

April 6, 2015

Here's an item from the [Washington Post](#) that portrays the country in a favorable light. Turns out there are more museums in the country than there are Starbucks and McDonald's combined.

There are roughly 11,000 Starbucks locations in the United States, and about 14,000 McDonald's restaurants. But combined, the two chains don't come close to the number of museums in the U.S., which stands at a whopping 35,000.

So says the latest data release from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, an independent government agency that tallies the number and type of museums in this country. By their count the 35,000 active museums represent a doubling from the number estimated in the 1990s.

While most of us think of massive institutions like the Smithsonian and the Guggenheim when we think of museums, one lesson of the new data is that the majority of U.S. museums are small, nearly mom-and-pop affairs. Of the roughly 25,000 museums with income data in the file, 15,000 of them reported an annual income of less than \$10,000 on their latest IRS returns.

And these museums are literally everywhere. Below, I mapped the total number of museums per county in the U.S., in both raw number and per-capita terms.

One shocker? The nation's cultural capital, at least as measured by number of museums, isn't New York, but rather Los Angeles — a city known more for Hollywood and the Hiltons than for Holbein and history. L.A. County has 681 museums compared to New York County's 414. Chicago (Cook County), San Diego and D.C. round out the rest of the top five. ...

The above is a good illustration of some of the things Alexis de Tocqueville found when he studied the United States almost 200 years ago. The [Learning To Give](#) blog has a post on de Tocqueville's writings on American "associations." The complete post is not here because of length. Follow the link if you wish to read it all. ... Tocqueville does not use the word "**philanthropy**" which means literally, "the love of people." But he writes extensively about the American phenomenon of forming "**associations**" of all types including professional, social, civil, and political. It is in this discussion of associations that the modern student may understand how Tocqueville's observations relate to philanthropy—now understood to mean the contribution of financial support and volunteer resources to the not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations which aim to serve the public good and improve the quality of human lives.

Tocqueville's description of associations is an enduring impact of Democracy in America . Tocqueville's extensive analysis of the role associations play in strengthening and moderating democracy are widely cited, and highly influential on the structure of American philanthropy. Tocqueville viewed the proliferation of associations as a unique response that was not only critical to the success of the experiment of democratic government, but also served to provide for the well-being of all of its citizens in accordance with a sense of equality that was previously unknown (Tocqueville 1840).

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contact. From that moment, they are no longer isolated but have become a power seen from afar whose activities serve as an example and whose words are heeded" (Tocqueville 1840, 599). ..

A **NY Times** report shows how sheer chance plays a role in who comes down with cancer.

Unlike Ebola, flu or polio, cancer is a disease that arises from within — a consequence of the mutations that inevitably occur when one of our 50 trillion cells divides and copies its DNA.

Some of these genetic misprints are caused by outside agents, chemical or biological, especially in parts of the body — the skin, the lungs and the digestive tract — most exposed to the ravages of the world. But millions every second occur purely by chance — random, spontaneous glitches that may be the most pervasive carcinogen of all.

It's a truth that grates against our deepest nature. That was clear earlier this month when a paper in Science on the prominent role of "bad luck" and cancer caused an outbreak of despair, outrage and, ultimately, disbelief.

The most intemperate of this backlash — mini-screeds on Twitter and hit-and-run comments on the web — suggested that the authors, Cristian Tomasetti and Bert Vogelstein of Johns Hopkins University, must be apologists for chemical companies or the processed food industry. In fact, their study was underwritten by nonprofit cancer foundations and grants from the National Institutes of Health. In some people's minds, those were just part of the plot.

What psychologists call apophenia — the human tendency to see connections and patterns that are not really there — gives rise to conspiracy theories. It is also at work, though usually in a milder form, in our perceptions about cancer and our revulsion to randomness. ...

Science Magazine suggests the white skin of Europeans is a relatively new development.

Most of us think of Europe as the ancestral home of white people. But a new study shows that pale skin, as well as other traits such as tallness and the ability to digest milk as adults, arrived in most of the continent relatively recently. The work, presented here last week at the 84th annual meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, offers dramatic evidence of recent evolution in Europe and shows that most modern Europeans don't look much like those of 8000 years ago. ...

An article in the **Christian Science Monitor** says the conviction of Atlanta educators in a widespread cheating scandal is just the tip of the iceberg.

A jury convicted 11 educators of racketeering Wednesday for their role in the Atlanta cheating scandal. But nationally, there's a strong split between those who see their actions as an aberration and those who would convict right alongside them the accountability systems that have attached increasingly high stakes to standardized tests in recent decades.

