

Sonia Verma
El Estoque
NSPA Artist of the Year 2023 Submission

I applied to be part of the graphics team at the beginning of my sophomore year – my first year on staff. What started as a hobby (and a convenient way to entertain myself during the occasional less-than-interesting class lecture) became a full-blown responsibility, in which I, as an artist, had the power to make or break a page design. So, with my iPad in one hand and stylus in the other, I set out to draw.

Or attempted to, at least. Unfamiliar with the ins and outs of digital art-making software, I stumbled through my first few months as an illustrator. Eventually, I made my way from spending hours on small, decorative graphics to illustrating entire page spreads.

My role as this year's sole graphics editor allowed me to push the limits of my artistic ability and work ethic. Armed with Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop and Procreate, I was well-equipped to tackle the deluge of graphics requests. Starting with a basic sketch, I tweaked and rehashed each design to perfectly suit the story it was paired with. Then, I transferred a picture of my final sketch onto Procreate or Illustrator, where I drew the graphic. If a graphic contained multiple components, I would draw each part individually and assemble them in Photoshop. I also encouraged staff members to think carefully about how a requested graphic would add to their article. As the foremost graphic illustrator on staff, I wanted to make sure the effort and attention to detail needed to make quality art was applied intentionally. Despite tight deadlines, I endeavored to make my illustrations as clean and professional as possible. I believe the five works in my portfolio showcase my breadth of ability and a sense of intention and purpose, utilizing a specific style to match what is being said in the accompanying narrative.

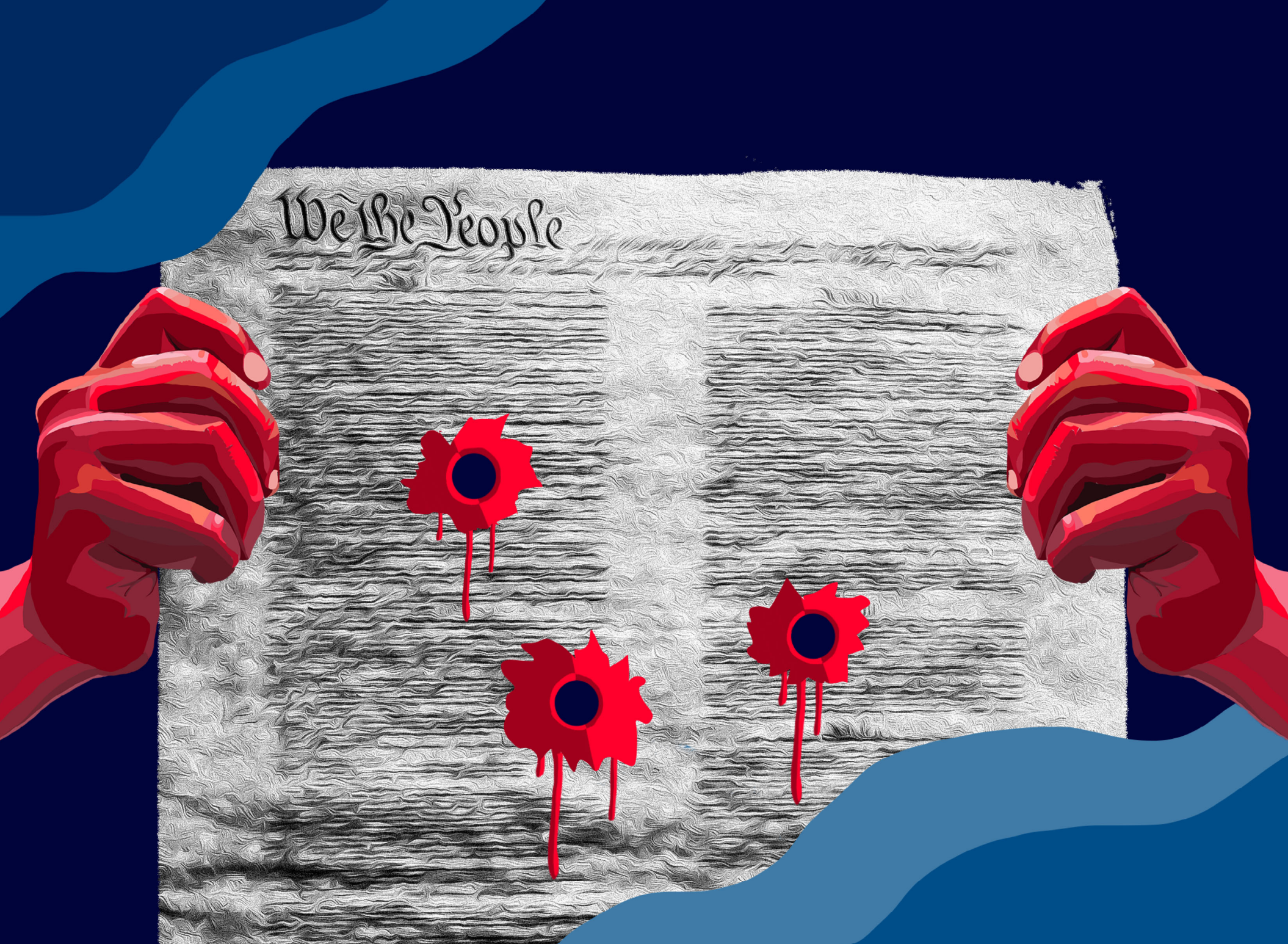
My work spans both El Estoque's print magazine and our online platform in the form of graphics, editorial cartoons and comics. Although most of my work this year was concentrated on online content, I challenged myself to take on larger projects, like covers and cartoons, for the print magazine as well.

