

3-2021

## The Pacific Sentinel: March/April 2021, Mini Issue

Portland State University. Student Publications Board

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/pacificsentinel>



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), and the [Publishing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Portland State University. Student Publications Board, "The Pacific Sentinel: March/April 2021, Mini Issue" (2021). *The Pacific Sentinel*. 35.

<https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/pacificsentinel/35>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Pacific Sentinel by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu).



# March & April Mini Issue

United We Stand?

Royalty  
Notwithstanding

The Art of the Podcast

Dream House and  
Other Horrors

A Man, a Plan, and  
a Virus





# Contents

---

Letter From the Editor **3**

## NEWS ANALYSIS

Royalty Notwithstanding **4**

A Man, a Plan, and a Virus **6**

United We Stand? **10**

## ARTS & CULTURE

Dreamhouse and Other Horrors **12**

The Art of the Podcast **14**

## CREDITS

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR** Vivian Veidt

**NEWS EDITOR** Sophie Meyers

**ARTS AND CULTURE EDITOR** Vivian Veidt

**OPINIONS EDITOR** Vivian Veidt

**PRODUCTION MANAGER** Alison White

**MULTIMEDIA EDITOR** Vivian Veidt

**DESIGNERS** Hlie Moua, Haley Riley, May Walker, Alison White, Mckinsey Carrol, Vivian Veidt

**ILLUSTRATORS** Mckinsey Carroll, May Walker, Greer Siegel, Bailey Granquist

**FRONT COVER** Alison White

**FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS** Conor Carroll, Nick Heilig, Analisa Landeros

**ADS** Hlie Moua **p. 13**, May Walker **Back cover**

# Letter From the Editor

---



Dear Reader,

The past month has brought with it tremendous difficulty, from the increasing burden of a prolonged pandemic to a horrifying reckoning with the nation's entrenched discrimination and violence against the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. On an individual scale, most of our readers were invested in final exams and planning for their futures through great turbulence. Though we have all been distanced, distracted, and weary, this is no time to let down our guard and initiative. Within these pages you will find a humble presentation of articles ranging from a retrospective on the Capitol riot and its fallout to the hotly anticipated American Rescue Plan, as well as the budding return of our Arts and Culture section that has been so devastatingly impacted by the pandemic.

I hope that as you read our magazine, you will consider the interconnectedness of all of our stories, their relationship to your lives, and how they provide insight on what it means to be American. Though at first they may seem unrelated, this issue is a review of this nation's domestic and foreign policy, its failures, and what we hope to consider its successes. In these articles, I hope you will find new perspectives or interest in the times through which we find ourselves living.

Spring is finally here and we have greater warmth and comfort to look forward to. Many of you will use that warmth to accommodate your outspoken priorities, from marching in the streets for police reform and racial justice to protecting the homeless, misunderstood, or otherwise vulnerable, to whichever topic suits your fancy. Others will enjoy the change of season as they graduate into their greater ambitions. Many may anticipate the coming end of the pandemic, with the expansion of vaccination and hope of a return to close proximity on the horizon. Regardless of how you spend your time, we at The Pacific Sentinel are honored that you have decided to expend some with us.

Kind Regards,

Vivian Veidt  
Executive Editor

---

Follow us on social media @PSUPacificSentinel

We are looking for writers and editors! Apply at [thepacificsentinel.com/jobs](https://thepacificsentinel.com/jobs)



# Royalty Notwithstanding

Crown prince of Saudi Arabia purported to have ordered U.S. based reporter Jamal Khashoggi murdered.



by Conor Carroll

Illustration by May Walker

On Feb. 11, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) issued an executive summary entitled “Assessing the Saudi Government’s Role in the Killing of Jamal Khashoggi,” and found that Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, had direct involvement in the journalist’s murder, dismemberment, and disposal.

Jamal Khashoggi was a prominent Saudi journalist. He covered major stories, including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the rise of the late al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, for various Saudi news organizations.

For decades, the Khashoggi was close to the Saudi royal family and likewise functioned as an adviser to the government.

He had fallen out of favor and left permanently for the US in 2017. From there, he wrote a monthly column in the Washington Post in which he criticized the policies of bin Salman. According to the report, “We assess that Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.” An elite squad of security operatives had perpetrated the killing, the report said. The team reported directly to Prince Mohammed, the Defense Minister and de-facto ruler of Saudi Arabia. The report omitted the brutal specifics of Khashoggi’s death, including the dismemberment of his body with a bone saw after Saudi officials lured him to their consulate in Istanbul, according to BBC. The Biden administration clarified in the report that the Crown Prince will not be receiving personal sanctions or punishment of any kind due to the importance of diplomatic relations.

Several Saudi officials and family members have received travel and monetary sanctions in response and in concurrence with the issuance of the report, according to Reuters. Political leaders from both major parties have congratulated the Biden administration for

releasing the report. Some Democrats, like Rep. Adam Schiff (D.-CA), have decried the lack of specifically targeted punishment for the Crown Prince.

The Saudi government issued a scathing and contradictory statement to the ODNI’s report. “The Ministry notes that the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia completely rejects the negative, false and unacceptable assessment in the report pertaining to the Kingdom’s leadership, and notes that the report contained inaccurate information and conclusions,” the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said in their statement.

The Saudi government has recently come under further international scrutiny for its bombing campaigns in Yemen and sponsorship of violence throughout the region. Thousands of civilians have been killed, with many millions more in danger of starvation and poverty, according to the Human Rights Watch Organization.

The U.S. government, in a separate Human Rights Council 2020 report, has also been described as complicit in the violence and war crimes in Yemen.

On September 16 of 2020, State Department officials testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee about whether the State Dept. had “misled Congress—and the American people—by circumventing controls designed to limit arms sales and ensure congressional oversight,” according to a Human Rights Watch analysis.