The teachers and administrators face potentially harsh sentences for a conspiracy to manipulate test scores — which investigators said involved more than 44 schools and about 180 educators. Eleven out of 12 who went to trial were convicted, and they were sent immediately to jail to await sentencing (with the exception of one who is pregnant).

For opponents of such high-stakes testing, there's likely to be more sympathy for the educators because of undue pressures being placed on teachers by an overemphasis on test scores. But for proponents of accountability, it's just as easy to hold up these educators as an example of why strong objective systems are needed to oversee and measure educators' performance.

The pressured atmosphere doesn't justify cheating, but it's one indication of a much larger problem, say critics of how testing has been used.

Especially as the federal government has pushed states to tie teacher evaluation policies to standardized-test gains, the testing regimen "creates a climate in school where you have to boost scores by hook or by crook," says Robert Schaeffer, a spokesman for the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest).

Atlanta offered up extreme examples such as test-cheating "parties." But "Atlanta is the tip of the test-cheating iceberg," Mr. Schaeffer says, with other cases surfacing in about 39 states, including a dozen or more that showed widespread cheating. ...

Washington Post

There are more museums in the U.S. than there are Starbucks and McDonalds – combined

by Christopher Ingraham



The Salvador Dali museum in St. Petersburg, Fla.

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But notice also that there are barely any blank counties on the map, even in sparsely populated rural areas. Storey County, Nev., population 3,942, has 11 museums, including the [Comstock History Center](#) and the [Fourth Ward School Museum](#). Loup County, Neb., population 576, is home to the [Loup County Historical Society](#).

The IMLS' Mamie Bittner notes that that many of these institutions, particularly in small towns and rural areas, are historical societies and history museums. "We are in love with our history — at a very grassroots level we care for the histories of our towns, villages and counties," she says. These museums may be small, but they play outsized roles when it comes to the "informal learning" that happens outside of the classroom. She added, "These museums are the community institutions that are the cornerstones of this informal learning."

Rural counties come out on top of the per-capita figures, although this is driven largely by their small populations. If we consider only counties with at least 10,000 people, San Juan County, Wash., has the greatest number of museums on a per-capita basis. I've tabulated the top 10 below.

Most museums per 100,000 residents, among counties with a population of 10,000+

County	State	Museums	Museums per 100k residents
San Juan	WA	21	132.3
Marshall	KS	12	120.0
Shoshone	ID	15	118.2

Hancock	ME	61	111.2
Nantucket	MA	11	105.8
Bayfield	WI	16	105.6
Baker	OR	16	99.9
Franklin	FL	11	94.8
Washington	ME	29	90.1
Knox	ME	35	88.5

The data also show where museums aren't. We've heard of food deserts, but how about cultural deserts? Up to 175 counties — home to 1.6 million people — don't contain any museums at all. Many of these are concentrated in the South, particularly Mississippi and Georgia. One word of caution here: Since the data file is culled from a variety of sources, including tax records, some of these counties may be home to museums that fell through the cracks of data collection; for instance, if they file their taxes under an office address that's different than their physical address.

If anything, the overall museum count is probably a conservative one. "Museums governed by state and municipal agencies or museums under the control of public universities may be undercounted," the researchers note.

Many institutions in the file are simply unclassifiable. There's the First State Antique Tractor Club in Greenwood, Del. The Idaho Forest Fire Museum in Moscow, Idaho. The Kansas Underground Salt Museum in Hutchinson, Kan. The Museum of Maritime Pets in Annapolis, Md. The Museum of Bad Art in Somerville, Mass. As Mamie Bittner puts it, "Anything you can dream up, there is a museum for that."

Learning To Give

[Philanthropy Described in *Democracy in America* by de Tocqueville](#)

by John Huebler

Alexis de Tocqueville, a French civil servant from an aristocratic family, wrote *Democracy in America* following a nine month visit to the United States in 1831-32. Tocqueville journeyed to the United States with a fellow governmental employee, **Gustave de Beaumont**. Their stated reason for the trip was to study the American penal system, but Kramnick asserts that Tocqueville had a larger goal in mind—one with great personal significance. "Studying American prisons was merely an excuse to get the official leave of absence required for the trip. . . . Beaumont and Tocqueville saw the journey as a career-creating opportunity. Tocqueville, in particular, had begun to contemplate a political career, and. . . he sensed that understanding America. . . would provide a useful edge for anyone involved in the politics of an evolving French democracy" (Kramnick 2003, xvii).

