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The Story Behind the Story



MARIA JESUS CONTRERAS

Getting to Know a Fellow, Famous Book Lover

Reese Witherspoon, now a tastemaker in the book world, has a writer charting her love of reading.

By ELISABETH LEGAN

I'd never eaten Nashville hot chicken before, and I'd never met Reese Witherspoon.

But there we were — she, in a blue and white pastripe Oxford and jeans; me, in forgettable clothing, having rolled up to Witherspoon's office with a borrowed suitcase for an article that appears in this weekend's New York Times Book Review. You can't greet the actor who played Elle Woods today luggage with a visible burn mark across the top. (Related: Never use your carry-on as an ironing board.)

I've been following Witherspoon's inroads in the book world ever since I saw her in "Wild" (2014) and knew, just by the gritty, vulnerable way she embodied Cheryl Strayed that she was a book lover. In 2017, Witherspoon started Reese's Book Club, which focuses on fiction by women, about women, and reliably sends its monthly picks onto the best-seller list. Last year, print sales for the club's selections outpaced those of Oprah's Book Club and Read With Jenna, according to Circana Bookscan, adding up to 2.3 million copies sold.

I've enjoyed many of Witherspoon's picks and interviewed a number of Reese's Book Club authors — including Alka Joshi, Nina Simon and Celeste Ng — for the Book Review, where I'm a writer and editor. I wanted to talk with her, reader to reader, and the lead-up to her 100th pick seemed like the perfect time.

Over lunch, Witherspoon told me that she likes to read in the morning, after exercising. (I read instead of exercising.) She

organizes her books by color and prefers physical copies to digital ones. She wears reading glasses, 1.5 strength — a tidbit that didn't make it into my story but gave me a certain middle-age presbyopic nerd thrill. (By the way, the hot chicken was delicious.)

"I read a lot on airplanes, while I'm traveling," she said. "Do you know what's interesting? It's hard for me to read on vacation, maybe because reading is my job."

I can relate. Many of us professional readers lament the lost luxury of enjoying books "like a normal person" instead of guzzling straight from the faucet, always a gulp away from losing the plot (literally). I know what you're thinking: Boo-hoo. And you're right!

What struck me about Witherspoon's comment was the reminder — so obvious I didn't even ask a follow-up question — that reading is supposed to be a hobby, belonging in the same category as listening to music, dabbling in watercolor and baking bread. Why has it become so much more complicated than other pastimes? Why do so many readers turn to the "experts" — big-name book clubs, critics, BookTok — for help figuring out what to read next? Don't get me wrong: I love being a part of the engine that fuels these recommendations, and Witherspoon clearly does too. But I still believe in the power of standing in a bookstore or library, running your fingers over the spines.

Witherspoon said her original goals for Reese's Book Club were to narrow the choices for busy readers and to "bring the book club out of your grandma's living room and online." Indeed, there are more than 900 comments beneath the club's Instagram post about its May pick, "How to End a Love Story," so she appears to have

been successful in this regard. Now, she said, "My dream is that it gets a little bit off the digital world and back into your living room."

Even Witherspoon, doyenne of digital book clubbing, has an IRL club of her own. I signed this approach. The digital world is an excellent place to get ideas and talk about books. But, to me, the difference between scrolling through videos of book hauls and talking about a great novel with a friend is the difference between walking on a treadmill and hiking in the woods.

On my way home from Nashville, I popped into the airport outpost of Ann Patchett's bookstore, Parnassus. I didn't buy anything; my suitcase was already straining at the zipper from the six novels I packed for my 24-hour trip. (Recommendations for beach reads, coming soon!) I also didn't impose my opinions on strangers, as I'm known to do the Hudson Booksellers at my home airport. I just stood there, flipping through paperbacks, enjoying the particular soundtrack of a store on a busy concourse. Wheels rolling, credit cards tapping, rushed customers asking where to find what they needed — Kristin Hannah, Fareed Zakaria, Sarah J. Maas, a book light, a birthday card, a bathroom. Over and over, the clerk murmured, "Will that be all?" and "Have a safe trip."

Eventually, feeling like the luckiest person who ever read under the covers by flashlight, I joined the throng of travelers and headed to my gate. By the time I finished my book, I was home.

This essay first appeared in the Morning newsletter. Subscribe at nytimes.com/newsletters. Read Ms. Egan's article on Reese Witherspoon in the Book Review.

