



FILM

**Sloan-Backed Feature *Tesla* Opens In Theaters and Online**

[Tesla](#), a feature-length, Sloan-funded narrative film about inventor Nikola Tesla, best-known for his contributions to the design of the modern alternating current (AC) electricity supply system, opened in 65 theaters across the country during the pandemic, the widest release to-date for the film's renowned indie director and three-time Sloan award winner Michael Almereyda. It was also released digitally and is now available to [stream online via Amazon](#). The film 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). It has received positive press from many outlets, including [The Los Angeles Times](#), [Slant Magazine](#), and [The New York Times](#), among others. The film received the Sloan Feature Film Prize at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival, a 2016 SFFILM Sloan screenwriting fellowship, and additional production support from a 2019 Sloan grant to SFFILM.



**Sloan Doc about Sexual Harassment of Women in Science Gains Growing Attention**

[Picture a Scientist](#), a Sloan-funded documentary about sexual harassment of women scientists, debuted earlier this year and has been generating soul-searching discussion and significant buzz within the scientific community. Professional and academic institutions around the country have been hosting digital screenings, such as 500 Women Scientists, the National Academy of Sciences, and MIT. The film, directed by Sharon Shattuck and Ian Cheney, follows the stories of three women scientists: MIT biologist *Nancy Hopkins*, who chaired a committee at MIT in the mid-90s that examined discrimination against women in science and produced the landmark paper "A Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT"; American University chemist and science communicator *Raychelle Burks* (pictured below), who has worked to fight against racial discrimination, as well as gender discrimination, in science; and Scripps Institution of Oceanography geologist *Jane Willenbring*, who was finally able to speak out against an eminent professor's sexual harassment after gaining tenure. The film has received positive coverage from [Chemistry World](#), [Nature](#), [Science Magazine](#), [Salon](#), [WBUR](#), and [Variety](#), among others. *Picture a Scientist* was funded by an early 2018 planning grant and a 2019 major production grant.





### NYU/Sloan-Winning Film *Radium Girls* to Open in Select Theaters and Virtual Cinema

[Radium Girls](#), based on the true story of young women in the 1920s who were poisoned while painting luminous watches at the U.S. Radium Factory, will open in select theaters and via virtual cinema on October 23. The film, directed by Ginny Mohler and Lydia Pilcher, stars Abby Quinn (pictured below with cast) 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. It has received positive press from [NJ.com](#), and [Collider](#), among other sources. *Radium Girls* premiered at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival and received an NYU/Sloan First Feature Award in 2013.

### Sloan-Funded Documentary *Oliver Sacks: His Own Life* Begins Digital Run



[Oliver Sacks: His Own Life](#), a Sloan-backed documentary on the world-renowned neurologist, clinician, and writer, has begun a run of public digital screenings during the COVID-19 pandemic, following well-received premieres at the Telluride Film Festival and the New York Film Festival in September 2019. Upon receiving a fatal diagnosis in 2015, Sacks invited award-winning documentary filmmaker Ric Burns and his team to film his final days. The film draws on eighty hours of this unique footage, in addition to telling the full story of Sacks' remarkable life and career, and has received positive coverage, including a [New York Times Critic's Pick review](#) and articles from [The Hollywood Reporter](#), [Variety](#), and [Vice](#), among others. *Oliver Sacks: His Own Life* was supported by a major production grant to the filmmakers via City Lore.



# ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION

October 2020

Program Updates from VP and Program Director Doron Weber

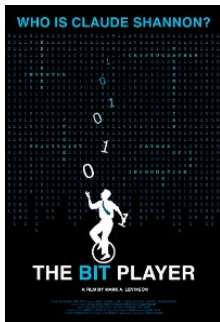
## Sloan-Supported Short *Sweet Potatoes* Wins Student Academy Award

[Sweet Potatoes](#) by [Rommel Villa](#), the recipient of the 2018 Sloan/USC production award, was named a [Student Academy Award Winner](#) in the Narrative (Domestic Film Schools) category.