Beaumont assumed the task of writing and publishing the study of the penal system. Tocqueville's primary contribution from the trip, however, was the study that became ***Democracy in America***, published in two volumes in 1835 and 1840.

While *Democracy in America* is not a founding document of the United States, it was highly influential from the time of its publication through Tocqueville's death in 1859. A renaissance began in 1935, on the occasion of the centennial of its publication. That modern interest has continued through the present; it includes several English translations, and the application of Tocqueville's observations to such events as the threat of totalitarianism during World War II, the Cold War, and contemporary American electoral politics. It has been used as a manifesto by politicians and social philosophers on both the political left and right (Kramnick 2003, xli-xlvi).

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NY Times

Random Chance's Role in Cancer

by George Johnson

Unlike Ebola, flu or polio, cancer is a disease that arises from within — a consequence of the mutations that inevitably occur when one of our 50 trillion cells divides and copies its DNA.

Some of these genetic misprints are caused by outside agents, chemical or biological, especially in parts of the body — the skin, the lungs and the digestive tract — most exposed to the ravages of the world. But millions every second occur purely by chance — random, spontaneous glitches that may be the most pervasive carcinogen of all.

It's a truth that grates against our deepest nature. That was clear earlier this month when [a paper in Science on the prominent role of "bad luck" and cancer](#) caused an [outbreak of despair, outrage and, ultimately, disbelief](#).

The most intemperate of this backlash — mini-screeds on Twitter and hit-and-run comments on the web — suggested that the authors, Cristian Tomasetti and Bert Vogelstein of Johns Hopkins University, must be apologists for chemical companies or the processed food industry. In fact, their study was underwritten by nonprofit cancer foundations and grants from the National Institutes of Health. In some people's minds, those were just part of the plot.

What psychologists call apophenia — the human tendency to see connections and patterns that are not really there — gives rise to conspiracy theories. It is also at work, though usually in a milder form, in our perceptions about cancer and our revulsion to randomness.

It takes several mutations, in specific combinations, for a cell to erupt into a malignant tumor. The idea that random copying errors are prominent among them is thoroughly mainstream. What was new about the paper was [its attempt to measure this biological bad luck](#) and see how it compares with the two other corners of the cancer triangle: environment and heredity — mutations we inherit from our parents that can give cancer a head start.

The mix of these influences varies. A lifetime of heavy smoking has been shown to multiply the risk of lung cancer — the [most common malignancy in the world](#) — by some twentyfold, or about 2,000 percent. But that is an anomaly. One of the great frustrations of cancer prevention has been the failure to find other chemical carcinogens so definitive or damaging, especially in the dilute amounts in which they reach most of the public.

For a handful of cancers, biological agents are important, like human papilloma virus in [cervical cancer](#) and [helicobacter pylori](#) in stomach cancer. On another level, inflammation and hormonal imbalances, like those associated with obesity and diabetes, can drive cells to multiply more frequently, increasing the chance of mutations causal and accidental.

Finally, heredity — like the BRCA mutations involved in some breast cancers — can have a profound effect in individual cases. But inheritance appears to be involved in just 5 to 10 percent of all cancers.

What that leaves is a large role for random, spontaneous mutations — the ones that just happen because of the microscopic grind of life.

That is not a reason for resignation. It is frequently estimated that some 40 percent of cancers [are preventable](#). But that means some 60 percent are not.

To get a feel for that balance, the authors looked at [stem cells](#) — those that are capable of dividing indefinitely and renewing themselves. First, they estimated the number of these cells in different tissues of the body and how many times they would copy themselves during a human lifetime. The higher the count, the greater the vulnerability to mutations.

Then they compared that number with the likelihood that a tissue would develop a malignant tumor. The result was a strong correlation, a steep sloping line suggesting that two-thirds of the difference in cancer susceptibility could be explained by spontaneous errors.

Tissues that deviated from the relationship, contracting cancer at a higher rate, were presumably swayed more strongly by something else.

For cancers like those of the bone and brain, chance seemed to rule. But at the other end of the spectrum were those that were more “deterministic” — like lung cancer and basal cell carcinoma, a usually harmless skin malignancy where sunlight plays a deciding part. Also at that

extreme were rare cancers mostly determined by inherited defects, like some familial forms of colon cancer.

The more common colon cancers were near the middle of the range. Random mutation was important, but environment — like the carcinogens in digestive waste — seemed to hold a modest edge.