The Newspaper and Beyond

TODAY'S PAPER

Corrections PAGE 17

Crossword THE MAGAZINE, PAGE 30

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Weather PAGE 23

AUDIO

Will Donald J. Trump's guilty verdict matter in November? On "The Run-Up" podcast, the host Astead W. Herndon spoke with voters, including supporters of the former president, about the issues on their mind before a criminal conviction. nytimes.com/therunup

MOVIES

The director Pablo Berger dissected a frame from "Robot Dreams," his Oscar-nominated animated film about a dog who builds a robot friend. Follow along at nytimes.com/movies.

QUIZ

The concept of artificial intelligence has been a staple of science fiction for decades. Test your knowledge of literary A.I. characters and plots by taking our quiz at nytimes.com/books.

Quote of the Day

"I've given them every fact and document known to mankind, and none of it matters."

CINDY ELGAN, an election administrator in rural Nevada. She has received threats from residents who embrace conspiracy theories about voting fraud. [Page 1](https://nytimes.com).

Last Week's Top Trending Headlines

Opinion | Why the Pandemic Probably Started in a Lab, in 5 Key Points In a guest essay for New York Times Opinion, Dr. Alina Chan, a molecular biologist at the Broad Institute of M.I.T. and Harvard, made the case that Covid-19 escaped from a research lab in Wuhan, China. Dr. Chan explained what we know about the Wuhan Institute of Virology, its proposed work with U.S. partners and the evidence for zoonotic origins that remains missing.

The 25 Photos That Defined the Modern Age T Magazine assembled a panel of experts to discuss the images that have best captured — and changed — the world since 1955. The images, and a transcript of the panel's decision-making dialogue, is in T this weekend.

Opinion | Boys Get Everything, Except the Thing That's Most Worth Having In a guest essay for Times Opinion, the author Ruth Whippman wrote that she talked to "boys of all types" while researching her new book, "Boymom," and found that "the same theme came up over and over for boys who on the face of it had little else in common. They were lonely." She argued that progressives should sympathize with the issues boys face, rather than dismissing them as privileged.

The Man Who Couldn't Stop Going to College Benjamin B. Bolger has spent his whole life amassing academic degrees. He has 11 advanced degrees, an associate's, a bachelor's and even a few M.F.A.s. The Times's Joseph Bernstein wondered: What can we learn from him?

A Headline From History

TABLE FOR 2? GET IN LINE

June 9, 2010. The number of New York City restaurants that did not take reservations was growing. The Times reported, with many adopting "equally restrictive populist" first-come-first-served policies. Reactions were mixed: Some diners found the shift more democratic. Others had reservations about the lack of reservations. "You can't have a client wait an hour for a table," said James Blank, a lawyer. Amid the economic recession that began in 2008, New Yorkers had embraced casual, inexpensive restaurants without reservation systems, one restaurateur said, which possibly explained the citywide shift. Last year, The Times reported on the struggles of nabbing a reservation at popular New York City restaurants through online seating services. One lesson? Get in position to pounce on a cancellation.

Facts of Interest

In the fantasy era, fishing crews, who often work through fatigue, ailments and injuries, suffer rates of fatal overdose up to five times that of the general population.

The Mayday Call
THE EMAGAZINE, PAGE 28

Before the mid-1800s, paint was made with natural pigments that were muted and faded, so limewash — a mixture of burned lime and water — was preferred over paint.

To Set a Soothing Mood, They Let the Darkness In SUNDAYSTYLE, PAGE 1

Leonard Glenn Francis, the military contractor behind one of the U.S. Navy's worst corruption scandals in modern times, has admitted to making at least \$35 million off the U.S. government, though no one knows exactly how much he stole.

Deep Dive BOOK REVIEW, PAGE 11

NewsGuard, a company that monitors online misinformation, identified more than 800 websites that use A.I. to produce unreliable news content, including false claims about political leaders and celebrity death hoaxes.

An A.I.-Generated News Site Priced Clinks Over Truth
SUNDAY BUSINESS, PAGE 1

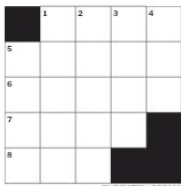
In the early 2000s, the singer Cyndi Lauper, now 70, wrote the music and lyrics to the Broadway musical "Kinky Boots" — for which she won the Tony for best score in 2013, the first woman to win alone.

True to Herself, Time After Time ARTS & LEISURE, PAGE 10

The earliest major account of the British explorer James Cook's first Pacific expedition — to observe the transit of Venus across the sun in 1769 — was one of the 18th century's most popular publications.

