers of immigrants arrive from southern and eastern Europe.
other skilled professions. Many unauthorized immigrants, on the other hand, work in manual labor jobs that few native-born Americans want. They might work in food processing plants, picking vegetables in fields, or as construction laborers. People who favor immigration maintain that all immigrants, regardless of their economic status, contribute to the economy and help the U.S. grow and thrive.

**COMING TO AMERICA**

If you want to immigrate to the U.S., some legal options exist. One option is to apply for a green card. However, these are very limited, and the process for getting one can be slow. For some people, it can take decades.

Another way to enter the country legally is through work **visas**. Some people with unique talents are given green cards so they can stay in the U.S. permanently. Far more come on temporary work visas. The U.S. offers temporary work visas for some agricultural workers and other seasonal jobs, such as resort workers and landscapers. The H1-B visa program allows American companies to sponsor foreign workers who have specialized skills, such as computer programming, engineering, or medicine. If a worker leaves the job, they must find another company that will sponsor them or leave the U.S. Some people argue that this program is a way for companies to hire foreign workers at lower wages than they would have to pay American workers. The companies claim that there are not enough U.S. workers with the necessary technical skills.

**THE DEBATE**

**SHOULD THE U.S. DECREASE THE NUMBER OF WORK VISAS?**

**YES**

✓ There are plenty of American workers who can fill the jobs.
✓ When companies bring in cheaper foreign labor, it can drive down other workers’ pay.
✓ Managers often treat the foreign workers worse than they do American workers because the visa-holders do not have the option of leaving for another company.

**NO**

✗ Companies cannot always find the skilled workers they need in the U.S.
✗ Tech companies hiring the best workers from around the world helps them innovate and thrive.
✗ Work visas encourage companies to keep jobs in the U.S., rather than hiring people overseas. This is good for the U.S. economy as a whole.

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**TIMELINE**

**1920s**
Laws such as the Emergency Quota Act and the Immigration Act are passed to limit immigration based on national origin, so that most immigrants are from western and northern Europe.

**1965**
The Immigration and Nationality Act abolishes country-based quotas. For the first time, immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean outnumber those from Europe.

**1986**
President Ronald Reagan signs a law granting amnesty to 3 million unauthorized immigrants.

**2012**
The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) shields some people who came to the U.S. as minors from deportation.
FINDING A NEW HOME
Every year around the world, war, famine, genocide, and climate disasters force millions of people from their homes. People flee to other countries, and some live for years in vast refugee camps. Children grow up there, going to school and playing in the dusty paths among the tents or simple houses. Their parents, meanwhile, wonder if it will ever be safe to go home again. Some people who cannot go home and are also in danger in their country of asylum are permanently resettled in distant countries.

The number of refugees the U.S. accepts changes from year to year. Refugee resettlement declined during Donald Trump’s presidency, but usually the nation resettles around 60,000 people a year. In recent years, the most refugees to the U.S. have come from Congo, Myanmar, and Ukraine.

The adjustment for the refugees is massive. Everything is new. Resettlement agencies arrange for housing, food, and clothing that’s appropriate for the climate. Many refugees from Somalia, a warm country in Africa, were resettled in Minnesota, one of the coldest U.S. states. The agencies help get kids enrolled in school and get adults signed up for social security cards so they can get jobs.

CROSSING THE BORDER
Many unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. cross the southern border. Some come from Mexico. Others have walked 2,500 miles from Central America. People who decide to make this journey have complex motivations. Many are fleeing ruthless gangs, drug cartels, and sexual violence. These same people are also looking for economic opportunity, to reunite with family, and to give their kids better lives. They make the long, dangerous trip because they have no hope left at home.

Some migrants borrow money to pay human smugglers, called “coyotes,” thousands of dollars to help them make the trip. The coyotes arrange for transportation and shelter on the journey north. They might ferry people across the Rio Grande into Texas, lead them across the desert into Arizona, or hide them in a truck for the journey into California.