The U.S. has had great financial ties to the Saudi Arabia for decades, and according to The New York Times, this may be a defining reason for the lack of sanctions of the House of Saud by governmental agencies or Congressional committees responsible for holding nations accountable for such crimes.

Former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is in fact opening a new sovereign wealth fund which intends to be partially backed by

Persian Gulf funds, including those of Saudi Arabia, according to The Hill’s reporting.

The Biden administration has promised more accountability for these crimes and this kind of behavior on the part of Saudi officials, after speaking to King Salman, not the Crown Prince.

Biden “made it clear to him that the rules are changing, and we’re going to be announcing significant changes today and on Monday to hold the Saudis accountable. It is outrageous what happened,” the president stated in an interview with Univision.

Besides the travel bans and freezing of assets, the State Department also announced visa restrictions against 76 Saudis accused of suppressing or harming journalists, activists and dissidents and other similar actions in a so called “Khashoggi Ban,” Sec. of State Anthony Blinken said, according to reporting done by Reuters.

Representative Adam Schiff (D-CA), head of the Intelligence Committee for the U.S. House of Representatives has called for the complete ban of bin Salman participating in the U.S. political and economic landscape.



# A man, a plan, & a virus

*Direct checks, state assistance,  
and addressing COVID-19:  
The American Rescue Plan Act  
of 2021, explained.*

by Conor Carroll  
Illustrations by Mckinsey Carroll

2020 has wrought untold distress upon the American people, and the global populace writ large. President Biden and the newly Democrat controlled Senate intend to help any and all who require it. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 is the proposed societal salve.

Biden's comprehensive \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill was adopted by a deeply divided U.S. Senate on March 6, 2021. The Democrats utilized Senate budget procedure to pass an aid program that essentially defines an increase in so called safety net spending, resulting in the largest antipoverity endeavor since the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

The passage of such legislation lately, due to increased polarization in politics, is increasingly difficult. Such legislation could only be passed through what is known as "budget reconciliation." Since the filibuster in the Senate has been utilized more and more, such procedural rules can be bypassed through passage of budget legislation, which does not require a 60-vote minimum.

The final vote from the Democrat controlled House to concur with a Senate amendment

passed on March 10 by a vote count of 220 to 211 and the act was signed by Biden on March 11. Not a single Republican member of Congress voted for the resolution, at any point in the bill's journey in becoming law.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 is massive; For comparison, the recovery package Democrats passed during the Great Recession in 2009 was about 5.5% of FY 2008's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while Biden's plan is 9% of 2020's GDP, despite the shrinking of the economy in 2020.

One of the main differences between the ARPA and the CARES Act is the targeted nature of the majority of the funds: The vast majority of aid is going to the individual and states, instead of corporations or wealthy institutions and persons, who profited most from Trump's March 2020 package.

The nature and language of the CARES Act suggests that the resolution is only meant to help those who most needed the assistance. This has turned out to be inaccurate. The rhetoric from the bill indicates that it was meant to focus on working families. In fact, the Treasury Department at the time described

the legislation as "The CARES Act provides assistance to workers and their families." However, much of the financial assistance was utilized by the wealthiest people and businesses in the U.S.

The bill contains \$1,400 stimulus checks being delivered to the majority of Americans. The full checks will go out to single people making up to \$75,000 and couples making up to \$150,000, and "phase out" at \$80,000 and \$160,000, based on 2019 or 2020 tax returns, depending on when people last filed their taxes.

Previous checks were phased out at higher income levels, which meant some people who received checks in previous rounds will not receive them this time. However, the legislation includes checks for adult dependents, such as college students and people with disabilities, for the first time.

Expanded and extended unemployment insurance (UI) with this legislation will persist through Sept. 6, with the unemployed receiving an extra \$300 a week in federal benefits. The bill also includes a proviso which makes the first \$10,200 in unemployment

benefits nontaxable for households making up to \$150,000.

In a change to tax policy, the legislation makes student loan forgiveness tax-free through 2025—a method for Democrats to prod the president on student debt cancellation and a policy change that will last longer than just Biden's administration according to reporting done by VOX.

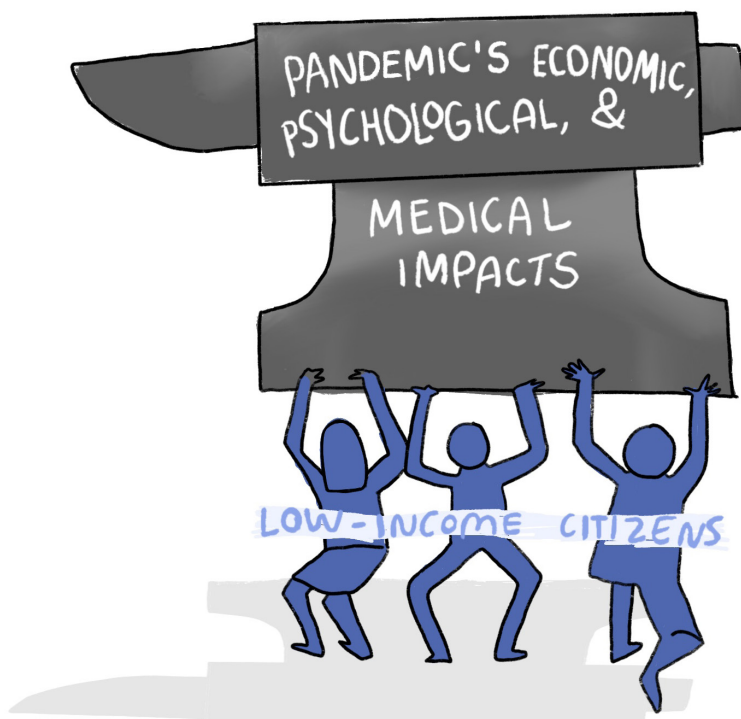
The White House estimates that the legislation, which includes an expanded child tax credit, will cut child poverty in half, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The bill includes \$170 billion for schools, \$100 billion for public health, and \$350 billion for state and local government aid—an issue that has been a major sticking point for Republicans.

It increases the Affordable Care Act subsidies and Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) subsidies for people who have lost their jobs, contains funds for restaurants, and has a variety of funds to assist individuals in general, such as rental assistance and help paying for water and energy bills.

Some portions of the bill didn't end up being as generous as they were when it was first proposed after push and pull with moderate Democrats. Biden initially wanted \$400 in extra unemployment through September.

However, the unemployment tax provision was only added in the Senate legislation, saving people from getting a surprise tax bill they might not be able to pay for. A \$15 federal minimum wage was also struck from the legislation.

Despite the fact that the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) concluded raising the minimum wage over the proposed time would indeed affect the federal budget, and therefore be eligible for a budget reconciliation inclusion, the Senate parliamentarian ruled it could not be done. The Senate thus voted down an amendment to put a \$15 minimum wage back into the bill, despite wide and bipartisan support among the American people.



The US has been in the throws of a pandemic for more than a year, and the government has passed numerous pieces of legislation designed at helping soften the blow to the economy, families, the working class, and small businesses.

The mantra among many economists—and one adopted by Biden—is that the risk is really doing too little, not too much, in response to the pandemic. Jerome Powell, the head of the U.S. Federal Reserve noted that lasting recession effects in a macroeconomic sense would be worse than letting the market self-correct, leading to further increases in poverty and lackluster economic recovery.

The bill is primarily aimed at delivering support to individuals at lower income levels. The poorest 20% of Americans will see at least a 20% boost to their after-tax income, and

the second quintile of earners will see their income go up by nearly 10 percent, according to an estimate from the Tax Policy Center.

In the meantime, the highest earners—many of whom are **doing financially better during the pandemic—will hardly see any tax shift, if at all.** Biden's legislation is in stark contrast to the tax cut bill Republicans adopted through budget reconciliation in 2017.

The 2017 Republican tax law “ignores the stagnation of working-class wages and exacerbates inequality” and “encourages rampant tax avoidance,” according to a 2019 report from the non-partisan Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP).

Average and low-income citizens have borne the brunt of the pandemic's economic, psychological, and medical impacts on the population, according to a report from the non-partisan Institute of Development Studies.

In fact, America's billionaire class has actually increased their wealth since the pandemic began.

The net worth of U.S. billionaires has soared by over \$1 trillion—to a total of more than \$4 trillion—since March 2020, according to a Dec. 2020 analysis from the watchdog group Americans for Tax Fairness. That same report also notes that, during that same time period, the bottom 50% of Americans have seen nearly a \$1 trillion drop in purchasing power.

The new legislation will be a welcome respite for those who have been unable to weather the economic storm. The current national polling for support of the ARPA is in staunch support on the left, and nearly half of all Republicans support its passage.





# UNITED WE STAND?

## *Veterans Resource Center Email Thread Highlights Divisions in Local Veterans' Communities Over the January 6 Capitol Riot*

by Nick Heilig  
Illustrations by Bailey Granquist



After the events of the January 6 riot at the Capitol Building in Washington D.C, Americans were inundated with emails, tweets, and advertisements that sought to either distance organizations from what happened at the Capitol or to decry the events as not representative of American democracy. Portland State University itself, and more specifically the Veterans Resource Center (VRC), sent out an email stating,

“Portland State University (PSU) and the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) unequivocally condemns and rejects violence in all forms perpetrated against American citizens and the US government. We support the First Amendment right to assemble with peaceful demonstrations. However, needless bloodshed and subversive acts against the American government are beyond the pale of legitimate protest and must be swiftly denounced and addressed in the strongest terms necessary in

favor of maintaining our democracy.”

This VRC email ignited a 100+ response reply all thread that highlighted a divide within the veteran and military communities of America. The US military has continued to struggle with racism in its ranks, rape culture, and “good ol’ boys” politics. Some of these problems have been in the spotlight recently when Vanessa Guillan’s case, covered by USA Today, made national headlines last year as yet another case of sexual violence within the Armed Forces. This division between members who would like to see an end to the violence and those who would rather excuse the violence as non-existent, if not patriotic, is not just present just within the military itself, but also in the diverse network of veterans around the country.

An often overlooked problem is a recruitment tactic used by all branches, which targets poorer communities, **skewing slightly to favor** BIPOC communities by virtue of economic

disparities that **affect** these communities. These communities have resisted in recent years by banning recruiters from high schools in some cases, according to original reporting and data collected by The New York Times. Following the email from the VRC, several Veteran students expressed that they either sympathized with the rioters at the Capitol, or at least did not feel that the VRC should be allowed to express opinions on national events. Still, more student veterans argued in favor of the VRC making a statement and took a stance against the Capitol rioters.

The US Military has a myriad of ethical **issues beyond** common criticisms from anti-war groups to bipartisan criticism of its budget, international bases, and its use as a tool of US coercive power. The US military also struggles quietly with issues surrounding nationalism and fascism within its ranks. For example, Unicorn Riot identified former USAF (M)



TSgt Cory Reeves as a leader in the Colorado branch of Identity Evropa, now American Identity Movement, a fascist and white nationalist group that spans the US according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. They are so pervasive that recently, City GOP members in Spokane have resigned over their affiliation with the organization, according to local newspaper The Spokesman-Review.