Bad Trip BOOK REVIEW, PAGE 22

The Mini Crossword



6/9/2024 BY KATHARINA THURNER
EDITED BY JAM ZIMMERMAN

ACROSS

- 1 Terrier in "The Wizard of Oz"
- 2 "Tosca" or "La Traviata"
- 3 Turn topsy-turvy
- 4 Targy
- 5 Team ____ (Olympians in red, white and blue)

DOWN

- 1 Tiny appetizers at a Spanish bar
- 2 "Tosca" or "La Traviata"
- 3 Thing you might have a stake in?
- 4 Totally strange
- 5 Type of skirt for a ballerina

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE



The Dateline

Where Times Journalists Are Reporting Around the World



THE NEW YORK TIMES

1. ST. PETERSBURG, FLA. — Patricia Mazzei talked to homeowners in the Shore Acres neighborhood near Tampa Bay, where floodwater has become a constant threat. Some residents are moving out or raising their homes; others can't afford a solution.

2. JAVARI VALLEY INDIGENOUS TERRITORY — The Marubo, an isolated Amazon tribe, connected to high-speed internet in September through Elon Musk's Starlink. Jack Nicas, the Brazil bureau chief, visited the tribe's remote villages to see what the internet has changed for them.

3. STOKES-ON-TRENT, ENGLAND — The people who provide owls at British weddings say that the trend — originally fueled by the popularity of "Harry Potter" — is now a mainstay. Claire Moses reported from a venue where owls serve as ring bearers.

4. KHARTOUM — Declan Walsh spent three weeks in Sudan, where few foreign reporters have gained access since a civil war erupted last year. As many as 150,000 people have died, famine is looming and Khartoum, the capital, "has been reduced to a charred battleground," he wrote.

In Times Past

Exploring an Artifact From the Archives of The New York Times

The Museum at The Times is a repository of artworks, furnishings, windows and even gargoyles that have adorned various headquarters of The New York Times.

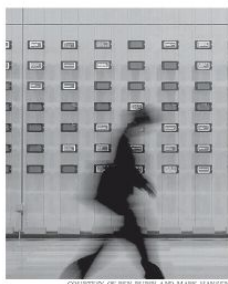
Most acquisitions are happily welcomed. The next acquisition, however, is being accepted reluctantly because it means that "Moveable Type" — a scintillating, engaging and kinetic work of public art in the lobby of The Times's building at 620 Eighth Avenue in Manhattan — is to be removed after 17 years.

Visitors are invited to experience the immersive 54-foot-long installation for themselves between now and mid-August, when it is to be taken down.

"Moveable Type," pictured at right, is composed of 500 screens suspended on wires. On a rotating basis, they display words, numerals, phrases, questions, quotations, shapes and diagrams drawn from The Times's live digital report. The array is ephemeral and ever-changing. The visual display is augmented by sounds — clicks, clacks, beeps, bells and a windlike whoosh — that echo through the lobby.

Ben Rubin and Mark Hansen, the creators of "Moveable Type," have pledged to give one or more of the $\frac{1}{2}$ -by- $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch screens to the museum — either from the installation itself or from a stockpile of 50 spares. (Only four screens have had to be replaced since the artwork was inaugurated in 2007.)

Each screen is a sandwich. Facing viewers is a vacuum fluorescent display with 32,768 luminous pixels, behind which is a printed circuit board. This off-the-shelf unit was made by Noritake Itron of Japan for use in control panels and medical devices.



COURTESY OF BEN RUBIN AND MARK HANSEN

Behind it is a second, custom-made printed circuit board that holds a central processor chip running the Linux operating system. The screens were assembled at Perfection Electrics in Queens. The whole installation is controlled from a second-floor utility closet that holds three computers and other gear.

The Times said in May that it would share details in coming months about what will replace "Moveable Type." The artwork will be returned to Mr. Rubin and Mr. Hansen. There are no current plans for its installation elsewhere.

David W. Denlap is curator of the Museum at The Times. "Moveable Type" is on view and open to the public on weekdays in the lobby at 620 Eighth Avenue in New York City.

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Why Gardening Is So Good for You

For me, gardening is a workout, meditation and opportunity to socialize with neighbors. I'm admittedly biased, but research backs up my observations that gardening can benefit your mind and body. **DANA G. SMITH**

Gardening gets you moving. Shoveling mulch, pulling weeds and lugging around a watering can all qualify as moderate-intensity physical activities. And gardeners tend to report higher levels of physical activity overall, compared with nongardeners.

