

News

THIS WEEK'S EVENTS

ANALYTICAL CHEMISTRY AND MASS SPECTROMETRY AT THE SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM CONSERVATION INSTITUTE SEMINAR
Saturday, Sept. 2 | 10 a.m. | Science and Engineering Hall
Attend a discussion with Smithsonian Physical Scientist Asher Newsome about how the institute uses physical and chemical analysis for its research.

TRIP TO DC JAZZFEST
Saturday, Sept. 2 | 1 p.m. | Thurston Hall
Join Campus Living and Residential Education and head to the 19th annual DC JazzFest at the Wharf.

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY Sept. 1, 1977

The CIA notified University officials that GW was involved in mind control experiments during the 1950s and '60s as a countermeasure against techniques allegedly used by communists during the Korean War.

Dogs with plainer faces appear more expressive to humans, study finds

MAX JACKSON
REPORTER

MICHAEL HARIMAN
REPORTER

A recent study by members of the GW Primate Genomics Lab and researchers at canine cognition labs from across the country linked the complexity of dogs' facial features to the intensity of their facial expressions.

The researchers found that dogs with plainer facial features — monochromatic faces with little pigmentation and simpler features — displayed more expressive facial behavior to humans than dogs with more colorful and complex facial characteristics. Courtney Sexton, the study's lead author and a researcher in the lab, said she was surprised that canine facial expressivity changes based on facial complexity because all dogs experience the same selection pressures to evolve to communicate with humans.

Findings in primatology inspired the study, Sexton said. The plain-face hypothesis in primatology argues that facial expressions in nonhuman primates with complex faces are more difficult to read, leading highly expressive primates to evolve simpler faces.

Sexton's study found that the same hypothesis also applies to dogs.

"What was surprising to me was that they did follow the same trends that we have found in primates, in that the dogs with plainer faces, or solid-colored faces, seemed to appear more behaviorally expressive to people," Sexton said.

Sexton said it was unclear whether genetic factors, like plainer dogs evolving to be more expressive, or faults in human perception, like expressions being easier to see on plain faces, cause dogs with plainer faces to be more expressive. Sexton said humans may pick up on certain expressions in dogs with simpler faces and not dogs with complex faces because the expressions may be easier to see on faces without "visual noise."

Sexton said she scored more than 100 male and female dogs selected from a wide range of breeds and phenotypes to measure the complexity of their faces. She said the system, which uses results from a binary survey of "yes" or "no" answers to measure colors and facial features, provides an objective measure of each dog's facial complexity.

"I developed a binary system to account for markings

and colors," Sexton said. "I was not looking at features like ear shape, or size, or snout length, or size, or even hair length, or many of those other kinds of features that of course, are going to influence how signals are received. We were looking strictly at markings and pigmentation."

Sexton said she ran an association of this physical score against the dogs' expressivity, using the Dog Facial Action Coding System, which scores dogs' facial movements based on the number of muscles they move to produce an objective behavioral sum. The higher the sum, the more muscles moved, which researchers used to signify that a dog had greater objective expressivity.

Sexton said owners of dogs with more complex faces were less likely to accurately notice and understand their dog's facial expressions.

Sexton said older dogs were also less likely to be expressive, while working dogs or dogs with advanced training were more likely to be expressive. She said older dogs may be less expressive due to physical decline or because older dogs may require less expressiveness to communicate with their long-time owners.

Francys Subiaul, a co-



KIM COURTNEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

GW researchers found owners of dogs with more complex faces were less likely to notice and understand their furry friends' facial expressions.

author and an associate research professor, said the study will help people understand how many aspects of human culture have been passed on to dogs. Subiaul said dogs are seemingly predisposed to understand human gestures, like pointing, more than other animals because they have evolved alongside humans.

"So in the realm of communication, dogs are really interesting models of this

unique cultural force that has been acting on us, and similarly acting on them," Subiaul said.

Experts in canine psychology and animal welfare said plain-faced dogs being more expressive mirrors similar studies for primates, and the study could be the starting point for other research in canine communication.

James Serpell, a professor emeritus of animal welfare at the University of Pennsylvania,

said the results seemed to align with the plain face hypothesis in primatology. "You think of something like a basset hound or a bloodhound with these sort of droopy kinds of faces, and we kind of find those faces cute," Serpell said. "In a sense, we think it's kind of cute that these dogs are perpetually sad, but it's not in any way a true reflection of what's going on inside the dog's head."

Activists, politicians honor 60th anniversary of March on Washington

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REPORTER

JENNIFER IGBONOBA
CONTRIBUTING NEWS EDITOR

"Not A Commemoration, A Continuation," was the title for Saturday's celebration honoring the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington.

Thousands of demonstrators convened at the Lincoln Memorial, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his renowned "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963. The event, hosted by Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network and the Kings' Drum Major Institute, celebrated civil rights achievements, like the movement's growing inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community and the election of a Black president and vice president.

The daylong event began with speeches from several high-profile activists and politicians including Sharpton, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and Martin Luther King III, King's eldest son. Speakers said King and other civil rights leaders paved the way for a more equitable society but emphasized that more work needs to be done to address current issues, like the protection of voting rights and affirmative action, to achieve complete justice.

Maya Wiley, the president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, said the fight for civil rights is not over among communities of color. She said children of color must be given mental health resources instead of being criminally punished for minor offenses and called for an increase in school funding.

"We are marching to say we are this country," Wiley said. "And we will not stop marching until we are all free."