This year, I wanted to implement more visual storytelling mediums within our publication, which led me to create my recurring print comic, *Catadors*. Starting from the first installment in El Estoque's May 2022 issue, this comic has been my version of a monthly column, sharing short, personal reflections on life through a cute anthropomorphic cat. I was pleasantly surprised to hear that *Catadors* gathered a small fanbase amongst our readers – I never thought a simple doodle of a cat with an extra pair of ears would be hanging on my teacher's mom's fridge.

When I was invited to give a presentation at the Columbia Student Press Association Spring 2022 Convention, being able to explain and answer questions about graphics and magazine illustration made me realize how far I have come. Two years of creating graphics have taught me that the visuals and aesthetics of a print page and the eye-catching ability of the main graphic of an online article meant the difference between a story that can touch readers' minds and hearts and one that is flipped (or clicked) past.

I am looking forward to continuing to push the boundaries of my artistic ability as the design editor for my third and final year on staff. Through my work, I hope to show what starts with a doodle could end up being breathtaking.

We the People





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WHAT CAN WE DO?

Coming to terms with the individual impact we have on combating climate change

Bike to school instead of driving. Eat less meat. Turn off the lights when we leave the room. Don't use plastic utensils.

In the last century, the Earth's temperature has increased by 2 degrees Fahrenheit due to human behavior. If this trend continues, there will be catastrophic consequences — some of which are already emerging — such as major heat waves and flooding, mostly impacting lower socioeconomic communities and magnifying the effects of the income gap. As unintentional contributors to the cause, we often embed small practices in our lives to try to help alleviate the impacts of a devastating situation.

But our mild inconveniences are outweighed by the monetary profits big companies reap through choosing to invalidate or simply ignore climate change. According to The Guardian, since 1988, 100 companies have caused 70% of the world's industrial greenhouse gas emissions, and more than half of those emissions can be traced to just 25 corporations.

When compared to these 25 corporations, our efforts appear minimal, outweighed and essentially negated. How much of an impact does choosing to bike have when Taylor Swift has used her private jet 170 times in 2022, with flight emissions 1,184 times higher than the average person? Looking at these statistics, it may feel like there's nothing we can do as individuals to fight climate change,

which perhaps stirs up a feeling of powerlessness.

As individuals, there are some ways we can contribute to the fight against climate change on a larger scale. We can choose to support companies that have made commitments to fighting climate change: Apple has invested \$4.7 billion into green technology and Nike intends to run on 100% renewable energy by 2025. We can also harness the power of grassroots democracy to create change by writing letters to our state representatives and senators asking them to support environmentally friendly bills.

However, our individual contributions to a collective entity rely on someone else to follow

through; we expect Apple to continue investing in green technology and our senators to read our letters and advocate for climate friendly bills. Realizing this, we again return to a feeling of powerlessness — a lack of agency that means acknowledging

that our efforts will never amount to what we hope they will.

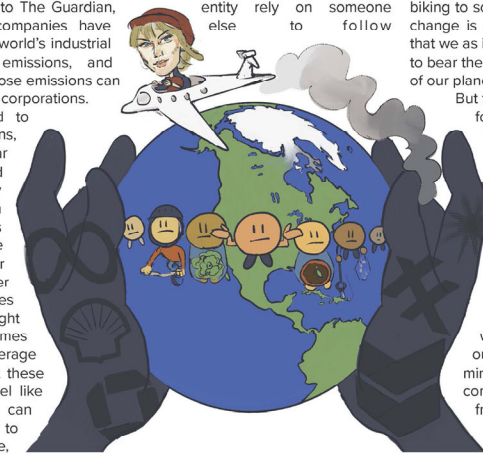
How are we supposed to deal with this?

Unless we have some loophole that can somehow magnify our individual impacts to a tangible extent, we just have to validate this feeling of powerlessness and, more importantly, realize that there's nothing wrong with it. We are just one person in a world of almost eight billion — our power to make change is limited. Accepting that biking to school will not solve climate change is one step toward realizing that we as individuals should not have to bear the responsibility of the health of our planet alone.