In one study conducted in Colorado, people who joined a community garden logged nearly six extra minutes a day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity compared with people who were on the waiting list for a plot. That may not sound like a lot, but it added up to about 42 extra minutes per week, said Jill Litt, a professor of environmental health at the University of Colorado at Boulder, who ran the trial.

There is also some evidence that gardeners have better cardio-metabolic health. One study of older adults found that, compared with those who don't exercise, people who gardened as one of their main physical activities had lower rates of heart attack, stroke, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Some of the more vigorous gardening activities, like digging, raking and hauling bags of potting soil, can also serve as a strength workout, challenging muscles in the arms, legs and core.



Gardening does wonders for your mental well-being. Some studies report that working in a garden lowers people's scores on anxiety and depression measures; other research has found increased confidence and self-esteem among gardeners.

Experts think there are a few possible ways gardening improves mental health. First, physical activity itself is a well-established way to boost mood.

Many people also report feeling a sense of purpose when they garden, which is an important contributor to well-being.

In addition, gardening, especially in community gardens, can help people build social connections and combat loneliness. In the Colorado study, participants talked about experiencing a sense of belonging and shared learning. "All of these processes are really important for mental health," Dr. Litt said.

For health advice, visit [nytimes.com/well](https://www.nytimes.com/well)



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International

The New York Times

It Called Itself a Yoga School. Prosecutors Say It Was a Sex Cult.

By ANA LANKES

BUENOS AIRES — Juan Percowicz was an accountant with an unusual side hobby: teaching self-help classes around Buenos Aires with a heavy dose of ancient philosophy and New Age spiritualism. He was a hit and, with donations from his followers, he built an organization known as Buenos Aires Yoga School, or BAYS.

For more than 30 years, he ran the school, which promised spiritual salvation through lectures and self-help classes.

But now, Mr. Percowicz, 85, and more than a dozen BAYS members are facing criminal charges, accused of running a “sex cult,” not a yoga school, that coerced some of its female members into prostitution and laundered the profits in real estate.

Prosecutors say the organization exploited and drugged some of its female members, forcing them to sell their bodies and generating hundreds of thousands of dollars monthly from clients in Argentina and the United States. BAYS also ran an illicit clinic where some members were administered drugs to induce prolonged sleep, sometimes as a form of punishment, according to prosecutors.

“Cults exist here, but we’ve never seen one that operated at this level,” said Ricardo Juri, the investigator who oversaw police raids on BAYS properties in August 2022.

The accusations against BAYS shocked Argentina, yet for many people, they also felt eerily familiar.

In the 1990s, Mr. Percowicz and his school gained notoriety after an Argentine family accused the organization of brainwashing their daughter. During the inquiry, some former members talked of being forced to work as “slaves” and said the school promoted prostitution.

But that original case stalled in the courts. Argentina did not yet have laws on human trafficking or money laundering, according to investigators. The justice system was still being overhauled after the end of the military dictatorship more than a decade earlier in which tens of thousands of people were killed.

A 1999 State Department report said Argentina’s judiciary was “hampered by inordinate delays, procedural logjams, changes of judges, inadequate administrative support and incompetence.”

There also remained a lingering distrust of government and the judicial system — and defenders of BAYS tapped into that, including Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, an Argentine Nobel Peace Prize winner, and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, whose children had been “disappeared” by the authoritarian regime. They accused the Argentine judiciary of corruption and human rights violations connected to the case.

Eventually, the case against BAYS was dropped.

Now, with updated laws, prosecutors are again targeting Mr. Percowicz and his followers in an investigation examining BAYS operations dating to 2004.

“The people are the same, the decisions are the same, the activities are similar, but there are two very important laws now with big penalties that prohibit the core activities these people were doing,” said Ariel Lijo, one of the judges now overseeing the case. Mr. Lijo was nominated for Argentina’s Supreme Court in March by President Javier Milei.

In the 2022 raids on BAYS, investigators said they found more than \$1 million in cash, five bars of gold, stacks of pornographic films, checkbooks from American banks and dossiers on wealthy individuals, including some who live in the United States. American authorities have cooperated in the investigation, according to Argentine investigators.

The U.S. Justice Department declined to comment.

Prosecutors say that the seven women named as victims were brought to BAYS by their parents when they were minors, or that they joined as young women and were eventually forced into prostitution. But the women in the case have denied ever having sex in exchange for money, or being victims of any crime.