The short film is based on the true-life story of Mexican chemist Luis Miramontes, known as the co-inventor of progesterone, one of the main components of the birth control pill. It follows Miramontes as he deals with both the religious and personal consequences of this new invention. This was another high honor for the pioneering Sloan film program, which now includes 12 film schools across the country.

## Sloan-Backed Documentary on “Father of Information Theory” Released on Amazon Prime



The Sloan-backed documentary [The Bit Player](#) was [released on Amazon Prime](#) this summer. The film, directed by Mark Levinson (*Particle Fever*), focuses on the life of Claude Shannon, an American mathematician, electrical engineer, and cryptographer known as "the father of information theory." Diverse storytelling techniques are blended in this hybrid documentary. While Shannon is relatively unknown, his work paved the way for much of the technology we use today, including email, texts, tweets, and Instagram. *The Bit Player* was supported by a 2018 Sloan grant to the filmmakers via the IEEE Foundation.

## AFI Hosts Digital Version of Annual Sloan Seminar on Science and Film

In June, the American Film Institute (AFI) hosted their annual Sloan Seminar for AFI fellows virtually. The discussion, one of their most popular to-date, featured *Contagion* (still from the film below) screenwriter Scott Z. Burns in conversation with *Contagion* science advisor Ian



Lipkin, a professor and pathologist at Columbia University called a “master virus hunter” for his contributions to identifying new viruses. Topics of discussion included climate change, the importance of listening to scientists, the COVID-19 pandemic, and more. Clips of the discussion are available to watch on [the AFI website](#). The Sloan Seminar is supported by a 2018 Sloan grant to AFI.



## TELEVISION

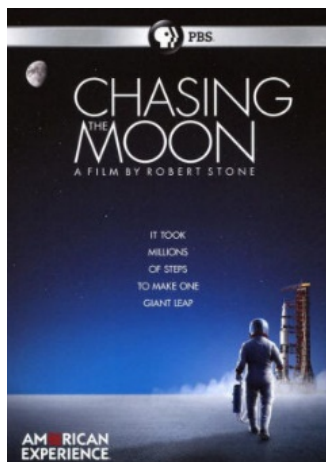
### 2020 Sloan/North Fork TV Festival Winner Previews at Drive-In Festival

The 2020 winner of the Sloan/North Fork TV Festival Science + Tech Script Competition, [Superuser Do](#) written by Zuff Idries (pictured below) and shot by award-winning filmmaker Elias Plagianos, will debut with a 15-minute sneak preview at the [2020 drive-in North Fork TV Festival](#). The pilot episode of this new series follows an aspiring Black software engineer and the diverse community of peers that supports him as he struggles to overcome structural inequalities and other obstacles in computer science. The award received positive coverage from [Broadway World](#) and [Moviemaker Magazine](#), among other sources. The full pilot is



scheduled to premiere on cable television later this fall. *Superuser Do* follows in the footsteps of Maxwell Pitagno's [Distemper](#), last year's inaugural Sloan winner about pathologist and LGBT icon Louise Pearce, which premiered at the 2019 North Fork TV Festival and went on to win multiple awards from film festivals across the country. The award and production of *Superuser Do* is supported by a 2020 Sloan grant to the North Fork TV Festival.

### American Experience's "Chasing the Moon" Receives Emmy Nomination



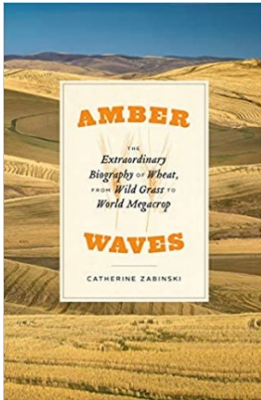
"[Chasing the Moon](#)," the three-part Sloan-supported *American Experience* documentary and the PBS centerpiece project of 2019, received [an Emmy nomination for "Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking."](#) "Chasing the Moon" explores the events leading up to the historic moon landing, covering topics from the little-known but important role of women and the influence of former Nazi Wernher von Braun on NASA's rocket program to the civil rights activists who protested government expenditures for space exploration rather than more pressing domestic issues. Last year, the film was also [nominated for an International Documentary Association \(IDA\) Documentary Award](#). "Chasing the Moon" is available to view on the [PBS website](#), as well as on other streaming platforms and DVD.



