

THE NEW YORKER

For Immediate Release: Monday, September 8, 2014

Press Contacts: Natalie Raabe, (212) 286-6591

Molly Erman, (212) 286-7936

Ariel Levin, (212) 286-5996

Is It Possible to Control Cancer Without Killing it?

In the September 15, 2014, issue of *The New Yorker*, in “The Transformation” (p.46), **Dr. Jerome Groopman** investigates a new breakthrough in the battle against cancer, as a promising form of treatment restores cancer cells, rather than eradicating them. “Cancerous cells traditionally have been viewed as a lost cause, fit only for destruction,” Groopman writes. However, there is emerging research on acute myelogenous leukemia (A.M.L.)—an often deadly form of leukemia—that suggests that at least some cancer cells might be redeemable: they still carry their original programming and can be pressed back onto a pathway to health. An experimental new drug called AG-221, from the pharmaceutical company Agios, is showing promise in clinical trials. “The Agios drug, instead of killing the leukemic cells—immature blood cells gone haywire—coaxes them into maturing into functioning blood cells.” Eytan Stein, an expert in blood disorders who is participating in Phase 1 of the AG-221 clinical trial, tells Groopman that he has observed “transformative” improvements in some patients: one woman—whose leukemia persisted despite chemotherapy and a bone-marrow transplant—went into complete remission after three months on the drug. Stephen Nimer, the director of the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, tells Groopman that the data surrounding the AG-221 trials signals “the first real advance for A.M.L. in thirty years.” He continues: “It’s a huge step forward.” According to Groopman, “The treatment of cancer, which traditionally adopted a destroy-the-village strategy, is becoming ever more like precision warfare.” The strategy is being applied by clinicians to other forms of cancer, including pancreatic and ovarian. Though there is still a long way to go before the findings are conclusive, Groopman writes that the recent research offers “an unanticipated opportunity for scientists to reexamine what many of us took for granted: that cancer cells must be destroyed if the patient is to improve.” He continues: “These discoveries could enable researchers to target cancers that were previously beyond treatment.”

Fast-Food-Worker Protests and a New Form of Labor Activism

In “Dignity” (p.70), **William Finnegan** visits the front lines of the fight for improved wages and conditions for America’s fast-food workers. According to Finnegan, the nation’s fast-food giants have appeared clumsy and wrong-footed in the face of recent protests among many workers and those advocating on their behalf. “Their traditional defense of miserable pay—that most of their employees are young, part time, just working for gas money, really—has grown threadbare.” Most fast-food workers today are adults; many have children. Finnegan meets Arisleyda Tapia, a single mom who has been working at a Washington Heights McDonald’s for eight years and now makes eight dollars and thirty-five cents an hour. Tapia and thirteen of her co-workers—among roughly thirty-five, total—belong to Fast Food Forward, the New York branch of a growing campaign to unionize fast-food workers. Tapia tells Finnegan about difficult working conditions and unpredictable weekly hours, and suggests that the management punishes workers for their union involvement. She says that her location’s franchise owner has been responsive to some of the union’s requests, including recent efforts to receive an additional change of uniform. “That was a real strike victory,” Tapia says. “But we know who our real opponent is. It’s the corporation. McDonald’s.” Finnegan travelled by bus with Tapia and others to attend a national conference of the fast-food-workers’ movement, which drew a crowd of more than a thousand people. There, he met Jorel Ware, a thirty-one-year-old worker at a midtown-Manhattan McDonald’s, who after two years on the job still made only the minimum wage, which is eight dollars an hour in New York City. “They say the franchisee is just a small man in the middle,” Ware says. “If that’s true, then who am I? I’m just a dot on the wall. I just want to be able to get an unlimited MetroCard. I can’t afford nothing.” Mary Kay Henry, the president of the Service Employees International Union, tells Finnegan that the widespread “fight for fifteen [dollars per hour] is growing way beyond fast food. It’s getting to be what the eight-hour day was in the twentieth century.”

What Drives Al Pacino?

In “Chairman of the Boards” (p.58), **John Lahr** takes an in-depth look at Al Pacino’s career and his life, both in and out of the spotlight. From his home in Beverly Hills, where he is raising thirteen-year-old twins, the iconic actor speaks candidly and at length here about his dizzying rise to stardom and about some of his most memorable roles—in “The Godfather” and “Scar-