Defense lawyers for Mr. Percowicz and current members of BAYS have denied all charges, arguing that no one in the case was ever sexually exploited. Instead, they say that the accusers — whose identities are protected in the case — want revenge on the organization for personal reasons.

There is a case of human trafficking without victims of trafficking,” said Jorge Daniel Pirozco, a lawyer who represents Mr. Percowicz and five other BAYS members. “It hasn’t been proven that anybody has been sexually exploited.”

Mr. Percowicz and BAYS members declined interview requests.

While prostitution in Argentina is not illegal, promoting or economically exploiting the practice of prostitution using deception, abuse or intimidation is. Prosecutors say they intend to show that the victims do not recognize themselves as such because Mr. Percowicz and his allies psychologically manipulated the women over the years.

As both sides prepare their arguments, the organization continues to have prominent allies, including in the United States.

In October 2022, the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr. sent an email to Mr. Lijo, the judge, which was reviewed by The New York Times. The message said that BAYS members were “victims of brutal and egregious human rights violations



SARAH PABST FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

After attending weekly lectures at BAYS, Caterina Sanfelice said she realized something was off and left the group. Pablo Salum, right, grew up in the school but left as an adolescent. His mother and sister remain.



SARAH PABST FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



SARAH PABST FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The family of Valeria Llamas filed a criminal complaint in 1993, accusing the school of being a cult and brainwashing their daughter. The case stalled in the courts. Ms. Llamas did not respond to requests for comment.



NATACHA FISZBANK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Juan Percowicz, left, the founder of the Buenos Aires Yoga School, being taken into police custody in 2022. Prosecutors say he and more than a dozen BAYS members forced some of its female members into prostitution and laundered the profits in real estate. Right, evidence confiscated during a raid at the school in 2022.



SARAH PABST FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

by elements of the Argentine legal system. “It was unclear why Mr. Jackson, 82, sent the email.

He did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

‘They Raised His Self-Esteem’

Caterina Sanfelice was a hairstylist in her forties when a friend first invited her to a BAYS lecture around 1993. “It was like going to a fancy cafe with an orator,” she said.

Mr. Percowicz spoke of finding inner strength, she recalls, hooking people with promises of answers in the next session. Ms. Sanfelice said two women propositioned her husband while other members undressed to prepare for an orgy. She ran out of the building.

When Ms. Sanfelice told her husband she did not want to go back, she said, he replied that the school was in him what he did not see: a great architect.

“They raised his self-esteem,” she said. “That’s when he started to feel important. And I became the witch.”

Ms. Sanfelice said her husband, who could not be reached for comment, left her in 1993 and stayed involved with BAYS. She said she was exasperated and felt like no one believed her.

Then came some validation: the first criminal case against BAYS, which captured international attention.

At the center of it was Maria Valeria

Llamas, who was 20 and jobless when a family friend offered to take her to a BAYS lecture in 1990.

“At first we saw it as something positive,” said Martin Sommariva, Ms. Llamas’s half brother. “We went from a Valeria who didn’t go out, who was stuck in her room the whole time, to this Valeria who got on the bus and had an interest in something.”

But over the next few years, the yoga school consumed her life, her family said. Ms. Llamas broke up with her boyfriend and lost touch with friends. She stopped going to family outings. She began working at a pharmacy run by BAYS members.

Soon after, her mother said, she found out Ms. Llamas had been pressured by the school to have an illegal abortion. When her family questioned her, Ms. Llamas replied that Mr. Percowicz was “an immortal angel.”

The next day, two BAYS members showed up at the house, escorted by police officers, according to the family and court records from the case. They said they were suing the parents for “unlawful deprivation of liberty.” The police moved Ms. Llamas’s belongings into an apartment owned by BAYS, her family said. Ms. Llamas later accused her stepfather of sexually assaulting her, court records show.

“Suddenly the world came crashing down on us,” recalled her mother, Elena. “We thought: What are we going to do now?”

No rape charges were ever filed against the family members. Ms. Llamas did not respond to requests for comment.

The family filed a criminal complaint in 1993, accusing the school of being a

cult that had brainwashed their daughter.

The accusation ended up in the docket of Mariano Bergés, a young judge starting his career. Under Argentina’s judiciary system at the time, judges could both investigate cases and oversee the court proceedings. As part of the investigation, Mr. Bergés said in an interview, he authorized a raid of the headquarters and some of BAYS’s other properties.

He said the raids found boxes of letters that showed members paying Mr. Percowicz for a higher spiritual ranking in the organization. This was not illegal, but, combined with the testimony of former members, it led investigators to believe there was illegal activity underway.