## BOOKS

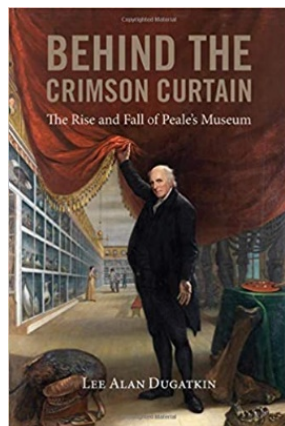
More than 11 Sloan-supported books have made or will make their debut since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges of launching virtually, almost all of these books have gained positive press and popularity. Below are eight new books that have had or will have their publication date after the last newsletter, and three books previously mentioned that are now published.

### ***Amber Waves: The Extraordinary Biography of Wheat, from Wild Grass to World Megacrop* by Catherine Zabinski Published September 1**



[\*Amber Waves: The Extraordinary Biography of Wheat, from Wild Grass to World Megacrop\*](#) by Catherine Zabinski, Professor of Restoration Ecology, Land Resources, and Environmental Sciences at Montana State University, was published on September 1. The book tells the story of the history of wheat – from its early cultivation to its status as a pantry staple today – and looks at its influence on our diet, the environment, and more. It dives into the science of agriculture and wheat, including the evolution of the plant, genetic modification, and gluten sensitivity and allergies. Zabinski received a 2017 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

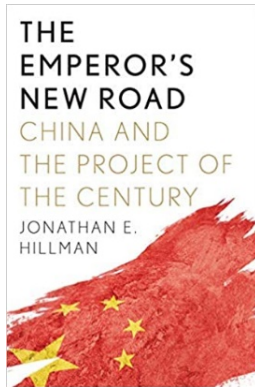
### ***Behind the Crimson Curtain: The Rise and Fall of Peale's Museum* by Lee Alan Dugatkin Published September 1**



[\*Behind the Crimson Curtain: The Rise and Fall of Peale's Museum\*](#) by Lee Alan Dugatkin, Professor of Biology and Distinguished University Scholar in the Department of Biology at the University of Louisville, was published September 1. The book tells the story of Charles Willson Peale, creator of a natural history/art museum in Revolutionary-era America, and how the museum influenced the public's perception of science and art. It chronicles the establishment of the museum in 1786, its relationship to the culture and major historical figures of the era, and its eventual takeover by PT Barnum. Dugatkin received a 2018 Sloan grant for the research and writing of this book.

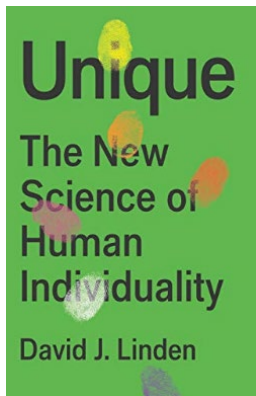


***The Emperor's New Road: China and the Project of the Century* by Jonathan E. Hillman  
Published September 29**



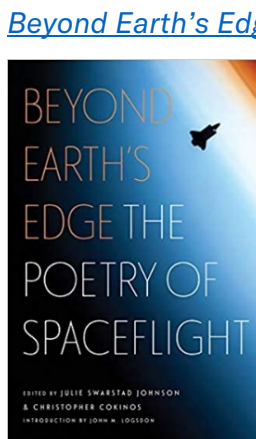
[\*The Emperor's New Road: China and the Project of the Century\*](#) by Jonathan E. Hillman, Senior Fellow and Director of the Reconnecting Asia Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, was published on September 29. The book looks at China's Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious one-trillion dollar effort by the Chinese government to build new ports, railways, fiber-optic cables, power plants, and other connections in over 130 countries around the world. The book launch, which included Hillman in conversation with Axios reporter Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian is [now available to watch online](#). Hillman received a 2019 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