face,” among others. At seventy-four, Pacino sometimes asks himself, “When am I just gonna sit back and smell the golf balls?” But, with three movies coming out this year and several new projects in the works, the answer, according to Lahr, is not soon. “I believe I have not reached my stride, which is why I persist,” Pacino tells Lahr. “The day I turn to you and say, ‘John, what I just did in this role was a real winner,’ I hope you’ll have the courage and decency to throw a wreath around my head, and then so very quietly and compassionately shoot me.” Pacino tells Lahr that he regrets the fact that many of his Hollywood movies of the past decade have been business chores, taken on for primarily financial reasons. “If you don’t have that alacrity of spirit, then you have to check yourself—because where’s the pony in all this horseshit?” Pacino says. “I worked for United Parcel once, and I don’t want to have that feeling with my own craft—that it’s just a job.” Two of Pacino’s forthcoming films, “Wilde Salomé,” a docudrama about the staging of an Oscar Wilde play, and “The Humbling,” based on the 2009 Philip Roth novel, which Pacino optioned, are part of his mission to reconnect creatively. “The Humbling” tells the story of a depressed, aging actor whose talent is slipping away and who tries to rejuvenate himself through an affair with a younger woman. “I liked the idea that an actor is losing it and wants to revive not so much his career as his life, and finds that there’s no life there,” Pacino says. “He’s trying to be a real person, and discovering that he doesn’t have the appropriate tools to do this. I felt that these things were sad and almost farcical.” According to Lahr, Pacino’s legend is based on the films of his youth, for which he drew on his anger, his sexuality, his energy. The films he’s interested in now tend to dwell on old age and the issues of decline. “They are of a different amperage and a different spiritual mind-set,” Lahr writes. “They are not, so to speak, the rock-’em-sock-’em Pacino of old but a new Pacino: a man who is consolidating his family, regretting some of his life choices, and living under the strictures of his fame.”

Bill Cosby’s Never-Ending Tour

In “The Eternal Paternal” (p. 36), **Kelefa Sanneh** explores the legacy of Bill Cosby. “Unlike most of the lions of American comedy, Cosby is known for routines that aim to avoid giving offense, and yet he has proved surprisingly controversial: for decades, he was regularly criticized for being insufficiently attentive to issues affecting black communities; more recently, he has been passionately attentive, transforming into a culture warrior to deliver fierce indictments of what he diagnoses as an African-American social pathology,” Sanneh writes. Cosby, who is seventy-seven, is currently on tour: it is, according to Sanneh, part of a long comeback. Sanneh chronicles Cosby’s career from his early days as a Temple University student earning tuition money by telling jokes at a Manhattan coffee house to recent, well-publicized allegations of sexual assault. According to Sanneh, “These alleged assaults can’t easily be integrated into a consideration of his work: no doubt many of his fans will find it easier to put the claims out of mind or, especially if more information emerges, to put Cosby out of mind instead.” According to Sanneh, Cosby’s virtuosity as a comic endures, and his success has much to do with his career-long disinclination to mix comedy with social commentary. “The older Cosby gets, the easier it is to be grateful, instead of frustrated, that he has kept his comedy separate from his other interests and troubles,” Sanneh writes. “This decision has come to look like an act of self-preservation, Cosby’s way of making sure that, whatever else happens in his life or in the world, he will always be able to escape to the stage.”

Plus: In Comment, **David Remnick** examines President Barack Obama’s unshowy and incremental foreign policy, which lacks the swagger and snarl many of his domestic rivals yearn for. But, when the aim is to conduct yourself responsively and responsibly on the world stage, the avoidance of “stupid stuff” is often the avoidance of blood and unforeseen strife (in *Shouts & Murmurs*, **Cora Frazier** p. 27); adapts Jane Austen’s ideals of “Feminine Accomplishment” for the modern woman (p. 44); **Alex Ross** considers how Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno’s early criticisms of mass culture present a model for thinking about contemporary society (p. 88); **Emily Nussbaum** watches “Red Band Society” and “Outlander” (p. 96); **David Denby** reviews “Starred Up” and “The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby: Them” (p. 98); and fiction by **Danielle McLaughlin** (p. 80).

Online: On the Political Scene Podcast, **Steve Coll** and **Ryan Lizza** talk about the foreign-policy crises confronting President Barack Obama. On the New Yorker Out Loud podcast, **Kelefa Sanneh** and **Sarah Larson** discuss Bill Cosby.

Tablet and Phone Extras: **Kelefa Sanneh** comments on Bill Cosby’s evolving comedy; **John Lahr** offers commentary on films from Al Pacino’s career; **Emily Nussbaum** comments on “Outlander,” on the Starz network; **Danielle McLaughlin** reads her new story; **Jen McClanaghan** reads her new poem; and **Richard Brody** picks his Movie of the Week, Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s “All About Eve,” from 1950.

Announcing the 15th Annual New Yorker Festival, October 10-12 in New York City

On October 10-12, 2014, *The New Yorker* will present its 15th annual Festival, a three-day celebration that will once again bring together an esteemed and exciting group of writers, thinkers, artists, and other luminaries from a wide range of fields including film, music, television, politics, food, sports, literature, and technology. Since the Festival’s inception, events have sold out quickly, drawing close to twenty thousand people from around the world every year. The full program guide is now available at newyorker.com/festival and on the New Yorker Festival app, available for iPhone and Android devices. We invite members of the press seeking further information or credentials for particular events to write to us at mediarequests@newyorker.com.

The September 15, 2014, issue of *The New Yorker* goes on sale at newsstands beginning Monday, September 8.