Recently, the number of people attempting to cross the border has surged. When the migrants reach the border, many are caught and turned back. Children who cross by themselves are allowed to stay. Some parents, after being turned back as a family, send their children on by themselves. They might have the phone number of an uncle who lives in the United States written on their T-shirt in magic marker. Families with very young children are usually allowed to stay. When minors cross alone, the U.S. government must find sponsors for them to live with. If they are under 18, these unaccompanied minors cannot be left alone. Often, family members in the U.S. can take the
children in. Other times, they are placed in shelters or foster homes. Although they are only supposed to be kept at the border for a few days, during surges of migration it sometimes takes longer to process them and find a safe place for them to live.

Many people who arrive at the U.S. border request asylum based upon a fear of persecution if they returned to their home country. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the U.S. to dramatically slow its processing of asylum claims. Though the applications are being processed more quickly again, a huge backlog remains. Having their asylum applications processed does not always make things better for the immigrants. In recent years, most claims made by people from Mexico and Central America have been denied. Many are then deported.

**LIFE IN THE SHADOWS**

Immigrants who make it across the border, or who stay in the U.S. after arriving on a tourist visa, live life in the shadows. Most unauthorized immigrants are employed. Some work for cash. Others use fake IDs, including fake social security numbers, so they can gain regular employment. It is estimated that between half and three-quarters of unauthorized workers pay taxes using fake social security numbers.

Some work in dangerous chicken-processing plants or other factories. Many work as laborers on construction sites, or as house cleaners and nannies. Some are employed as migrant agricultural workers, picking fruit or vegetables in the hot sun on one farm before moving on to another when the harvest is done. About half of California’s 2 million farmworkers are unauthorized. In the eastern part of the country, many families start the year in Florida picking citrus crops. In the spring, they might move to North Carolina, and then by summer they’re in Michigan picking apples and other fruit. The children of migrant workers change schools frequently, which makes learning difficult. Special programs give them extra help and provide them internet access. When the students are in high school, they are often on the move before the end of the term, so they don’t complete classes and don’t have enough credits to graduate.

Some programs help the students complete classes online, so they are able to get full credit for them. Unauthorized immigrants live with the threat of deportation hanging over their head. Government agents sometimes raid factories where many immigrants work and check everyone’s immigration status.

**Top Countries of Origin of Recent Immigrants (2019)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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**THE DEBATE**

**SHOULD UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS HAVE ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES?**

**YES**

✓ Many unauthorized immigrants have faced dire circumstances and they need help.
✓ All people should have food, shelter, and health care, regardless of their immigration status.
✓ Unauthorized immigrants play a large role in the U.S. economy and society, so they are entitled to services.

**NO**

✗ Providing financial assistance encourages more people to come.
✗ The U.S. government has a large deficit, so it can’t afford to support unauthorized immigrants.
✗ People shouldn’t be rewarded for illegal acts.

**FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP/Getty Images**
who were born in the U.S. are American citizens. If the parents are being deported, they must then make the difficult decision of whether to leave their kids in the U.S. with other family or friends, or bring them back to a country where they have a bleaker future.

**TOWARD CITIZENSHIP**

Every year many thousands of people bring their children with them as they cross the border into the U.S. without a visa. It was the parents who decided to come to the U.S., not the children. Yet as the children grow up and go to college or work, they continue to live under the specter of deportation. In 2012, the U.S. began a program called the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which protected about 700,000 young people from deportation. It did not, however, offer them citizenship.

Many people argue that there should be a pathway to citizenship, both for those who were brought to the U.S. as children and for adults who have built their lives here. President Joe Biden has suggested that, after passing background checks, unauthorized immigrants be given legal residency and work permits. They would later be able to become permanent residents and then citizens. Some people argue that this is unfair to those who

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**THE DEBATE**

**SHOULD THERE BE A PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP FOR UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS?**

**YES**

✔️ It will keep families together, so that parents will not be deported, leaving behind their American children.

✔️ People who have lived and worked in the U.S. for years and made it their home should not be treated as second-class citizens.