There are still ambiguities to resolve. The cellular dynamics of two of the most common cancers, breast and prostate, were not certain enough to be included in the analysis. But however they might tilt the lineup, random mutations will remain a dominant driver.

It is always possible that what we call randomness will turn out to be complexity in disguise. Some mutations attributed to chance may eventually be revealed to have subtle causes.

Over the years, however, the scale seems to be tipping the other way, with the discovery that some long-suspected agents like dietary fat and artificial sweeteners may not be so potent after all.

For all our agonizing, it can be liberating to accept and even embrace the powerful role chance plays in the biology of life and death. Random variation, after all, is the engine of evolution.

Because of spontaneous mutations in germ cells — sperm and eggs — each generation of our species is subtly different. Some of the variations confer an advantage and others a vulnerability. They are sifted by natural selection, and so we adapt and evolve.

In the ecosystem of the body, cancer cells go through a much faster version of this same process. The fittest of the bunch develop the weaponry to invade and destroy their surroundings, like a fractal reflection of what humans do in their own world.

The evolution of our brains, so compelled to find patterns, has given us an edge — discovering cancers that can be avoided or, failing that, identified and excised before their deadly storm. But try as we might, we can never be in complete control of a condition so deeply rooted in the trade-offs of being alive.

Science Magazine

[How Europeans evolved white skin](#)

by Ann Gibbons

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI—Most of us think of Europe as the ancestral home of white people. But a new study shows that pale skin, as well as other traits such as tallness and the ability to digest milk as adults, arrived in most of the continent relatively recently. The work, presented here last week at the 84th annual meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, offers dramatic evidence of recent evolution in Europe and shows that most modern Europeans don't look much like those of 8000 years ago.

The origins of Europeans have come into sharp focus in the past year as researchers have sequenced the genomes of ancient populations, rather than only a few individuals. By comparing key parts of the DNA across the genomes of 83 ancient individuals from

archaeological sites throughout Europe, the international team of researchers reported earlier this year that Europeans today are a mix of the blending of at least three ancient populations of hunter-gatherers and farmers who moved into Europe in separate migrations over the past 8000 years. The study revealed that a [massive migration of Yamnaya herders from the steppes north of the Black Sea may have brought Indo-European languages to Europe](#) about 4500 years ago.

Now, a new study from the same team drills down further into that remarkable data to search for genes that were under strong natural selection—including traits so favorable that they spread rapidly throughout Europe in the past 8000 years. By comparing the ancient European genomes with those of recent ones from the 1000 Genomes Project, population geneticist Iain Mathieson, a postdoc in the Harvard University lab of population geneticist David Reich, found five genes associated with changes in diet and skin pigmentation that underwent strong natural selection.

First, the scientists confirmed an earlier report that the hunter-gatherers in Europe could not digest the sugars in milk 8000 years ago, according to a poster. They also noted an interesting twist: The first farmers also couldn't digest milk. The farmers who came from the Near East about 7800 years ago and the Yamnaya pastoralists who came from the steppes 4800 years ago lacked the version of the *LCT* gene that allows adults to digest sugars in milk. It wasn't until about 4300 years ago that lactose tolerance swept through Europe.

When it comes to skin color, the team found a patchwork of evolution in different places, and three separate genes that produce light skin, telling a complex story for how European's skin evolved to be much lighter during the past 8000 years. The modern humans who came out of Africa to originally settle Europe about 40,000 years are presumed to have had dark skin, which is advantageous in sunny latitudes. And the new data confirm that about 8500 years ago, early hunter-gatherers in Spain, Luxembourg, and Hungary also had darker skin: They lacked versions of two genes—*SLC24A5* and *SLC45A2*—that lead to depigmentation and, therefore, pale skin in Europeans today.

But in the far north—where low light levels would favor pale skin—the team found a different picture in hunter-gatherers: Seven people from the 7700-year-old Motala archaeological site in southern Sweden had both light skin gene variants, *SLC24A5* and *SLC45A2*. They also had a third gene, *HERC2/OCA2*, which causes blue eyes and may also contribute to light skin and blond hair. Thus ancient hunter-gatherers of the far north were already pale and blue-eyed, but those of central and southern Europe had darker skin.

Then, the first farmers from the Near East arrived in Europe; they carried both genes for light skin. As they interbred with the indigenous hunter-gatherers, one of their light-skin genes swept through Europe, so that central and southern Europeans also began to have lighter skin. The other gene variant, *SLC45A2*, was at low levels until about 5800 years ago when it swept up to high frequency.