Mr. Bergés then ordered wiretaps on Mr. Percowicz and his top deputies, which Mr. Bergés said indicated a scheme to steal the assets of a deceased BAYS member.

In depositions reviewed by The Times, several former BAYS members later said that Mr. Percowicz and his inner circle forced younger followers to be “slaves” to higher ranking members, making them carry out tasks like housework without pay. Former members also said that the organization promoted prostitution, the depositions show, though none said they had been prostituted themselves.

But without human trafficking or money laundering laws in Argentina, Mr. Bergés said, he had to build a case around fraud, promotion of prostitution and a flimsy charge known as “corruption of adults.”

In late 1995, Mr. Bergés withdrew from the case after being threatened with

impeachment by Argentina’s Congress. In an interview, he said the Congress and Supreme Court, as well as human-rights groups, pressured him to step down, saying that his investigation tactics, like the wiretapping and raids, violated the suspects’ civil rights. He denies the accusations.

Outside his house, he said, “The walls were plastered with posters and things against me.”

By the mid-1990s, BAYS had opened wellness companies and a foundation in Chicago, Las Vegas and New York. It had gained a reputation as an education center for philosophy and wellness whose members included scholars, professionals and musicians.

BAYS had also cultivated supporters in the U.S. Congress, though it is unclear how the lawmakers first became aware of the organization or whether any of them had any real knowledge or connections to the group.

In Argentina, the criminal case against the organization continued to drag through the courts. More than 50 congressional members sent letters to the country’s government demanding the investigation be closed, according to the House record. (There is no evidence that any U.S. politicians were members of BAYS or investigated by Argentine officials.)

Edolphus Towns, a congressman representing part of Brooklyn, gave a House testimony that BAYS members were being harassed by Argentine judicial officials, had been unlawfully imprisoned and subject to antisemitism. Mr. Percowicz and some of his top deputies are Jewish.

Mr. Towns, 89, retired in 2013 and did not respond to requests for comment.

Robert A. Underwood, a former congressman from Guam who signed a letter sent to President Bill Clinton calling for him to intervene, said in an interview that such missives were common. “Nobody really puts a lot of thought into it because you are signing letters all the time,” he said.

Mr. Clinton, in his final year in office, responded to members of Congress in September 1999 and said that U.S. Embassy officials in Buenos Aires had “recently reiterated to senior Argentine officials the importance of resolving this case as quickly as possible,” according to a letter provided to The Times by the Clinton Presidential Library.

The White House’s written response to Congress “reflects the extent of President Clinton’s involvement in this,” said Angel Ureña, a spokesman for Mr. Clinton.

In Argentina, the criminal case against BAYS was eventually closed in the early 2000s with no convictions.

Trying to Make a Billion Dollars

Over the next 20 years, BAYS flourished, with little attention from Argentine authorities. During this time, Mr. Percowicz made clear he was in the business of making money.

“If what we wanted to do here was write a book about the life of Jesus, we wouldn’t be thinking about anything other than the life of Jesus,” Mr. Percowicz told his followers in 2006 in a video obtained by investigators. “But what we are trying to do here is make a billion dollars, one billion dollars, goddamn it!”

Then, in 2021, BAYS ran into new trouble.

Argentina’s federal public prosecutor’s office for trafficking and the exploitation of people opened an investigation into the organization.

Investigators tapped the phones of Mr. Percowicz and some of his allies, capturing conversations that, according to prosecutors, show the work of managing a prostitution operation.

Transcripts filed in court show that in one call, Mr. Percowicz goes over the logistics of arranging what investigators say was a sexual encounter in a separate recording. A BAYS manager tells Mr. Percowicz that a woman is bringing in only \$6,000 a month, which is not enough money, suggesting she needs to bring in more for the organization.

The wiretaps also recorded conversations with a man whom prosecutors say is Plácido Domingo, one of the world’s most famous opera singers, who has faced numerous accusations of sexual harassment in recent years. In one call, he speaks to a woman who prosecutors say was a senior member of BAYS to discuss how she could get to his Buenos Aires hotel room without being noticed.

Argentine prosecutors have not brought charges against Mr. Domingo in connection to the BAYS case.

A representative for Mr. Domingo said in a statement that the opera singer had not been charged “and he is completely unrelated to the investigation.”

Prosecutors said that the majority of BAYS’s income came from sex-trafficking activities, and was then laundered into real estate in Argentina and the United States, and that prosecutors’ BAYS’s total assets at nearly \$50 million as of December 2020.