But this shouldn't be an excuse for inaction. The worst thing we can do for the fight against climate change is give up hope, because we would be not only conceding the possibility for saving our planet, but also essentially exacerbating climate change by choosing not to take action against it. Instead, we have to recognize that our role in the solution is minimized, and as long as we continue practicing climate-friendly habits, that's the most we can and should expect from ourselves. ■

STAFF EDITORIAL

OPINION OF THE EL ESTOQUE EDITORIAL BOARD



GRAPHIC | SONIA VERMA

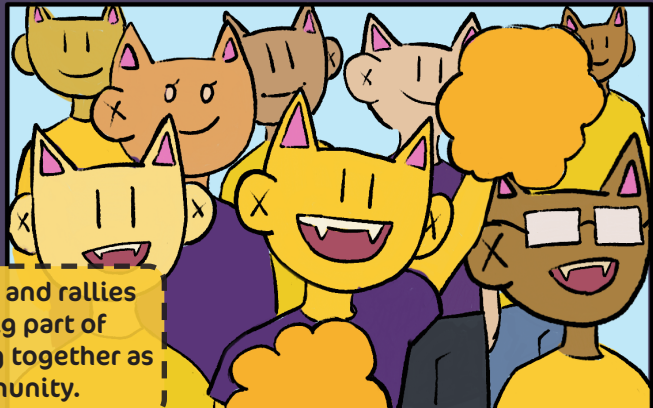
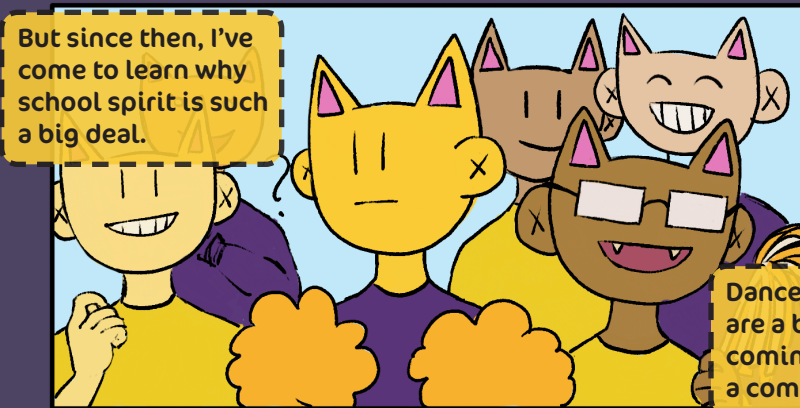


What is school spirit?



Participation in school events helps build community among students

BY SONIA VERMA



I think school spirit means creating a positive environment for each other to learn and grow,

and part of that is showing up to school events whenever possible.



(1) *One nation, under guns: Bulletproof beliefs* Header image

As part of a features package discussing gun control in our community, this article talks specifically about second amendment rights, which is why the Constitution is centered in the illustration. To portray the seriousness of the topic, I opted for a realistic, nearly visceral style, contrasting bright blood-reds with dark blues that not only depict the partisan aspect of the debate but quite literally illustrate the fatal consequences of America's near-unrestricted sale and possession of firearms.

(2) *Packaging the period plan* Thinglink graphic

As part of an article covering the Menstrual Equality for All Act, I made a graphic for an informational Thinglink about the period products being dispensed at our school. The pink and peach tones and the contrast between the realistic and illustrative elements of the image helped establish a continuous aesthetic throughout the story, tying together a lineart-heavy animation and map with a picture of the product dispenser later in the story. This illustration marked my transition from a first-year staffer and graphics team member to my current position as the graphics editor.

(3) *Band-aids for bullet wounds: Staying Awake* Header image

Redbulls and coffee are synonymous with student life – but at what cost? This editorial addressed the over-reliance on caffeine in our school community and those across the country to sustain academic performance. Limited by a four-color palette that did not associate with a dizzying caffeine rush (think: neons), I wanted this graphic to address the real problem – sleep deprivation. I used the limited color scheme as an opportunity to use value (the lightness or darkness of a color) instead of color to add depth to this illustration.

(4) *What can we do?* Editorial Cartoon (Vol. 53 Issue 1, Page 20)

After reading an article on the total carbon emissions of private airplanes, with pop singer Taylor Swift topping the carbon-criminal charts, I knew I had to draw an editorial cartoon for the November staff ed, which talked about how students could combat climate change in the face of climate indifference from celebrities and companies. I wanted to add humor and a sense of irony to the cartoon, drawing Taylor Swift, who was mentioned in the article, in the bobble-headed style that is used frequently in professional political cartoons. The figures standing on the earth are doing things to benefit the environment, like riding a bike and picking up trash, but are still dwarfed by the two held by two gray hands holding the Earth, symbolizing the overwhelming influence of the fossil fuel industry.

(5) *Catadors #5: What is school spirit?* (Vol. 53 Issue 4, Page 19)

Inspired by complaints of low student participation in school rallies and dances from friends in student government, I wanted the fifth installment of my recurring comic, *Catadors*, to address the importance of school spirit. Since our school colors are purple and gold, I wanted to contrast the orange and yellow tones of the panels in the top half of the page with the cool green and purple of the final scene. The name of my comic, *Catadors*, is a portmanteau of my favorite animal, the cat, and my school's mascot, the matador, reflecting the merging of my personal experiences and that of a high school student to create the comic's unique narrative voice.