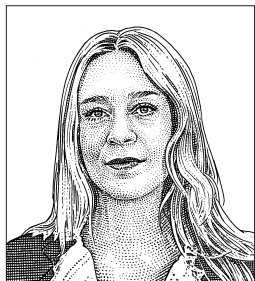


THE COLUMNISTS

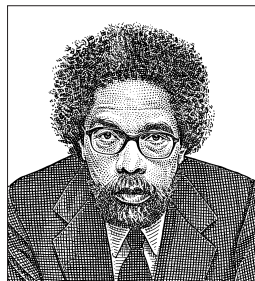
WSJ. asks six luminaries to weigh in on a single topic. This month: Nostalgia.



CHLOË
SEVIGNY

“From an early age, I had a very sensitive nose. I still do. I find a lot of attachment with scent and people and places. My mother wore Arpège, which has this deco design on the bottle of a mother and child at a ball. There’s all this romantic connotation around that for me; I get misty-eyed. Even certain cigarettes—I had a boyfriend who smoked Marlboro Reds, and when I smell that cigarette, I’ll always think of him. My nostalgia for New York City goes back to when my father would bring me into the city with him. We’d go to FAO Schwarz and Saks and Rockefeller Center and get in the Checker cabs. Even further back, there was the New York City that I read or fantasized about—the whole ’70s punk scene, or even the turn of the century, the movie *Hester Street* with Carol Kane, or Luc Sante’s book *Low Life*. I guess what I’m trying to say is: My nostalgia is bottomless.”

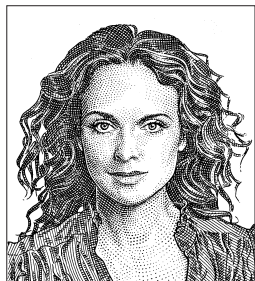
Sevigny is an actress, director and designer who collaborated on a new fragrance, Little Flower, with Régime des Fleurs.



CORNEL
WEST

“Nostalgia has to do with deep and profound desires for things that once gave us joy and that no longer exist. Intellectually and ideologically, we have a certain nostalgia for the Garden of Eden and moments of epiphany that seemed like paradise. There are ways of being nostalgic that are childish, and there are ways that are childlike. The enabling form reinforces your sense of wonder and gets you outside of your ego and narcissism. The disabling form is a matter of wanting to control something that reinforces your narcissism and narrowness. Alfred North Whitehead says the two great legacies of Athens and Jerusalem generate a noble discontent—they take us outside of our narrow nostalgia in order to generate courage to think for ourselves. To love people we didn’t think we’d love. So it’s an adventure, you see—a move from the known to the unknown.”

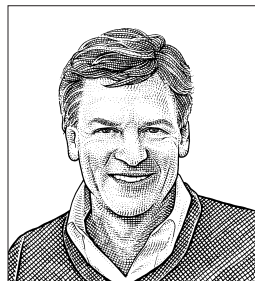
West is professor of the practice of public philosophy at the Harvard Divinity School.



MELISSA
ERRICO

“Music is all about how we turn big questions about memory and history into the personal ones of living in and out of the past. A lot of my job as a performer is to make the archival past available to people, American Songbook stuff. I try to make it occur now—not just for my emotions, for your emotions. I think it’s very healing. *Nostalgia* is sort of a pejorative word, but it’s an essential feeling. Nostalgia suits me because I can speak on its behalf. I have history now, but I didn’t have it before. While other people are saying, ‘Oh, poor you; you’re an older actress,’ I’m thinking, Are you kidding me? I’ve never had more information to share. I’m not just an information bearer. I try to take in information, but my next step is to make it raw and expansive and natural and available.”

Errico is a singer and actress. A special reissue of her album Legrand Affair is out in November.



MICHAEL
LEWIS

“There’s money to be made off exploiting other people’s nostalgia. Baseball, unlike other sports, is selling its connection to the past. I think that’s why baseball is nostalgic. People naturally associate baseball not just with childhood but with their relationship with their father. If what you’re selling is continuity and a connection to the childhood experience, then it is scary to make changes. If you make those changes, you do indeed undermine that feeling of nostalgia. It’s not irrational for these sorts of institutions to be resistant to change. The interesting thing is that baseball is so unmodern. The modern world is all about embracing change and disrupting. The truth about baseball is if there’s no continuity, it’s kind of boring. It’s slow; it’s not the pace of modern life. Basketball is the pace of modern life.”

Lewis is the author of Moneyball, The Big Short and The Fifth Risk and the host of the podcast Against the Rules With Michael Lewis.



SHIRIN
NESHAT

“I’m Iranian and I’ve lived outside my country for many, many years. First voluntarily and then not so voluntarily. My nostalgia has mainly to do with the town I grew up in, my father’s orchard, the sounds of the Quranic chants over the city. There are moments when thoughts come through my mind like, Wow, I will never, ever go back to Iran again; I will never put my foot down where I was born. Then this whole emotion of sorrow and unbearable pain comes that is unexplainable. And then there are moments when you feel this rush of nostalgia that’s lovely and beautiful and makes you feel like you’re connecting to your roots, that you’re not just who you are in this second; you’re made out of all this other history. And that makes you feel richer as a person in your experiences, even though they’re so ephemeral. It’s very beautiful. It’s like life opposed to death.”

Neshat is an artist. Her exhibit Shirin Neshat: I Will Greet the Sun Again debuts this month at The Broad in Los Angeles.



PETER
POMERANTSEV

“We’ve seen it first in Russia in the 1990s and now increasingly in the West: an inability to imagine a coherent idea of the future. Nostalgia has taken over. You could choose many moments when the idea of that future crumbled—various foreign-policy follies, the 2008 crisis, the idea that our children are getting poorer than us. What replaces it is a policy of nostalgia. Nostalgia isn’t about specific memories; it’s about the sense of loss. The roots of nostalgia are about losing home. The great scholar Svetlana Boym talks about two different types of nostalgia. One is restorative, which takes this nightmarish version of the past and tries to re-create it. There’s also something called reflective nostalgia: looking at the past, understanding how things have changed, and establishing distance from it. Weirdly, that gives you a sense of history and of being able to think about the future as well.”

Pomerantsev is the author of This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality.