TELEVISION

Sloan Grantee American Experience Honored with Several Prestigious Awards

In January, PBS's American Experience, the long-running flagship of Sloan's public television program, was awarded an International Documentary Association (IDA) Award for Best Curated Series, one of the most prestigious awards for documentary filmmaking. In addition, two Sloan-funded shows were individually honored. “Chasing the Moon” (pictured left), about the historic 1969 journey to the moon, was awarded an Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award, which celebrates outstanding reporting in the public interest; and “The Poison Squad,” which is based on the book of the same title by Deborah Blum about U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dr. Harvey Washington Wiley's efforts to test the health effects of popular chemical food additives, was nominated for a Writer’s Guild Award for Documentary Script – Other Than Current Events.

“The Codebreaker” about Pioneering Cryptanalyst Elizabeth Smith Friedman Airs on PBS

“The Codebreaker,” the most recent documentary in the Sloan-supported American Experience series, aired on January 11 on PBS. The film tells the little-known tale of Elizabeth Smith Friedman (pictured left), Cryptanalyst-in-Charge for the U.S. Treasury Department, whose codebreaking skills helped bring down a Nazi spy network in South America during World War II. Together with her cryptographer husband, Friedman’s contributions to the science of cryptology helped lay the foundations for the National Security Agency. The film received positive notices from The Wall Street Journal, Smithsonian Magazine, and Ars Technica, among other outlets. This show is the latest of four produced through a major Sloan production grant to American Experience, which has also supported projects including “The Poison Squad,” “The Man Who Tried to Feed the World,” and “Mr. Tornado.”
Sloan-Backed Doc on History of Public Health to Debut on PBS in May

*Extra Life: A Short History of Living Longer*, a four-part television series exploring the 300-year history of public health advances set against the current COVID-19 pandemic, will air Tuesdays on PBS starting May 11. Produced by the award-winning filmmaking team at Nutopia and hosted by best-selling science author Steven Johnson and University of Manchester historian David Olusoga (pictured below), each episode of the series examines one aspect of medicine and public health that has played a central role in increasing life expectancy over the past hundred years and juxtaposes it with current COVID-19 challenges. The four episodes include “Vaccines,” “Data,” “Medicine,” and “Behavior,” and will feature guests such as Anthony Fauci, Kizzmekia Corbett, Francis Collins, and more. *Extra Life* was supported by a 2020 Sloan grant to Women Make Movies.

Three-Part NOVA Series *Beyond the Elements* Premieres

*Beyond the Elements*, a Sloan-backed NOVA series about the chemistry that makes our world, debuted across three Wednesday nights in February. Hosted by popular science and technology writer David Pogue (pictured below), the hour-long episodes include “Reactions,” which looks at the importance of chemical reactions; “Indestructible,” which explores the chemistry of durability; and “Life,” which examines the molecules that allowed life on Earth to begin. All episodes are currently available to stream via the NOVA site. The series builds on the popular and critical success of the Sloan-supported series *Hunting the Elements*, about the periodic table. *Beyond the Elements* was supported by a 2016 Sloan grant to the WGBH Educational Foundation.
Secrets in our DNA Debuts on NOVA

*Secrets in our DNA*, a new NOVA documentary produced by the award-winning team at Kikim Media and supported by Sloan, aired on PBS on January 13. The film explores the value of genealogy research along with the risks of entrusting our most private data to commercial enterprises and online databases. With over 30 million people already having submitted their DNA to large testing companies such as 23andMe and AncestryDNA, this topic is only growing in importance. The full documentary is currently available to stream via the NOVA site. *Secrets in our DNA* was supported by a 2019 grant to the WGBH Educational Foundation.

**FILM**

Sloan Feature Film Prize Winner Son of Monarchs Launches at Sundance

*Son of Monarchs* was awarded the Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize at this year’s Sundance Film Festival and screened virtually as part of the Festival program. The narrative feature film, directed and written by filmmaker and scientist Alexis Gambis, follows a Mexican biologist (Tenoch Huerta) who studies butterflies at a NYC lab as he returns home to the Monarch forests of Michoacán. The film was cited by the jury “for its poetic, multilayered portrait of a scientist’s growth and self-discovery as he migrates between Mexico and NYC working on transforming nature and uncovering the fluid boundaries that unite past and present and all living things.” This year’s Sloan jury included MIT researcher and Algorithmic Justice League founder Joy Buolamwini, Associate Professor in Chemistry at CUNY Hunter College and the CUNY Graduate Center Mandë Holford, and Sloan filmmakers Aneesh Chaganty (*Searching*), Lydia Dean Pilcher (*Radium Girls*), and Lena Vurma (*Adventures of a Mathematician*). *Son of Monarchs* has received positive press from *Science Magazine*, *Variety*, *Scientific American*, and *IndieWire*, among other outlets. The Sloan Feature Film Prize and other Sloan activities at Sundance are supported by a 2019 grant to the Sundance Institute.
Sundance Celebrates Three New Sloan-Winning Projects