The Capitol riot saw groups of right wing protestors storming the Capitol after attending a rally held by Donald Trump at the Ellipse, behind the White House. Known white supremacists and white supremacist adjacent groups like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Groypers, and Three Percenters were in the crowd as well according to on site reporting by the Washington Post. Individuals present were flying the colors of a myriad of militia movements, Q Anon conspiracy theorists, and the ever present Stars and Bars of the

Confederacy. Many of these groups are nationalistic in nature and use rhetoric that indicates a leaning toward fascism, according to journalism collective Bellingcat. In addition to these groups, members of both current and former law enforcement, active and reserve military members, and veterans were in the crowd. The Guardian reported that there were those within the vanguard who were organized and allegedly interested in committing more violence against members of Congress, and an alleged plot against the Former Vice President Pence's life.

The VRC did not immediately respond to requests for clarity as to their position on addressing this schism in the community after the Capitol riot, instead opting to publish a series of podcasts on their social media. The Pacific Sentinel asked a small group of veterans in a Zoom call what their take on the email thread was. They responded by brushing off the

disagreements in the reply all as "just veteran things." The veterans in the zoom meeting pointed readily to one individual's response that decried supporters of the Jan 6 riots and expressed support for the VRC's initial email, as a position they support. Whether the dismissive attitude is a product of being numb to the prevalence of these ideologies in these social circles, or the product of "shop talk" is uncertain. It is heartening to report that the abundance of messages were in support of the VRC's email and against those who sought to jeopardize our democracy.

# Dream House and Other Horrors

*Carmen Maria Machado is a stand-out voice in nonfiction and speculative fiction*



by Analisa Landeros

After hearing friends rave about it, I listened to the audiobook of Carmen Maria Machado's memoir, *In The Dream House*, narrated by the author herself. In one of the most intriguing and boldly written books I've ever read, Machado documents her experience in a relationship with an abusive ex-girlfriend. Every chapter takes a narrative risk, experimenting with iconic tropes and writing styles, giving them twists that only Machado could execute.

A quick flip through the chapter titles will give you a strong sense of the unique frames through which she shares her story: *Dream House as Choose Your Own Adventure*, *Dream House as Noir*, *Dream House as Murder Mystery*. I was extremely curious as to how a book as ambitious as this could be done effectively, and was fascinated by Machado's abilities. It neither gets bogged down by its formatting or sacrifices its commitment to the ever-changing format for the sake of clarity. Machado brilliantly redefines memoir. After finishing it, I immediately sought out the rest of her bibliography. I soon discovered *In The Dream House* is just a fragment of her range. Machado—a queer Cuban writer—has had her work featured in numerous anthologies. It became evident how her short fiction background weaved into her memoir and the fiction she published beyond that. Her stories—many of which center Latinx women, queer women and women of color—cleverly examine sexism, queer culture, trauma and more through an intersectional lens.

*In The Dream House* challenges heteronormative perceptions of domestic abuse, showing how a relationship between two queer women can be just as harrowing. It challenges the way abuse can be understood and identified. It invites readers alongside her as she explores a well documented subject—domestic abuse—with crucial, underrepresented **nuances—domestic** abuse in sapphic relationships. By sharing her story as well as examining cases of domestic abuse in queer relationships throughout history, Machado seeks to build

a framework in her memoir through which readers may be able to relate to and recognize parts of her story in their own circumstances.

Machado's short fiction works are just as powerful and innovative as their novel-length counterpart. *In Mary When You Follow Her, Machado*—with one breathless sentence—tells the story of a Latinx teenager on high alert after the disappearances of half a dozen girls of color, all of which have been ignored by her town. Machado's debut book, *Her Body and Other Parties* is a patchwork of eerie, gruesome and strange science fiction and horror short stories. Her unique storytelling and experimentation with format, genre and tropes are on display in full force. The settings and situations characters find themselves in are both familiar and otherworldly. The longest piece, *Especially Heinous*, is a reimagining of the entirety of *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*. The Husband Stitch is a spin on one of Alvin Schwartz's classic horror short stories of a woman with a mysterious green ribbon around her neck that she never takes off.

The rest of the stories are just as haunting, with plot twists at every corner and plenty of room to explore their meanings; *The Resident* follows a writer attending a residency with an eccentric crew of artists at a cabin in the woods. *Inventory* depicts a woman listing and reminiscing on all of her past relationships while quarantined during a global pandemic (it bears mentioning that the collection was published in 2017). *In Difficult At Parties*, a woman is disturbed by her ability to hear other peoples' thoughts to the point that her intimacy with her husband is strained. A mall sales clerk makes a horrifying discovery in the seams of prom dresses in *Real Women Have Bodies*. Machado's writing is gritty, atmospheric and doesn't shy away from anything grotesque. If body horror is your speed, you've come to the right place. Enjoy the ride, but please, keep your most treasured extremities close to you at all times.

Since the release of *In The Dream House* in 2019, Machado's short fiction has been published in several anthologies. Her most recent contribution, *The Lost Performance of the High Priestess of the Temple of Horror*, follows a young woman in early-20th century Paris who seeks refuge in a theater and has a convoluted relationship with the star performer. The story appeared in *Kink*, a literary fiction collection that explores love and desire, featuring work from various prolific writers, including Roxanne Gay and Alexander Chee, was released in February 2021. In 2020, Machado's first horror series with DC Comics, *The Low Low Woods*, hit shelves. Set in Shudder-to-Think, Pennsylvania, where the woods have been on fire for years and sinister monsters lurk—including rabbits with human eyes, skinless men and a deer woman who stalks hungry girls. We follow two girls who wake up in a vacant movie theater with no recollection of the last few hours of their lives. When they set out to unravel the mystery of their lost memories, it doesn't take long for them to discover disturbing truths about their small town. While the comic format is a relatively new one for Machado, I don't doubt that there'll be distinctive elements of her speculative work at play in *The Low Low Woods*.