Prosecutors say they are confident that the evidence and new laws will enable them to bring Mr. Percowicz and other defendants to justice. The case is currently working its way through the courts. No trial date has been set yet.

For Pablo Salum, whose mother first brought him to BAYS when he was only 8, the case is already a nightmare. He left the organization when he was 12 and has become estranged from his mother and sister, who remain BAYS members.

“This could have ended 20 years ago,” he said. “Everything that is happening now would not have had to happen. And I may even have recovered my family.”



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War in Ukraine

In Ukraine, Soldiers And Civilians Get Energy From a Can

From Page 1

much or slept in three days. If you don't drink this stuff, where are you going to get the energy for that final push?"

Ukraine is in the throes of its hardest moment since the early months of Russia's full-scale invasion more than two years ago, and its forces are struggling in face of sustained assaults across the 600-mile front. Depleted and exhausted, frontline troops are hooked on a growing constellation of highly caffeinated, shrewdly marketed energy drinks, some specially made for this war.

Sales are surging. Energy drinks have become one of the few bright spots in the Ukrainian economy. New varieties and crazy flavors keep appearing — cotton

every aspect of life in Ukraine, intensifying the demand for a quick hit of caffeine that didn't require a cafe, boiling water, a coffee mug or a tea bag. And it was not only soldiers who craved it.

"The civilian population's heightened need for energy sources arises from constant missile attacks, anxiety and lack of sleep," said Taras Matsypura, a vice-president at Carlsberg Ukraine.

And so last year Carlsberg, a major international player, also began manufacturing an energy drink in Ukraine: Battery.

The market, Mr. Matsypura said, was "booming."

Even with the economy suffering and millions of Ukrainians having fled the country, the sale of energy drinks in Ukraine has surged nearly 50 percent since the start of the war, according to industry surveys.

Individual soldiers, their units and civilian volunteers who bring essentials to the front line are buying truckloads. Some beverage makers like IDS Ukraine provide it for free. And a Ukrainian supply chain has swung into action to move it.

Big trucks, little trucks, soldiers' cars smeared with army green paint, motorcycles and bicycles journey through a landscape of bombed-out buildings and downed bridges to carry cases hundreds of miles from factories in central and western Ukraine to trenches in the east.

"Before the war, no one was buying it at this scale," said Serhiy Parakhin, a shopkeeper. "Except truck drivers."

The best-selling brands are cheaper Ukrainian varieties such as Non Stop and Pit Bull, but imports like Red Bull (from Austria), Monster (from the United States) and Hell (from Hungary) are also popular.

What distinguishes an energy drink from other soft drinks is its high level of caffeine, along with additives like taurine (an amino acid), B-12 (a vitamin) and guarana extract (from an Amazonian fruit). All are believed to boost flagging energy levels.

Many of these drinks pack in around 100 milligrams of caffeine per can, about the same as a cup of coffee. But for coffee you need hot water, and for that you need to light a fire or plug into some electricity, and when you are hunkered down in a muddy trench, these are not easy things to do.

Of course, there are health concerns about consuming too much caffeine, which can lead to shaky hands, high blood pressure and stomach issues. A 2018 study of American soldiers found that high consumption of energy drinks



IBRAHIM O'REILLY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Troops are hooked on the drinks, some of which are specially made for this war.

candy, cactus, even cannabis — with names like Jungle, Boost and Stalker.

You see the cans everywhere. Tucked into ammo vests. Jangling around backpacks with bullets. On the back of tanks. Crushed empties piled in trenches next to dead Russians.

Ukrainian companies market these drinks to appeal to frontline troops and the fighting spirit they embody, giving them camouflage labels or patriotic mottos and names such as Volia, which means, loosely — there's no direct translation — freedom and will.

"We wanted a slice of the action," said Marco Tkachuk, the chief executive of IDS Ukraine, the owner of the Morshynska bottling plant and Volia brand.

Morshynska is a water company based about 45 miles south of the city of Lviv. It made its mark years ago by tapping into natural springs in the Carpathian Mountains and packaging the water in 1.5 liter plastic bottles that have become ubiquitous across Ukraine.

But in 2022, Mr. Tkachuk, along with other Ukrainian beverage executives, realized something significant was happening as the strains of war intersected with the global energy drinks craze.

Russia's invasion had upended

Oleksandra Mykolayshyn, Katya Lachina and Julie Cresswell contributed reporting.