Three exciting new projects featuring scientific themes or characters were celebrated at the virtual Sloan awards ceremony at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival and will now be developed via the nationwide Sloan film pipeline. Tania Taiwo was awarded the Sloan Commissioning Grant for Pharmacopeia, about a Black pharmacist who becomes a drug dealer to support herself; Alyssa Loh was awarded the Sloan Development Fellowship for Chariot, about the 1958 plan to use nuclear weapons to blast a new harbor near a village of indigenous people in Alaska; and Graham Sack (writer) and Jennifer B. Lee (producer) were awarded the Sloan Episodic Fellowship for The Harvard Computers, a pilot inspired by the brilliant women who defied sexism and discrimination to become the first female astronomers in the 1880s. Writer-Director Alexis Gambis also accepted the Sloan Feature Film Prize on behalf of his film Son of Monarchs. The full event is available to stream via the Festival’s YouTube page.

Sloan Panel at Sundance Brings Together Scientists and Filmmakers

Three scientists and two filmmakers gathered virtually to discuss science and film for the Sloan panel at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival, The Big Conversation: Come Together. Moderated by Janna Levin, director of sciences at Pioneer Works and Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Barnard College, the discussion featured Harvard Medical School Professor of Medicine Galit Alter; Oscar-winning screenwriter, director, and producer Scott Z. Burns (Contagion); screenwriter Katherine Lingenfelter (Westworld); and engineer and astronaut Leland Melvin. The full panel discussion was recorded and is available to watch on Facebook.
**Father of the Cyborgs Premieres at Dublin Film Festival**

*Father of the Cyborgs*, a Sloan-supported documentary by award-winning filmmaker David Burke about neurologist Phil Kennedy, premiered at the Dublin Film Festival on March 12. A pioneer in brain-computer interface, Kennedy made global headlines twice: in the 1990s when he invented the first electrode implanted in a human brain, and in 2014, when he failed to gain approval from the FDA for his risky implantation surgery and flew to South America to have the electrodes implanted inside his own brain. The film has received positive early coverage from *The Irish Times* and *The Journal*. *Father of the Cyborgs* was supported by a 2019 grant to the filmmakers via Women Make Movies.

**Sloan Programming at Athena Film Festival Spotlights Women in STEM**

The Athena Film Festival, the premier festival dedicated to celebrating and elevating women’s leadership, is showcasing women in STEM through its Sloan-funded programming at the 2021 virtual Festival, which is running through March in celebration of Women’s History Month. The “Making it Happen: Women in STEM” programming area includes screenings of Sloan-supported documentaries *Coded Bias* and *Picture a Scientist*, and Sloan/SFFILM Science in Cinema Prize winner *Ammonite* (pictured left); a women in STEM shorts program, and a panel discussion on understanding numeracy. The Women in STEM program is supported by a 2019 Sloan grant to the Athena Film Festival.

**Coded Bias Airs on PBS March 22**

After a successful festival run and virtual cinema release, *Coded Bias*, a feature-length Sloan-funded documentary about the bias encoded in automated decision-making and machine-learning algorithms, premiered nationwide on PBS’s *Independent Lens on March 22*. Directed by Shalini Kantayya, *Coded Bias* features the work of MIT Media Lab Researcher and Algorithmic Justice League Founder Joy Buolamwini, who found that facial-recognition software is often unable to recognize darker-skinned faces, especially faces of women. Other women leaders in the field are also highlighted in the film, including mathematician Cathy O’Neil, Big Brother Watch’s Silkie Carlo, and technologist Zeynep Tufekci. The film has won multiple awards at the SIMA Awards, the Hamptons International Film Festival, the Calgary International Film Festival, and the GlobeDocs Film Festival, as well as recent nominations for Outstanding Documentary Film at the NAACP Image Awards and Best Science/Nature Documentary from the Critics Choice Association.
Oliver Sacks: His Own Life to Air on PBS April 9

*Oliver Sacks: His Own Life*, a Sloan-funded documentary on the world-renowned neurologist, clinician, and writer, will air nationwide on PBS’s *American Masters* on April 9. Upon receiving a fatal diagnosis in 2015, Sacks (pictured left) invited award-winning documentary filmmaker Ric Burns and his team to record his final days. The finished film draws on eighty hours of this unique footage, in addition to telling the full story of Sacks’ remarkable life and career. *Oliver Sacks: His Own Life* is also available to rent or buy on demand on iTunes, Amazon, and more.

Picture a Scientist to Air on PBS April 14

*Picture a Scientist*, a Sloan-funded documentary about sexual harassment of women in science, will air on PBS’s *NOVA* on April 14. The film, directed by Sharon Shattuck and Ian Cheney, follows three women scientists: MIT biologist Nancy Hopkins, American University chemist Raychelle Burks (pictured below), and Stanford University geologist Jane Willenbring. The powerful documentary has been screened at hundreds of universities and women and science-focused organizations in over 36 countries around the world. A post-screening survey found that 35% of respondents in leadership positions reported implementing at least one new policy to address sexism after watching the film, a testament to its timeliness and social relevance.

Radium Girls, Sloan-Winning Feature at NYU, Debuts on Netflix

*Radium Girls*, based on the true story of young women in the 1920s who were poisoned while painting luminous watch dials at the U.S. Radium Factory, is now available to watch on Netflix. It is also available to rent or buy on Amazon, YouTube, and other streaming platforms. The film, directed by Ginny Mohler and Lydia Dean Pilcher, stars Joey King (*Fargo, The Act*) as one of the women who watches her sister and friends develop illnesses from radium and fights to expose the truth about radium’s dangerous effects.
Tesla Now Available on DVD

*Tesla*, a Sloan-funded narrative feature film about inventor Nikola Tesla, best-known for his contributions to the design of the modern alternating current (AC) electricity supply system, is now available on DVD. It is also available to rent or buy on Amazon, YouTube, and other streaming platforms. *Tesla* was directed by three-time Sloan-supported director Michael Almereyda, stars four-time-Academy-Award nominee Ethan Hawke and features an A-list supporting cast including Kyle MacLachlan, Jim Gaffigan, and Eve Hewson (pictured left with Hawke).

BOOKS

*Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future* by Elizabeth Kolbert Published

*Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future* by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Elizabeth Kolbert was published February 9. The book discusses the adverse effects humans have had on the environment and different efforts devised to combat those effects, such as biologists working to preserve the rarest fish in the world and engineers working to turn carbon emissions into stone. It has received favorable press from *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and NPR, as well as starred reviews from Kirkus and Booklist. Kolbert received a 2019 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

*Kill Shot: A Shadow Industry, a Deadly Disease* by Jason Dearen Published

*Kill Shot: A Shadow Industry, a Deadly Disease* by award-winning journalist Jason Dearen was published on February 23. The book tells the story of the 2012 fungal meningitis outbreak caused by contaminated steroid injections distributed by the New England Compounding Center that infected hundreds and killed more than one hundred people. It has received positive notices from outlets such as Publisher’s Weekly, AP, and The Daily Herald, as well as a starred review from Kirkus. Dearen received a 2019 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.
Mr. Humble and Dr. Butcher: A Monkey's Head, the Pope's Neuroscientist, and the Quest to Transplant the Soul by Brandy Schillace Published

Mr. Humble and Dr. Butcher: A Monkey's Head, the Pope's Neuroscientist, and the Quest to Transplant the Soul by medical historian Brandy Schillace was published on March 2. The book examines the life and work of Dr. Robert White, a scientist who developed lifesaving neurological techniques that earned him a Nobel Prize nomination, but also performed controversial experiments on monkeys to try to develop a method for performing head transplants. It has received positive press from Kirkus, Publisher's Weekly, The Washington Post, and The New York Times. Schillace received a 2018 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

Life's Edge: The Search for What It Means to Be Alive by Carl Zimmer Published

Life's Edge: The Search for What It Means to Be Alive by New York Times science writer Carl Zimmer, author of the Sloan-supported book She Has Her Mother’s Laugh, was published on March 9. The book investigates the enduring question: What is Life? It wrestles with difficult issues such as whether a fertilized egg is a living person and when a person can be legally declared dead and discusses how different scientists and schools of thought define life. Life’s Edge has received favorable notices from Kirkus, Quanta Magazine, Science Magazine, and Publisher's Weekly, among others. Zimmer received a 2020 Sloan grant for the research and writing of this book.

Beloved Beasts: Fighting for Life in an Age of Extinction by Michelle Nijhuis Published

Beloved Beasts: Fighting for Life in an Age of Extinction by science journalist Michelle Nijhuis was published March 9. The book recounts the complex history of the modern conservation movement, illuminating the contributions of scientists and activists such as Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson and detailing the efforts of organizations such as the Audubon Society and the World Wildlife Fund. Beloved Beasts has received positive press from Publisher’s Weekly and Smithsonian Magazine, as well as starred reviews from Kirkus and Booklist and an interview on Sloan-funded The Open Mind. Nijhuis received a 2018 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.
Nuclear Choices for the Twenty-First Century: A Citizen’s Guide by Richard Wolfson

Published

*Nuclear Choices for the Twenty-First Century: A Citizen's Guide* by Middlebury College professor Richard Wolfson was published on March 23. The book is an updated version of the 1993 Sloan-supported book *Nuclear Choices: A Citizen's Guide to Nuclear Technology*, explaining the basics of nuclear technology in a way accessible to a general audience and discussing the controversies surrounding the use of nuclear energy. Wolfson received a 2018 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

Hawking Hawking: The Selling of a Scientific Celebrity by Charles Seife to be Published

*Hawking Hawking: The Selling of a Scientific Celebrity* by New York University professor Charles Seife will be published on April 6. The book revisits the life story of scientist and celebrity Stephen Hawking in a non-hagiographic way. Starting with his death and moving backwards through his life, it covers topics such as his contributions to science, his relationship with his wives, his popular books for the general public, and his self-promotion. *Hawking Hawking* has garnered positive early press from *Prospect*, as well as a starred review from *Kirkus*. Seife received a 2019 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

The Memory Thief: And the Secrets Behind How We Remember: A Medical Mystery by Lauren Aguirre to be Published

*The Memory Thief: And the Secrets Behind How We Remember: A Medical Mystery* by Lauren Aguirre will be published June 1. The book tells the true story of a team of doctors who found that a small group of opioid overdose survivors in Massachusetts developed a new form of amnesia. It examines the connection between opioid use and memory and explores what this type of amnesia can tell us about other neurological disorders such as Alzheimer’s Disease. Aguirre received a 2020 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.
Brainscapes: The Warped, Wondrous Maps Written in Your Brain—And How They Guide You by Rebecca Schwarzlose to be Published

Brainscapes: The Warped, Wondrous Maps Written in Your Brain—And How They Guide You by neuroscientist and science writer Rebecca Schwarzlose will be published on June 15. The book introduces readers to the concept of a brain map and walks them through how maps affect our functions and shape our experience of the world. Schwarzlose received a 2018 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

THEATER

Ensemble Studio Theatre Presents 2021 First Light Festival

In March, Ensemble Studio Theatre (EST) held its annual First Light Festival, which is made up of readings of Sloan-commissioned plays. This year’s Festival includes virtual readings of nine Sloan plays, including Circumstances Affecting the Heat of the Sun’s Rays by Amanda Quaid, Henry Makes a Bible by AJ Clauss, Smart by Mary Elizabeth Hamilton, Lemuria by Bonnie Antosh, Beyond Words by Laura Maria Censabella, The Reservoir by Jake Brasch, Las Borinqueñas by Nelson Diaz-Marcano, Good Hair by Phaedra Michelle Scott, and Pō e Ao [Darkness & Light] by Susan Soon He Stanton (pictured below), which covered topics from the first birth control pill mass trial to the creation of Gray’s Anatomy textbook. The First Light Festival is supported by a 2019 Sloan grant to EST.
L.A. Theatre Works Releases Three New Science Audio Plays

L.A. Theatre Works, the nation's leading producer of audio theater, released three new science audio plays as part of the Sloan-supported Relativity series. Plays include: Life on Paper by Kenneth Lin, an Ensemble Studio Theatre/Sloan commission about a forensic economist who clashes with a small-town actuary over the exact value of one man’s life; Extinction by Hannie Rayson, a Manhattan Theatre Club/Sloan commission about a zoologist in Australia who gets funding to save an endangered species from the very company that threatens its existence; and Bump by Chiara Atik, the 2018 Ensemble Studio Theatre/Sloan Mainstage Production based on the true story of Jorge Odón and the birthing device he invented in his garage. All three plays are available via L.A. Theatre Works’s site. The production of new science radio dramas as part of the Relativity series, which reaches millions of listeners across the world, is part of a 2019 Sloan grant to L.A. Theatre Works.