As long as Carmen Maria Machado is fearless in writing these stories, I myself will be fearless in reading them. In a 2017 interview for *Hazlitt* promoting *Her Body and Other Parties*, Machado discusses her belief that bodies can be a source of horror, saying that bodies are inherently haunted. Bodies are "powerful and fragile, bloody and imperfect, uncanny, impressionable vehicles"—the showcasing of which is a common thread in all of Machado's work. Despite all of the horrors explored, however, there's more beneath the surface than just terror. As she writes in *In The Dream House*, "[art] is a reminder that you are more than a body and its accompanying grief." Machado does exactly that.

# The Pacific Sentinel is hiring!

We are looking for

- Editors
  - Reporters
  - Writers
  - Designers
  - Illustrators
  - Videographers
- And more positions!



The Pacific Sentinel is a monthly student-run magazine at PSU. We seek to uplift student voices and advocate on behalf of the marginalized. We analyze culture, politics, and daily life to continually take the dialogue further.

To Apply Visit: <https://pacsentinel.com/jobs/>

Questions? Reach out to [news@pacsentinel.com](mailto:news@pacsentinel.com)



# The Art of the PODCAST

*Wondery's Lindsay Graham, from popular podcasts like American Scandal and Wicked Game, discusses life as one of the most recognizable narrators in the business and how podcasting can change the world.*



by Conor Carroll  
Illustrations by Greer Siegel

The world of podcasting used to be smaller, more niche, and lacking in professionalism, according to Wondery's popular podcaster and narrator Lindsay Graham. In a recent discussion with the Pacific Sentinel, Graham describes podcasting in a pandemic and his plans for the future.

Wondery, an award winning podcast production company, was acquired by Amazon Music in December 2020.

Founded in 2016 by former Fox News executive Hernan Lopez, Wondery has become a top-five podcast producer, with more than 40 million downloads in December 2018 alone, and in 2019 received six iHeartRadio Podcast Award nominations and a "Most Bingeable Podcast" award win for their series "Dr. Death."

Despite Wondery's success, Graham, their lead ad producer, and most recognizable narrator, is helpful and humble, and even hopes to create a curriculum for a class on podcasting.

With podcast ad revenue looking to surpass \$1 billion this year and big-tech inundating the podcast industry, Graham's observations are as important as ever to understanding the art of the podcast.

**PS:** Can you tell us a little bit about what you've been working on?

**Graham:** Yeah. It's not ready for public release yet, but . . . I'm considering putting together a start-to-finish podcasting course. I found that (1) I like answering questions like yours and others, and (2) there seems to be, frankly, a market for it. There's a lot of podcasting courses that seem very entrepreneurially oriented or—and I do a different type of podcast. So I thought it might be lucrative as well. We'll see. But that's it.

**PS:** No it's smart. That was my impetus for reaching out to you, frankly. I do my own small one for myself, and then I'm working on two for school. I go to Portland State University. I have to agree with you—a lot of what I've seen out there... are rather, remedial. I've dabbled a bit in looking them up but they're not very instructive. So I figured... it'd be alright if I reached out.

**Graham:** No problem. Your questions might end up in the curriculum. Who knows.

**PS:** Yeah. And I reached out to my editing team.... we put together some questions to ask you. So this is from the entire editorial team as well as myself. So basically just kind of going to start jumping in here. So, walk me through the process from start-to-finish .

. . . the process from pre-pandemic obviously, walking into a studio to leaving at the end of the day, what you work on when you're working on a podcast, an episode specifically.

**Graham:** Sure. Actually the pandemic hasn't changed my work at all. I'm in the room right now that I'm in... 8-10 hours a day.

**PS:** Oh wow, really?

**Graham:** Yeah, I own this little studio in a back building of a property that now my parents own, but at the time I owned it. It's a little—I guess it's probably a three car garage that's split into two rooms, this is the smaller room. I'm trying to move into the bigger room but I'm also doing all the work so it's slow. But yeah I roll up, probably—I arrive at 9, and then I sit down here and get to work. Most of the day is spent at this point managing the business. So that requires a lot of emailing between both my client (which is Wondery, predominantly) and my team (I have two employees right now—an editor and a sound designer).

**PS:** And your company is...

**Graham:** Air Shift. Um, on days that I have something to record, long-form—like an episode—honestly, I'm lucky that (1) I'm able to do this and (2) that my team is good enough

to make it possible. I open up a script and I start narrating. I haven't read it before. I just read cold.

**PS:** Do you find that it helps reading cold like that?

**Graham:** I just don't really think about it too much. It's certainly not done to keep me fresh or... you know, I've heard that stuff, I want to be on my toes. Honestly I don't know that I believe any of those new claims, I think they're doing it for the same reason I'm doing it—why work harder than you need to?

**PS:** Work smart, right?

**Graham:** Yeah, work smarter, not harder. Now, uh, there are exceptions to that. If there is a new project, like *Business Movers* just launched recently, so I am reading all of those scripts because this is a new project, I'm in charge of more of the editorial than normal, so that's a different thing. But soon enough, a script will show up and I'll start reading it. Thankfully, we're good enough at this point where I can get through a 35-40 minute script in an hour and ten minutes, and then I'll ship it off to my editor who starts getting rid of all my mistakes, and there are many. Then I'll spend a fair amount of my day, most days, recording, writing and recording ads and promotions. I do that a lot because not only do I have my three podcasts, but I do the ads for almost all the other Wondery podcasts that don't have hosts. I'm the de facto voice of Wondery. So that keeps me busy too. Writing ads is something that I don't particularly enjoy, but it's part of the job. So if I were super successful I'd probably farm that out.