The team also tracked complex traits, such as height, which are the result of the interaction of many genes. They found that selection strongly favored several gene variants for tallness in northern and central Europeans, starting 8000 years ago, with a boost coming from the Yamnaya migration, starting 4800 years ago. The Yamnaya have the greatest genetic potential for being tall of any of the populations, which is consistent with measurements of their ancient skeletons. In contrast, [selection favored shorter people in Italy and Spain starting 8000 years ago](#), according to the paper now posted on the bioRxiv preprint server. Spaniards, in particular, shrank in stature 6000 years ago, perhaps as a result of adapting to colder temperatures and a poor diet.

Surprisingly, the team found no immune genes under intense selection, which is counter to hypotheses that diseases would have increased after the development of agriculture.

The paper doesn't specify why these genes might have been under such strong selection. But the likely explanation for the pigmentation genes is to [maximize vitamin D synthesis](#), said paleoanthropologist Nina Jablonski of Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), University Park, as she looked at the poster's results at the meeting. People living in northern latitudes often don't get enough UV to synthesize vitamin D in their skin so natural selection has favored two genetic solutions to that problem—evolving pale skin that absorbs UV more efficiently or favoring lactose tolerance to be able to digest the sugars and vitamin D naturally found in milk. “What we thought was a fairly simple picture of the emergence of depigmented skin in Europe is an exciting patchwork of selection as populations disperse into northern latitudes,” Jablonski says. “This data is fun because it shows how much recent evolution has taken place.”

Anthropological geneticist George Perry, also of Penn State, notes that the work reveals how an individual's genetic potential is shaped by their diet and adaptation to their habitat. “We're getting a much more detailed picture now of how selection works.”

Christian Science Monitor

[Atlanta teacher convictions: Do standardized testing pressures foster cheating?](#)

An Atlanta jury convicted 11 out of 12 teachers charged with conspiring to manipulate student test scores, but experts say 'Atlanta is the tip of the test-cheating iceberg.'

by Stacy Teicher Khadaroo

A jury convicted 11 educators of racketeering Wednesday for their role in the Atlanta cheating scandal. But nationally, there's a strong split between those who see their actions as an aberration and those who would convict right alongside them the accountability systems that have attached increasingly high stakes to standardized tests in recent decades.

The teachers and administrators face potentially harsh sentences for a conspiracy to manipulate test scores – which investigators said involved more than 44 schools and about 180 educators. [Eleven out of 12 who went to trial were convicted](#), and they were sent immediately to jail to await sentencing (with the exception of one who is pregnant).

For opponents of such high-stakes testing, there's likely to be [more sympathy for the educators](#) because of undue pressures being placed on teachers by an overemphasis on test scores. But for proponents of accountability, it's just as easy to hold up these educators as an example of why strong objective systems are needed to oversee and measure educators' performance.

The pressured atmosphere doesn't justify cheating, but it's one indication of a much larger problem, say critics of how testing has been used.

Especially as the federal government has pushed states to tie teacher evaluation policies to standardized-test gains, the testing regimen “creates a climate in school where you have to boost scores by hook or by crook,” says Robert Schaeffer, a spokesman for the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest).

Atlanta offered up extreme examples such as test-cheating “parties.” But “Atlanta is the tip of the test-cheating iceberg,” Mr. Schaeffer says, with other cases surfacing in about 39 states, including a dozen or more that showed widespread cheating.

The El Paso, Texas, superintendent went to prison in 2012 for fraud for manipulating federal accountability measures, and nearly a dozen others were held accountable for their role by the state education department.

An Arizona State University [study surveyed Arizona educators](#) in 2010 and found that 39 percent knew of situations in which colleagues encouraged students to redo test problems, while 10 percent knew of colleagues who did something they considered more outright cheating.

“We have a system in which people are told all the time that all that really matters is raising test scores,” says Daniel Koretz, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Some examples of the “shortcuts” teachers are encouraged to take? Teachers are often shown “power standards” – the types of items most commonly tested – by administrators, and sometimes are taught to skip chapters of textbooks that don’t fall in that category, Professor Koretz says. And states now routinely offer teachers old test items to use for test prep, a practice frowned upon in the 1980s.

“Clearly cheating is unethical, but at what point does this other stuff become unethical?” he says.