The speeches were followed by a march from the Lincoln Memorial to the MLK Jr. Memorial near the Tidal Basin, where attendees were greeted by the sound of the Oscar-winning song "Glory" by Common and John Legend playing on speakers and listened to speeches by Sharpton and King's nephew, Isaac Newton Farris Jr.

Shavon Arline-Bradley, the president and CEO of the National Council of Negro Women, said she had "righteous rage" because of the obstacles Black women continue to face in the United States, including being paid less than white men and Supreme Court decisions that continue to "marginalize our people."

"In one breath, I'm grateful to be on the stage of American dreams, but in 2023, as a

Black woman, I'm looking at an American nightmare right before me," Arline-Bradley said. "Watching those who intended to desecrate democracy and turning back the hands of time, watching so-called leaders in government hide behind the law to strip away the agency of a people."

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) said King and "the movement" can be proud of the work done to advance justice for all but that advocates "still yearn to make this union more perfect for everyone," like the civil rights leaders before them.

"Their march traveled far but that dream has not yet arrived for many," Wasserman Schultz said. "So we are here today to keep marching on until victory is won."

K'Shawn McNair, a sophomore majoring in neuroscience and president of the Gamma Alpha Phi Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., said he volunteered with the medical and first aid staff at the event because he wanted to support his community in the continuation of the fight for freedom.

"There's people willing to fight for what they believe in," McNair said. "And people were ready to go out and speak for hours and hours for a movement."

Locals rally in support of proposed homeless shelter

MAX PORTER
CONTRIBUTING NEWS EDITOR

Foggy Bottom and West End community members rallied in support of D.C.'s proposal to convert a former GW residence hall into a homeless shelter at a demonstration Wednesday.

More than 150 people gathered outside The Aston, a former GW residence hall on New Hampshire Avenue, to show their support for the District's plan to convert it into the first shelter in D.C. for mixed-gendered adult families and medically vulnerable people where residents have their own rooms. At the demonstration, rally organizer Jesse Rabinowitz announced the District finalized the sale of The Aston, the latest step in an escalating duel between the city and a group of West End community members suing the city over the building's planned conversion.

"Unlike D.C.'s current shelter system for single adults, non-congregate shelters allow residents the dignity of their own space to rest and work towards housing," a flyer distributed at the rally stated.

The D.C. Council approved the Department of General Services' \$27.5 million contract to purchase The Aston from GW on July 6 and finalized the sale Wednesday. But on July 18, The West End D.C. Community Association — an unincorporated group of local property owners represented by law firm ArentFox Schiff LLP — sued the District, arguing community members lacked sufficient time to provide feedback on the proposed shelter in an effort to halt The Aston's purchase.

The Way Home Campaign, a coalition dedicated to solving chronic homelessness in D.C., organized the rally. Rabinowitz, the manager of the coalition, said he organized the rally to showcase the community's opposition to the nameless lawsuit. He said the turnout shows how supportive community members are of the shelter.

"People are really excited about this and we're really excited about this moving forward," Rabinowitz said.

He said people's resistance to the shelter is rooted in "racism, bigotry and stereotypes" against unhoused people.

"The solution to homelessness is housing and that's where we need to focus all of our attention and energy," Rabinowitz said.

Wesley Thomas — a speaker from Miriam's Kitchen, a local nonprofit working to end chronic homelessness — said he was previously unhoused for 29 years, 18 of which were spent sleeping on

"cardboard, sleeping bags and blankets" in Washington Circle, just blocks away from The Aston. He said he likely would have utilized the shelter if it existed when he was unhoused.

"I most likely would have walked down the street the additional two blocks to avail myself with the services and security that a shelter provides," Thomas said. "It would have limited my time of living chronically homeless on the streets."

Thomas said many unhoused people he has spoken with said they would live in the shelter if it's created. In a letter submitted to the Foggy Bottom and West End Advisory Neighborhood Commission last month, DGS and DHS officials said case managers would work with Aston residents to secure permanent supportive housing vouchers that subsidize rent for an extended period of time.

"Here is a facility ... that will provide a safe haven at night but also the opportunity to get their lives in order by providing permanent supportive housing vouchers, mental treatment, stability and a sense of dignity and pride," Thomas said.

Sarah Mitchell, a junior studying human services and social justice and a speaker at the rally, said the shelter is "much needed" in Foggy Bottom. There are seven year-round, low-barrier shelters in the District where unhoused people can secure beds on a first-come, first-serve basis, with none of the shelters located in Foggy Bottom or West End, according to the Department of Human Services website.

"We have the opportunity to provide support to members of our community," Mitchell said. "So why should we not take it?"

The District funded more than 2,400 permanent supportive housing vouchers in fiscal year 2022, but 520 people used the vouchers to move into housing as of August 2022, according to DHS.

"The only argument you can come up with is that the creation of the shelter will degrade the neighborhood, whatever that means, or bring noise complaints," Mitchell said. "I just don't think that's good enough."

Ray Doakes, a student at Howard University who attended the rally, said homelessness is an "archaic" condition that has "no place" in the United States. He said he thinks people attended the rally because they know that they themselves could become unhoused by just losing a paycheck or their job.

"They understand that the issue is not on the individual," Doakes said. "Usually the issue is on the mechanisms of society that allow it to be."

SNAPSHOT

JENNIFER IGBONOBA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



On Saturday, the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, a woman shades herself from the sun with a picture of Martin Luther King Jr., who led the historic protest against social and racial inequality six decades ago.