**PS:** Keeps the lights on though.

**Graham:** Yes. And then it's just reviewing stuff, audio will come back in from my editors and I will listen to it and make corrections myself or send it back to corrections. As this business grows it's becoming harder and harder, and yet more imperative, that I don't fix the mistakes myself. That I have to send it back to the people who made the mistakes with clear instructions of how to fix it. And that's much lower.

**PS:** Interesting.

**Graham:** But I have to do it so the mistake isn't made a second time.

**PS:** Interesting. OK, next question ... what does your podcasting team look like? What does it consist of, their education, their experiences, and what not.

**Graham:** So on the production side, the actual air line employees, we don't do any of the writing of the scripts. So there is me, the host, and probably chief executive, and so I do two roles there, I'm the name talent but I'm also the main manager. Then I got a

sound designer who started with me initially just editing dialogue, and um, the very first thing I farmed out. You know, here's the raw stuff, make it better. But very quickly we, Derrick is just fantastic and a fast learner and has good intuition, so he's now doing all the sound design for all the shows, including the upcoming season of *1865*, which I did personally last time. So he's really coming up. I have another full-time employee who's started also on just dialogue, and a lot of the production assistant stuff. So like, OK the episode's finished, now render it, name it correctly, send it to Wondery, put it in the right folders, just the everyday traffic kind of stuff. But she has started sound designing too, we do two podcasts that are not mine—Tied to History for Wondery and then History That Doesn't Suck—so Molly, more and more and more, is starting to do those shows. And they're not the super involved sound design level that even, you know, Scandal is, so it's a good fit as we train her up. She's been with us six months. Now, to the point of the writing—so four shows that Wondery owns, and those are *American History Tellers*, *American Scandal*, *Epstein*, and now *Business Movers*—they provide the scripts. They're in charge of editorial. So they uh, they decide what seasons are coming up, they find the writers, they do the script editing, they've got their whole process.

**PS:** So they drive all content for that pretty much?

**Graham:** Right. Except for *Business Movers* because, uh, that one's kind of more of a hybrid. Wondery, for a variety of market reasons, insisted that if I was going to do another large scale podcast, that they own it, and so I'm in charge more of content but they still have the IP. What that means is my friend Steve, who wrote *American Elections: Wicked Game* and he wrote *1865*—he's the head writer of *Business Movers*. And so we'll work together and send Wondery stuff. Wondery's expecting this to be pretty turnkey after the first few episodes, making sure they're happy. So it's actually an in between thing where we do actually control the content but don't own the show.

**PS:** Interesting. Now you mentioned sound design...can you speak a little bit more to that? Without getting too definitional, what does that entail? I kind of know what it means, but the purposes of my project, can you tell me what that means for you?

**Graham:** Yeah, sure. I think there's probably three different categories that could fall into sound design. One is just the everyday ordinary treatment of the narration. So beyond the edit of getting rid of all the stumbles—the uhs and ums—there's the—well the leveling and EQ and compression and multiband compression and de-essing and all the stuff—noise reduction—all that stuff. At this point, that's kind of set and forget for

us. It's all templated out. But for every new voice that comes online, that process needs to happen again. My voice is not the same as your voice. So it'll be different. Then sound design really happens when it's—and it branches into adding sound effects to places where sound effects are necessary. My shows have these—these moments, right? These scenes that are fully realized and there are characters.

**PS:** I'm literally hearing it in my head, hearing you talk and it's taking me back to like, the Chicago fire one I just listened to the other day, it's right there.

**Graham:** Right. So like, we need fire sounds and crunching boots and burning scent embers.

**PS:** People screaming.

**Graham:** Yeah. Stuff like that. And that needs to be not just added in—I mean like, good sound design then finds good sound design to begin with, but then layers them in a soundscape that is three dimensional. So that's one part of sound design. The next part of sound design would be laying in music, which is just as important as anything else. There are lots of different ways you can do it. *History Tellers* has music sometimes, and then *Scandal* and *Business Movers* have music all the time, wall to wall. So making those decisions—those are aesthetic decisions as well. Sometimes it's in the script—you know we try and make it obvious, like “here's a subject change, we need some sort of segue in and out,” but it is a largely intuitive and necessary portion of the job for the sound designer to understand the pace and the arc of things. Like, they can go horribly wrong. Music will screw everything if it's the wrong cue.

**PS:** Speaking to that a bit... things going horribly wrong... what do you often find as one or two of the things that—not necessarily hinder you but are troublesome. Anything in particular?

**Graham:** It's mostly in the script portion of it that—there are so many ways to write that are bad for audio. It could be as simple as just ambiguous pronoun use. When I say—after naming 3 names and then I say “he,” you have no idea who I'm talking about. And there's no ability for the listener to scan up and kind of check. Numbers are the same, you know, especially in *Business Movers*... it's like “Coca Cola grew from 764 million to 102 point—and it's like (1) those numbers are very complex and unnecessary and (2) you can't process them like you can in print. Like I can see that 1.2 billion—it has a relationship to 800 million. That's easy.

**PS:** You mean like visually, you can see right there...

**Graham:** Yeah, there's a mathematical

relationship, it's a 50 percent increase. So numbers will come across wherein the writer should have said, "Coca Cola increased their profits by 50 percent." Problem solved, right. And those are the small things. Word repetition, there's all sorts of other stuff. The bigger things are when I'm in the midst of a script and I don't know what the hell is going on. You know, admittedly, narration is kind of a fugue state that I get in and maybe I've just lost the thread of it, but it's my job not to lose the thread because that's how I know how to modulate my narration. But when I don't know what's going on, then I don't know to be high, low, left, right, soft, loud. When that happens, there's big trouble. So it's kind of intuitive, I do read these scripts cold, but sometimes that's the biggest frustration, it's like fuck, I don't know what's going on! So I'll have to go back and try and fix it. Usually it's structural. Usually the writer has done something like just skipped a bunch of time, or just threw away something that they thought was obvious but it needed a lot more exploration, or just got too clever. Audio is a pretty straightforward medium. Like I said, you don't have any opportunity to really rewind, you can't turn on the closed-captions, you're not reading, you're not scanning—if you've lost them, you've lost them.