Despite the conviction of the Atlanta test-cheaters, which may make people and systems more cautious to guard against outright cheating, Koretz says he’s skeptical that it will have much impact on this broader problem of shortcuts that shortchange students of quality teaching.

But some argue that cheating scandals shouldn’t be leveraged in the debate about accountability systems.

“There are plenty of reasons for teachers to take issue with some of the teacher evaluation [policies] that have been rolled out across the country.... But I’m a little bit troubled when folks say, ‘Oh, and it’s driving teachers to cheat,’ ” says Michael McShane, an education policy research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington.

People opposed to standardized testing might use the Atlanta cheating scandal “as a story of educators trapped in an unjust system ... like it’s almost like some form of civil disobedience, which is just not the case.... [The cheaters were] eroding trust in public institutions and setting horrific examples for young people in Atlanta,” Mr. McShane says.

There are many variations of state systems that tie test scores to evaluations, and most give 50 percent or less weight to such scores. The Obama administration’s Department of Education encouraged such policies through its [Race to the Top](#) grants and its waivers to states from certain portions of the No Child Left Behind accountability law.

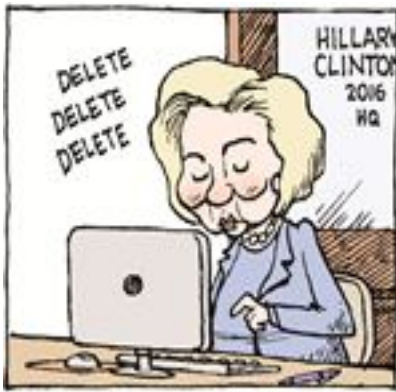
But as opposition from teachers’ unions and parents has grown, particularly amid the challenging logistics of rolling out new tests tied to the [Common Core State Standards Initiative](#), there’s “a real inclination among many people, even those who ultimately support the use of testing in evaluations, to hit the pause button,” says Patrick McGuinn, a political science and education professor at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.

Supporters of test-based accountability say it's important to keep something in place to check across schools, districts, and even states, on how students are doing, and to be able to analyze data by race, gender, and other categories to ensure that disadvantaged students are well-served. Historically teachers were not held accountable to such standards, and reformers "fear that this short-term pause is a ruse to put it off indefinitely," Professor McGuinn says.

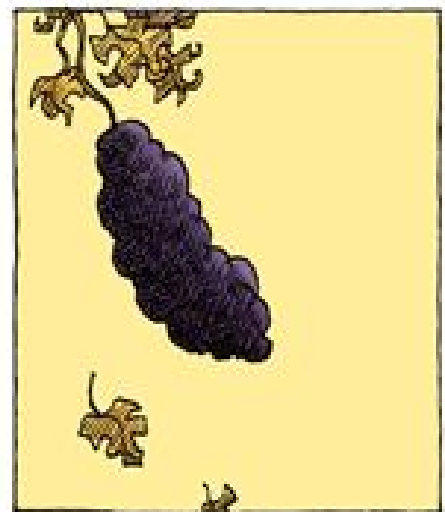
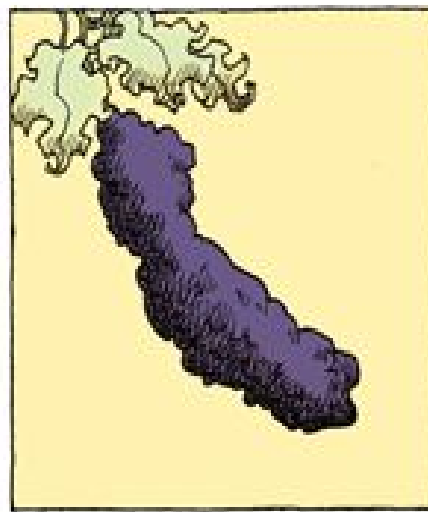
But research has long shown that state standardized testing can be gamed, and usually does little to actually improve the amount of learning taking place, Koretz says. For instance, students often make big gains on state tests while at the same time showing little progress on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NEAP), a national snapshot of reading and math skills at certain grade levels.

Koretz says true accountability would include many unstandardized measures of student and teacher performance, everything from portfolios to observations, and that a limited amount of standardized testing then could be part of the oversight system to make sure teachers were applying appropriate standards. Instead, the way testing has been used, he says, has "taken an extremely complicated accountability problem and reduced it to something that's ludicrously simplistic and just hasn't worked."





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THE CALIFORNIA RAISIN

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FIRST SIGN OF *Spring* AFTER A TOUGH WINTER