***Unique: The New Science of Human Individuality* by David J. Linden Published Sept. 29**



[\*Unique: The New Science of Human Individuality\*](#) by David J. Linden, Professor of Neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University, was published on September 29. The book examines the science behind human individuality – or what makes you “you” – through the lens of sexuality, food, biological rhythms, mood, personality, and memory. Inspired by the author's experiences with online dating sites such as OkCupid, it explores questions about nature versus nurture, what makes us different, and why individuality matters. The book has received early positive press from [Kirkus](#) and [Psychology Today](#). Linden received a 2019 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

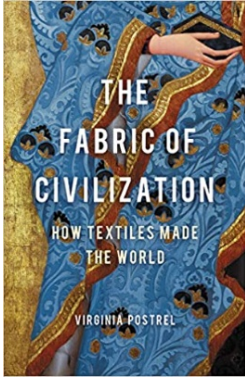
***Beyond Earth's Edge: The Poetry of Spaceflight* Published October 6**



[\*Beyond Earth's Edge: The Poetry of Spaceflight\*](#) was published October 6. The poetry anthology was edited by Julie Swarstad Johnson, author and Senior Library Specialist at the University of Arizona, and Christopher Cokinos, Associate Professor of English at the University of Arizona, and contains an introduction by John M. Logsdon, founder and former Director of the Space Policy Institute at George Washington University. *Beyond Earth's Edge* looks at the science and technology of spaceflight through the lens of poetry. It includes works from writers such as Robert Hayden, Rae Armantrout, N. Scott Momaday, Adrienne Rich, Tracy K. Smith, Ray Bradbury, May Swenson, Pablo Neruda, and many others. The book's editors received a 2018 Sloan grant through the University of Arizona to support the production of this book.

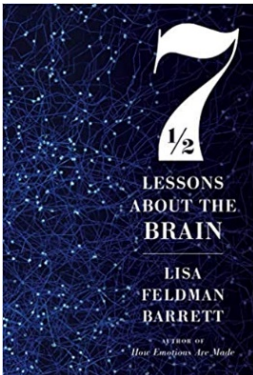


***The Fabric of Civilization: How Textiles Made the World* by Virginia Postrel to be Published November 10**



[The Fabric of Civilization: How Textiles Made the World](#) by journalist Virginia Postrel, whose work has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic*, will be published on November 10. The book looks at the history of textiles from ancient civilizations to today, combining scholarship from diverse fields such as archaeology, genetics, economics, technology, and history. Postrel recorded a video trailer for her book, which can be found on her [YouTube page](#). She received a 2018 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

***Seven and a Half Lessons About the Brain* by Lisa Feldman Barrett to be Published November 17**



[Seven and a Half Lessons About the Brain](#) by Lisa Feldman Barrett, Northeastern University Distinguished Professor of Psychology, will be published on November 17. The book, made up of seven and a half short essays, will teach readers about the brain using the latest research in neuroscience, exploring topics such as the truth behind popular brain myths and how brains evolved. It has received positive early press, including [a starred Kirkus review](#). Barrett received a 2019 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

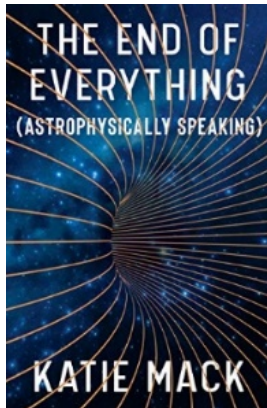
***Artificial Life After Frankenstein* by Eileen Hunt Botting to be Published December 18**



[Artificial Life After Frankenstein](#), by Eileen Hunt Botting, Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, will be published on December 18. The book will show how classic author Mary Shelley's novels – such as *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* – became a prototype for a new type of political science fiction that looks at the ethics of making artificial life through science and technology. The book has received early positive press from [Publisher's Weekly](#). Botting received a 2019 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