**PS:** I was reading the other day that ad revenue for podcasting is going to be over a billion dollars. Obviously this is becoming, not just because of the pandemic but just in general, a very healthy medium of exchange of ideas, of education, or academia, for instance, and I was wondering, could you speak a little to that? Do you see podcasting as perhaps a healthy vessel for education? Could teachers start using it more often?

**Graham:** So yeah. Podcasting has been projected to hit over a billion probably this year but the pandemic screwed that up, and then, so really next year. We're seeing continued growth, I mean it is a growth industry, revenues are rising more, and there's been a professionalization of the industry too. More and more people who know what they're doing are entering it. And you can see that too, I mean, you know Wondery just got bought by Amazon, Spotify bought Gimlet...

**PS:** I saw that. That was pretty quiet to be honest. Or at least if you aren't in the know. That was really interesting.

**Graham:** Yeah I think it leaked a little bit early so they scrambled to catch up with it, I don't know. But you know, a \$1 billion market is not like, super big. I'm going to make it up but the frozen potato market is probably much bigger. I know for a fact that radio is like, 10-20x bigger in terms of advertising. So it's still got a long way to go, but it is a technology market, you know it's not terrestrial radio, it's not potatoes, it has potential to grow and not just grow but grow in interesting ways in which there's social media components and

user data extraction and all sorts of shit that Californian investors get excited about. But to your second question about, is podcasting a mechanism for teaching and other things, which doesn't really seem to be market-oriented...

**PS:** Yeah that was not the nature of the



question. Yeah I definitely—for me, from what I've seen so far, it's almost an underutilized vehicle for this. I'm sure a lot of teachers use it and they do, I've seen them. A lot of professors use them, it's great. But yeah I wondering just—sorry to interrupt you, I apologize, I just wanted to clarify...

**Graham:** No yeah, I know for a fact that podcasting is a great teaching tool because teachers are doing their own podcasts and teachers are adopting and using podcasts that exist in their classroom. So History That Doesn't Suck is a great example of a university professor who wanted to teach the masses and is successful at it. My Twitter feed—I wish they would tell me more often—but every month you know, some teacher tags me and is like "Hey we're using Episode 4 of The Age of Jackson from History Tellers in my classroom." And it's fantastic mainly because it's experiential learning. I love the—well one of them most recently that I enjoyed was that over lunch break, this teacher decided to just start playing the podcast while the kids are eating lunch and, you know, it's supposedly a topic they're studying, but this is a free period—but the teacher said this was the quietest lunch period she ever had. And there was just a heartbreaking story about a single dad and his young teen son, they weren't doing too well together. And so the dad just started playing History Tellers in the car on the way to school, and the son got out and said "Hey Dad, would you mind if we listened to the rest of that together? Don't listen to the rest of it... wait for me!" And like...I could die! That's good stuff. So to answer... I mean sure, movies and TV shows and books do all of that too. But podcasting seems to be uniquely good at sneaking into your life, like in your lunch hour, or on your commute. You didn't expect to have these communions with a classroom

or with your family. So...

**PS:** That's a really good point. Like, I'll often be going for a jog, or even—it's just like something I look forward to in my day. OK I got my podcasts ready, I'm going to do the dishes, it helps me set a pattern for my day. It's really nice. So to kind of finish up, just consolidate here, going back to process. As far as software is concerned, is there a particular... I use Audacity and Anchor. Now this is just for me... What does a much larger institution such as Air Frame and Wondery utilize?

**Graham:** Wondery probably uses Pro Tools most. But they use a lot of different tools. They don't have too many in house engineers. Most of that stuff is outsourced, so they'll find freelance designers. Whenever I get an audio project from Wondery it's almost always Pro Tools. I have no idea why because I hate Pro Tools. And I don't like Avid as a software company, I don't like Pro Tools as a product... I use Reaper. It is eminently affordable, and it's free to try, you could probably never pay a cent and always use it, you'd just get annoyed with the little flash screen at the beginning. For independents and small businesses it's \$60. The full-freight license is like, \$230. So no real barrier there. And it is a full-fledged program, probably way too much for just podcasts. But I grew up on it in an audio production music setting and it is... it's really powerful. I mean so powerful that it might be a little hard to get your talons into at first. But it's very customizable. There's 4 ways to do everything, so that's good and bad. But we use Reaper for everything. It's very lightweight, very fast, very inexpensive, very powerful, and when I do get Pro Tools projects from wherever, I convert them. I've got a conversion software thing and I just load them up into Reaper. After that, there's some plugins that we use, the ones we use most are LUFDS Meter, a loudness meter from Klangfreund, pretty much the whole stack from FabFilter, so de-ess-ing, the gate, the EQ, the compression... for most of our environmental special reverbs and effects, we use Audio Ease Altiverb, that is a pretty expensive plugin at 7 or 8 hundred dollars, but it's a really good convolution reverb that has good post production sounds.

**PS:** I'm sorry could you ... convolution reverb?

**Graham:** Yeah it's called a convolution reverb and this one is well suited because it has a lot of post production sounds. So (1) convolution reverb, there's two types: there's algorithmic and then there's convolution. Algorithmic is a mathematical approximation—I'm going to repeat this sound a whole bunch and put it into an algorithm and it comes out sounding like a big room, or a hallway or something. Convolution is actually a photograph of an actual place. So you go into the place you want to sound like, and you either clap or play a sophisticated noise into the room while recording it, and then the software spits out a



version of that room.