✔️ It will benefit the economy, since unauthorized immigrants will be paying taxes instead of working in a shadow economy.

**NO**

❌ Unauthorized immigrants should wait their turn behind other people who applied for legal immigration.

❌ Many unauthorized immigrants are low-income, and they might receive more money in government benefits than they would pay in taxes.

❌ The big influx of legal workers will depress wages.
went through legal channels for immigration and would encourage more unauthorized immigration. But the majority of the American public supports the idea.

WHAT YOU CAN DO
Immigration is the responsibility of the U.S. government. But there are many things that you can do to help people in need.

• Get informed. Immigration is a complex topic, and people have many conflicting opinions about it. Read reliable news sources to learn why people come to the U.S., what happens to those detained at the border, and what proposals are being suggested for citizenship for unauthorized immigrants.

• Write or call your elected officials to let them know what you think. The number of calls and letters they get also gives them indication of how important the issue is to people in their district.

• Volunteer at local organizations that provide services to immigrants. You might distribute food, help immigrants gain access to social services, work as a translator, or help immigrants learn English.

• Talk to your friends and family about what they can do to help people in need. Go with them to protests or rallies so that others can see how important the issues are to you.

• Vote, when you are old enough! In most case, you can’t vote until you’re 18, but in many states you can register at 16 or 17, and you’ll be all set when 18 rolls around.

Christina Jiménez
Cristina Jiménez was 13 when she came to the U.S. from Ecuador. As a teenager in New York, Cristina learned English and navigated high school. She also attended college and went on to cofound United We Dream, an organization dedicated to helping young unauthorized immigrants. The members of United We Dream told about their lives, despite their fear of being deported. By standing up and making themselves visible, Cristina and others put a human face on the struggles of unauthorized immigrants. United We Dream was instrumental in convincing President Barack Obama to create DACA.

Hamdia Ahmed
Hamdia Ahmed was a refugee from the day she was born. Her mother, nine months pregnant, was fleeing a civil war in Somalia. In the middle of the 370-mile walk to a refugee camp in Kenya, she gave birth. Hamdia spent the first seven years of her life in the camp, with UNICEF providing food and medical care. The family was eventually resettled in the U.S., ending up in Maine. Many people were welcoming, but others were hostile. As she grew older, Hamdia became an activist, trying to ensure that her adopted country was welcoming to other refugees. When President Donald Trump instituted a ban on people traveling to the U.S. from several Muslim countries, she organized a large protest. She has also become a UNICEF USA advocate, speaking out for the rights of refugees around the world.

Daniela Murguia
In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Daniela Murguia’s mother was forced to close her hair salon because Washington State was under a stay-at-home order. Unlike many other people, however, Daniela’s mother could not get financial assistance because she is an unauthorized immigrant. Daniela is part of a group of young immigrants called the Washington Dream Coalition who advocate on behalf of unauthorized immigrants. They quickly raised more than $5 million to help immigrants who were not getting government relief. “Community always provides, especially when government fails,” says Daniela.
THE FIRST IMMIGRANTS

1. How do you think Native Americans felt about the earliest immigrants from Europe? What effects did the arrival of Europeans have on them?

2. What are the differences between early European settlers and modern-day immigrants? What are their goals and reasons for coming to America?

3. What positive changes have immigrants brought to America? If you see any downsides, what are they?

NOW IT’S YOUR TURN TO MAKE GREAT DECISIONS

1. Who should and shouldn’t be allowed to move to the U.S., and why?

2. What kinds of regulations could improve the way immigration works in the U.S.?

3. **YOUR STORY:** Did you or someone you know immigrate to the U.S.? What motivated the journey? Has it worked out well?

KEY WORDS & TERMS

- amnesty
- asylum
- coyotes
- DACA
- deportation
- genocide
- green cards
- refugee
- unaccompanied minors
- visas

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Thanks for reading! We’ll be back in fall with all-new topics for the new school year. Until then, have a great summer!

GREAT DECISIONS IMMIGRATION

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