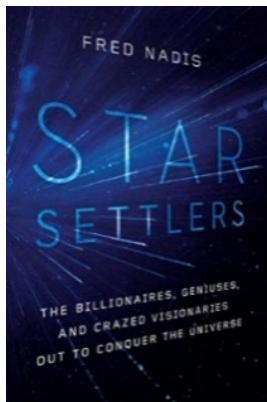


***The End of Everything: (Astrophysically Speaking)* by Katie Mack Published Aug. 4**



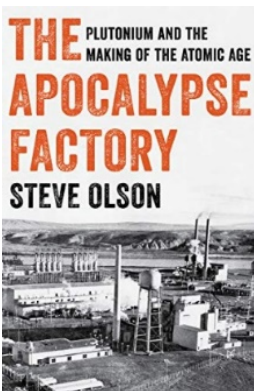
[\*The End of Everything: \(Astrophysically Speaking\)\*](#) by theoretical astrophysicist Katie Mack, an assistant professor at North Carolina State University and one of the most followed astrophysicists on social media, was published on August 4. In her book, Mack explains five possible endings for the universe: the Big Crunch; Heat Death; the Big Rip; Vacuum Decay; and the Bounce, making complex ideas in astrophysics accessible and engaging for the lay reader. The book has received positive press from [Nature](#), [The New York Times](#), [Kirkus](#), and Sloan grantee [Science Friday](#), among many others. Mack received a 2019 Sloan grant to support the research and writing of this book.

***Star Settlers: The Billionaires, Geniuses, and Crazy Visionaries Out to Conquer the Universe* by Fred Nadis Published August 4**



[\*Star Settlers: The Billionaires, Geniuses, and Crazy Visionaries Out to Conquer the Universe\*](#) by author and journalist Fred Nadis was published on August 4. The book chronicles both contemporary events and the history of space travel and settlement alongside their portrayal in science fiction. It profiles important figures from billionaire visionaries like Elon Musk to prominent scientists and technologists at premier institutions like NASA, assessing their contributions, motivations, and more. The book has received positive press from [Kirkus](#) and [Publisher's Weekly](#), among others. Nadis received a 2019 Sloan grant for the research and writing of this book.

***The Apocalypse Factory: Plutonium and the Making of the Atomic Age* by Steve Olson Published July 28**



[\*The Apocalypse Factory: Plutonium and the Making of the Atomic Age\*](#) by author Steve Olson, was published on July 28. The book examines the history of plutonium and atomic weapons. Unlike most works on the Manhattan Project and the Cold War, it focuses on the overlooked Hanford nuclear facility, which housed the first plutonium production reactor that was used to create plutonium for the first nuclear bomb and the bomb dropped on Nagasaki. The book has received positive press from [The New York Times](#), [The Wall Street Journal](#), and [Jefferson Public Radio](#), among others. Olson received a 2017 Sloan grant for the research and writing of this book.





NEW MEDIA

Sloan-Supported *Knowable Magazine* Wins Five Prestigious Eddie & Ozzie Awards



*Knowable Magazine* has [won five Folio Magazine Eddie & Ozzie Awards](#), which recognize “excellence in engaging content and gorgeous design across all sectors of the publishing industry.” The prestigious awards were given to the online magazine, helmed by Editor-in-Chief Eva Emerson (pictured left), in the categories of use of data, long-form feature content, newsletter, profile or Q&A, single article (consumer, health & fitness), and single article (overall). *Knowable Magazine* content also received three honorable mentions. Sloan has been supporting *Knowable Magazine* since its launch, most recently with a [2020 grant to increase COVID-19 reporting](#) with a focus on the consequences of the pandemic and recovery efforts.

*Red Planet Farming* Computer Game Continues Gaining Popularity

[Red Planet Farming](#), a Sloan-supported NYU Game Center computer game, was released earlier this year on Steam and has seen very positive results. It has been added to users’ libraries 35,389 times, has been downloaded 17,073 times, and has received 281 reviews, 97% of which were positive. The free-to-play game is a farming simulator with a science-based twist: the farms are located on Mars. The production team, which includes NYU graduates Nina Demirjian, Noah Lee, Sean Park, and Sean Porio, worked closely with advisors at [NASA’s](#)