**PS:** Okay. That's really interesting. I'm not an audio guy, so thank you.

**Graham:** Yeah. In the filmmaking and post production world for video, convolution is used a lot because right before or right after you shoot, you just clap—have one of the actors clap—anyways you're on set and you can get what the set sounds like. So if you have to ADR later, looping or whatever to replace some dialogue—you can get a really good approximation of what it sounded like on the day, in the place.

**PS:** So it's about producing reality. To create, in the mind of the viewer, the listener, whatever...

**Graham:** Yeah. And... you know, there's lots of—music algorithmic reverbs are great for music, but they're kind of idealized spaces. And often, they don't sound real. Like the real domestic small spaces that you and I inhabit. It'll sound... it doesn't sound right. It just doesn't sound right for voices and sound effects. So yeah, that software is expensive and that's probably it, in terms of us. You don't have to spend much money.

**PS:** And that was one of my questions...one my multimedia contributors was like... we're starving students. They wanted to know like, in actuality, to produce a solid podcast cost wise, it doesn't have to be that much, right? Like you can really make something good as long as you're prepared to work at it, right?

**Graham:** Yeah I mean honestly... provided you have a laptop or you have something of computing power, you could come out well-under—well-equipped—for under \$1000 easy. Probably for under \$500. I bet you could do it for under \$200. All of the software I mentioned is easily replaceable with free or budget options. None of it's required. I mean, the real expense is time and having good intuition. Because if you don't have good intuition or chops or skills or experience, you just have to do it three times before you've done it right. So that's the expense to do a really good podcast. This microphone—this is a stupidly expensive \$4,000 microphone—not necessary.

**PS:** Yeah this was \$120 and even then it probably didn't need this silly thing.

**Graham:** Well you don't need both a windscreen and a pop filter.

**PS:** Let's talk a bit about the pandemic. I know you said that your day hasn't really changed too much because you're pretty much doing this in your studio in your backyard, but what are some of the things you've noticed that have changed from the pandemic here? For podcasting, specifically?

**Graham:** Well there's a whole branch of podcasting that's been very much influenced and that's the in person interview. That just can't happen. So what I think is interesting is that the listening public has probably gotten really used to crappy Zoom audio. No one's really complained, which tells you something about evangelists—audio quality evangelists. I'm never going to say you shouldn't improve your audio quality, but it does indicate that maybe good enough is good enough. I do some interviews, not a lot of them, my podcasts are not interview-centric, but those that are, clearly probably hurt. I mean you don't—especially with ones that don't have the resources to Joe Rogan it and like, have everyone have a Coronavirus test two days before they show up and fly people in, and so—we, for the interviews that we did on my shows, we would often have people go to a



studio, whether it's a public radio station or a recording studio, or hire a stringer to go and set up in their house or their office or whatever, and do the recording that way to get the best possible audio. Now, we don't do that anymore. I think we should return to it because it's clearly better audio, it just—yeah and it's easier to edit, it's easier to work with, it's easier to listen to. But for those persons that do in person interviews, I bet it's tough—not just for the audio quality, but for the eye contact and the lack of delay and stuff.

**PS:** Yeah, it's different. There's an energy of being in person that you don't quite get here.

**Graham:** Yeah obviously it's several degrees removed. You don't get the micro-linguistics, you don't get the small expressions. Everything's blurred and delayed, and I can't tell if you're reacting immediately to the word I just said or to the word I said two minutes

ago. So any sort of intimacy is kind of... not destroyed, but just tampered.

**PS:** Excellent. To finish up here, this was—what advice do you have for aspiring podcasters?

**Graham:** No I mean like, I should probably have an answer for that. Well the truth is I do have an answer for that because—I just don't know if it's satisfying. Because there are other very, very common questions—other than, you know like, what microphone should I use, which is a ridiculous question—it is, you know how do I grow an audience? And immediately, everyone's like “well are you marketing right?” Are you on social? Are you on Instagram? And there are some absolute marketing procedures—best practices that you should follow—but I don't really know if I know them well. What I do know is that—I just heard this yesterday listening to someone else talk. No one has ever listened to a podcast and thought to themselves “Well this sucks. You know what I'll do, I'll come back in 90 days and see if they've improved.” No one ever behaves like that. Especially now, we have tiny attention spans. And so I need to assess the quality, interestingness, and relevance to any new podcast that I'm going to listen to. And that entails making the best show you can. I don't know how you might have gotten a listener to click on you and download you or listen to you or stream you or however they come to you, but they come to you, that's the best opportunity you're going to get. So you need to make sure that you've done everything in your power to ensure that they're not turned off. That could be audio quality, it could be that you've given them a good premise about what the show is. If you say your show is true crime weekly, and you talk about your dog monthly, then... you know, they're going to jet. So there's a promise to your listener, there's how good you sound (this could be audio quality or loudness), but it's also just understanding that people listen for a reason. And if you can—here's another thing that I've been thinking about recently, Warren Buffet indicated that the best way to beat the market—the stock market—let's say you're trying to beat the Fortune whatever. The Fortune 50 or whatever index. Just find the worst one and get rid of it. By dropping the bottom of the barrel, you are now better than that index. And finding the worst is probably easier than finding the best.



**We're Hiring!**  
**We're Hiring!**  
**We're Hiring!**  
**We're Hiring!**

looking for:

- **LBGTQ+ PERSPECTIVES COLUMNIST**
- **BLACK LIVES COLUMNIST**
- **INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES COLUMNIST**
- **HISPANIC/LATINX PERSPECTIVES COLUMNIST**
- **ACCESSIBILITY COLUMNIST**

*The Pacific Sentinel* is a monthly student-run magazine at PSU. We seek to uplift student voices and advocate on behalf of the underrepresented. We analyze culture, politics, and daily life to continually take the dialogue further