RADIO

Four-Part Podcast Series on Role of Libraries Released

Libraries Reimagined, a Sloan-supported documentary podcast series on the evolving role of libraries, was released over the past year. The series, produced by award-winning radio documentarian David Freudberg for the podcast Humankind, is divided into four 30-minute segments: “Information Age,” “Treasury of Learning,” “Early Literacy,” and “Digital Literacy.” The series was heard by more than a million listeners via public radio stations and the NPR channel of SiriusXM satellite radio, as well as in a special edited segment of the NPR program Here and Now. Interviewees included Universal Access to Knowledge grantees Katherine Maher, CEO of the Wikimedia Foundation and John Bracken, Executive Director of the Digital Public Library of America, as well as Larra Clark, Deputy Director of the American Library Association; librarians and library directors; and academics. Libraries Reimagined was supported by a 2019 Sloan grant to Documentary Educational Resources.
NEW MEDIA

Pioneer Works’ The Broadcast Releases Virtual Science Content

Pioneer Works, a creative incubator for art and science in Brooklyn, has launched its multimedia online platform, The Broadcast. Led by Barnard College Professor of Astronomy and Physics Janna Levin, this new website brings Pioneer Works’ original and in-depth science content to a new global audience. New science content includes an hour-long “Scientific Controversies” discussion on swarm intelligence and short animated “Condensed Matters” videos Swarm Intelligence (pictured left) and Genetic Engineering. Launch of The Broadcast was supported by a Sloan planning grant in 2019, with a new grant in 2020.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

Sloan Helps DPLA Become Biggest Contributor of Images to Wikipedia

A Sloan grant to the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) to develop infrastructure for the ingestion of data from national aggregators into Wikimedia Commons has resulted in the uploading of 1.25 million media files from DPLA’s 4,000 participating institutions (Boston Public Library image at left). This makes Sloan-supported DPLA the world’s biggest contributor to Wikimedia Commons, the online repository of free use images and other media that accompanies articles on Wikipedia. Over 1,000 Wikipedia article pages currently include DPLA cultural heritage artifacts, resulting in over 16 million total views. Sloan grantees DPLA and Wikipedia will continue to build on this seminal program in 2021.


DPLA announced that it is now offering an ebook creation service to libraries, allowing them to create their own ebooks from materials in the public domain or from materials for which the library owns the copyright (example at left). Books can be made available to patrons via the SimplyE app and via DPLA’s Open Bookshelf collection of free ebooks. DPLA recently released its own new ebook, The Impeachment Papers II, joining earlier DPLA-produced ebook versions of important government documents, and is now developing a new ebook, By the Quill of Her Pen: Black Suffragists in Their Own Words. DPLA’s work with ebooks is supported by multiple Sloan grants.
Wikipedia Celebrates 20th Birthday

Wikipedia, whose 55 million articles available in 300 languages are read more than 15 billion times each month, celebrated its 20th birthday in January. Since 2008, the Sloan Foundation has supported Wikipedia to scale up, improve accuracy, and enhance credibility as it became the largest encyclopedia in human history and the fifth largest website in the world. Wikipedia has been the go-to global source for reliable and up-to-date information about the COVID-19 pandemic, while Google recently announced it will start using Wikipedia to help users validate its search results.

Consumer Reports Investigates Data Sharing of Robotic Vacuum Cleaners

Using the Sloan-supported Digital Standard for digital privacy and security criteria, Consumer Reports’ Digital Lab recently tested robotic vacuum cleaners to learn more about the data they collect and how secure it is. The study found that all the manufacturers tested encrypt users’ sensitive information, but none of the vacuum companies earned high marks for data privacy. Many manufacturers did not provide robust information about what data is collected and how. Consumer Reports Director of Consumer Privacy Justin Brookman warned, “These companies need to make sure the cameras in robotic vacs have reasonable security protections to ensure that attackers can't access them.” Work with CR’s Digital Lab and the Digital Standard is supported by multiple Sloan grants.

Knowable Magazine Hosts Virtual Discussions on COVID-19

As part of its new Sloan-funded COVID-19 reporting effort, “Reset: The Science of Crisis & Recovery,” Annual Reviews’ Knowable Magazine has produced virtual events covering a wide range of topics, including “Preventing the Next Pandemic: Exploring the Origins and Spread of Animal Viruses,” “How to Change Behavior during a Pandemic: From Personal Habits to Public Health,” and “How Has the Pandemic Influenced Public Attitudes Toward Science?” The next event, “Baking Resilience into the Food System,” will take place on March 24. Past events are available to view on the Knowable Magazine website.