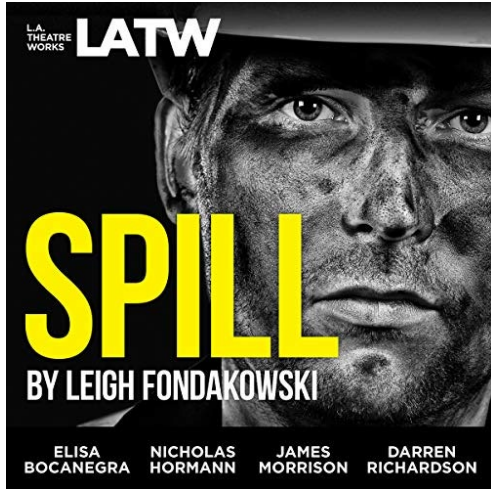
[Ames Research Center](#) to create a scientifically accurate vision of how extraterrestrial farming would work. In addition to being available to play on [Steam](#), *Red Planet Farming* is also currently hosted on [Cool Math Games](#). The annual NYU/Sloan gaming award for incorporating more science into this hugely popular medium is supported by a 2019 grant to NYU Tisch.



**THEATER**

**L.A. Theatre Works Expands Radio Drama Offerings During COVID-19 Pandemic**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, L.A. Theatre Works began offering [free recordings of classic and contemporary plays](#) for the public to enjoy earlier this year, including over 30



Sloan-supported, science-themed radio dramas from its *Relativity* series. In addition to [expanding these listening offerings](#), they have also extended their “[Setting the Stage for Learning](#)” teacher resources. As part of this effort, they have produced a [new curriculum guide for their recording of the EST/Sloan-commissioned play \*Spill\*](#) by Leigh Fondakowski, about the 2010 Deepwater Horizon drilling rig explosion. L.A. Theatre Works has also [offered their full library of more than 500 recordings to non-profits](#), as a way to help support arts organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Relativity* series is part of a 2019 Sloan grant to L.A. Theatre Works.

**RADIO**

**Gastropod Releases Sloan-Funded Report on Podcast Diversity**

[Gastropod](#), the award-winning Sloan-supported podcast hosted by Cynthia Graber and Nicola Twilley (pictured below) which brings a scientific approach to the popular subject of food, recently released a report titled “Tracking and Increasing the Representation of Diverse Voices.” The Sloan-funded report looked at the diversity of the guests invited to speak on the



show, including an in-depth and novel examination of the speaking time of those guests. The hosts hope this report will contribute to the discussion of how podcasts can help combat pervasive bias against women and BIPOC. The full report is available on the [Gastropod website](#). The production of this diversity report was funded by a 2018 Sloan grant to *Gastropod* via the Food & Environment Reporting Network.



### Sloan-Supported WNYC Health Convening Hosts Dr. Anthony Fauci

On June 22, WNYC hosted their annual Sloan-supported Health Convening, which aims to better inform WNYC health reporting. The event focused on COVID-19 and its impact. The first



session was “COVID-19 and the Effect on the American Healthcare System” with WNYC’s Brian Lehrer in conversation with Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Part of this discussion [aired later on \*The Brian Lehrer Show\*](#). Additional sessions included “The Economics of Long Term Health Care” and “COVID-19 and the Healthcare Supply Chain.” The WNYC Health Convening was supported by a 2018 Sloan grant to New York Public Radio.

### Sloan-Funded Podcast *Planet Money* Educates the Public on COVID-19



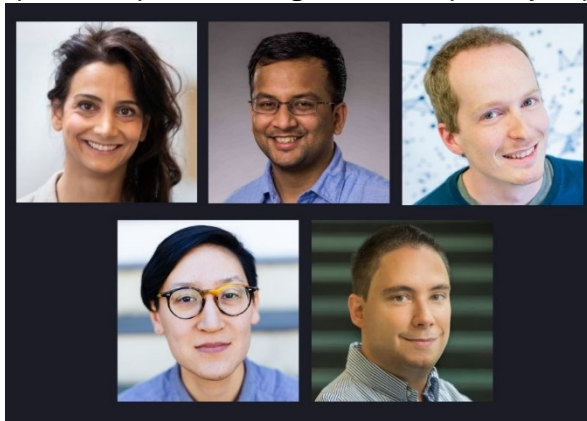
Over the past few months, the popular Sloan-supported economics podcasts [Planet Money and its short form version \*The Indicator\*](#) have released numerous episodes relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent episodes include “[A Smarter Approach To Lockdowns](#),” “[Parenting In The Time of Corona](#),” “[Opening Schools: Mission Impossible](#),” “[5 \(More\) Ways Life Has Changed](#),” “[Science, Economics And Vaccines](#),” and “[The Old Rules Were Dumb Anyway](#),” among many others. The episodes, which have helped people during this difficult and stressful time of economic uncertainty, are free to stream via the NPR site. *Planet Money* is supported by a 2019 Sloan grant to NPR.



## UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

### Consumer Reports Names 2020-2021 Digital Lab Sloan Fellows Cohort

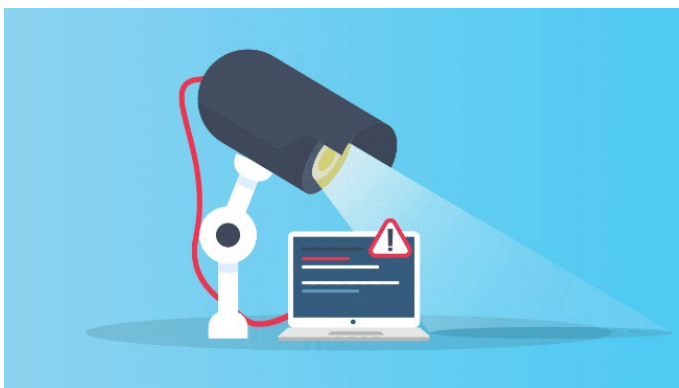
Consumer Reports (CR) [named five Digital Lab Sloan Fellows](#) who will design and build research and testing tools to protect consumers. The 2020-21 fellows are: **Kasia Chmielinski**, who will “conduct research and build materials to support the Dataset Nutrition Label, a tool and framework that encourages conscious and appropriate use of datasets;” **Daniel Dubois**, who will “create innovative IoT testing methodologies, with an initial emphasis on smart speakers, provide insight into IoT privacy exposures and provide mechanisms for mitigation;”



**Arunesh Mathur**, who will “build an internet-scale digital ad observatory, enabling new kinds of consumer protection research;” **Roya Ensafi**, who will “lead the development of an innovative VPN test suite, and engage volunteers in large-scale testing;” and **Julien Gamba**, who will “focus on increasing transparency of the Android supply chain by evaluating the pre-installed software and custom permissions enabled by vendors.” The fellows are supported by a 2020 Sloan grant to CR.

### Consumer Reports Finds Privacy Gaps in Home Security Cameras and Doorbells

Consumer Reports tested multiple brands of both [wireless home security cameras](#) and [digital video doorbells](#) and found privacy and security gaps. While testing 26 cameras, CR found that only eight received a good score for their privacy policies. In a test of 24 video doorbells, CR discovered privacy and security issues with five of them. They also found that many brands of both the cameras and doorbells lacked two-factor authentication, an important feature that



greatly improves digital security. After both tests, CR reached out to the manufacturers in an effort to have them bolster privacy features, and several agreed to comply. CR’s Digital Lab used the Digital Standard, a set of digital privacy and security criteria, to perform these tests. Work with CR’s Digital Lab and the Digital Standard is supported by grants made by Sloan in 2018 and 2019.



### DPLA Celebrates Black Women's Suffrage with New Digital Collection

The Digital Public Library of America's (DPLA) new [Black Women's Suffrage Digital Collection](#) documents the contributions and experiences of Black women during the women's suffrage movement and highlights activism by Black women in the 1850s and 60s. The collection, released as part of the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, includes 200,000 artifacts such as images, videos, letters, diaries, speeches, maps, and oral histories,



from more than 4,000 of DPLA's partner institutions. The first featured collection, centering on teacher, journalist, and anti-lynching activist [Ida B. Wells](#) (pictured left) is now available to browse online. DPLA hosted an event on September 8 to launch the collection called "Race, Power, and Curation," which was their best-attended virtual event to-date and can be [streamed online for free](#). Sloan is a longtime supporter of DPLA, most recently with a 2020 Sloan grant to support a suite of COVID-19 response activities, including the collection of African American COVID-19 experiences.