EMILE DOORE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, drinking Red Bull while conducting strike missions last month. Left, cases stacked outside a shop popular with soldiers near the front line in eastern Ukraine.

explained that their formula was concocted a little differently — it's based on mineral water and uses fructose and glucose instead of regular refined sugar. ("They say sugar works better for uplift, but we found some examples in China that used fructose and glucose," he said.)

The soldiers liked the taste, and the result was a drink that Mr. Tkachuk conceded was not necessarily healthy but "healthier."

Some soldiers said they would rather carry energy drinks into battle than bread. Others said they had become frontline currency.

"Energy drinks in the army are not just a drink but the most popular gift," said Anton Filatov, a film critic turned soldier.

(The Russians have their own favorites, including some patriotically packaged with a red star.)

Last August, Psycho took a piece of shrapnel a millimeter above his eye. He was disoriented, bleeding and in shock.

"I crawled back to a position and found a can of Burn," he said. He guzzled it and said he felt better immediately.

"In war you're trying to value these little things," Psycho explained. "Imagine. Just a can of Burn. But my mood was so happy."

was "significantly related" to depression, anxiety, aggression and, paradoxically, fatigue.

Bacha, a Ukrainian infantry sergeant, said that one of his soldiers, who had a heart condition, had died last winter. The unit wondered whether it might have been connected to his habit of drinking 10 cans a day. Bacha said the man was found slumped in the toilet, with an energy drink in his hand.

Psycho dismisses the medical risks. Before the war, he said, he was a paramedic, fitness freak and taekwondo champion. In pre-war pictures, he looked like a cross between a Calvin Klein underwear model and Mister Universe. He has been decorated with several medals and was recently wounded in the leg.

"I've been drinking these since I was 14," he said. "There's nothing wrong with them."

IDS Ukraine, one of Eastern Europe's biggest bottlers, said it was donating as many as 40,000 cans a month to Ukraine's military. Soldiers have been part of their process from the beginning, starting with the label: an ancient Ukrainian soldier — a Cossack — glaring over a handlebar mustache.

When the company rolled out its product last year, it asked military units to test it. Mr. Tkachuk

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War in Ukraine

As Europe Marks D-Day, Putin Talks Nuclear War

Boasts of Russia's Might at a Global Forum

By NEIL MACFARQUHAR

President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia said on Friday that even the combined arsenals of Europe and the United States would be no match for Russia's in a nuclear confrontation, but that "I hope this is never going to happen."

He reasoned that Moscow's supremacy in the Ukraine war has made that grim scenario unlikely.

"The use is possible in an exceptional case — in the event of a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country," Mr. Putin told a large audience of the Russian elite and foreign dignitaries gathered for the main session of the four-day St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. "I don't think that such a case has come."

As Mr. Putin spoke, President Biden was in Europe to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day, when Allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy, leading to the defeat of Nazi Germany. The Russian assault on Ukraine meant the stakes were equally high today, Mr. Biden said, suggesting that the voices of the fallen "are summoning us" to defend Western values.

At the annual gathering in St. Petersburg, Mr. Putin invariably presents a glowing assessment of Russia's domestic and foreign affairs, and this year was no exception. The country's economy was growing despite a battery of Western sanctions, he said, and Russia was fostering an alternative to the American-dominated global financial order as Moscow's armed forces were prevailing on the battlefield.

"Mr. Putin is a great master at selling optimism, and this is a whole strategy — in Russia today, optimism is the official religion and mandatory state ideology," said Kirill Rogov, a former Russian government adviser who now leads Re: Russia, a Vienna-based policy research organization. Many of the positive economic indicators are driven by massive government spending on defense industries, he noted.

Given the large foreign presence at the forum, Mr. Putin often

Promoting restraint as Russian forces make advances in Ukraine.

uses a more measured tone than when he is addressing a strictly domestic audience.

The hawkish moderator, Sergei Karaganov, a prominent political scientist, repeatedly pressed Mr. Putin to agree that the nuclear option was the best way to win the war, that Russia should hold "a nuclear pistol to the temple" of the West.

In 1993, Russia abandoned the Soviet pledge of no first use of nuclear weapons, fearing its weakened military forces could not deter an American attack, however unlikely. While noting that Russia's nuclear doctrine could change, Mr. Putin swept aside Mr. Karaganov's remark.

"We don't have that need," he said of using nuclear weapons as a last resort to preserve national sovereignty. "Because our armed forces are not just gaining experience, they are increasing their effectiveness."

Mr. Putin suggested that saber rattling was counterproductive, although Western countries have accused him of doing just that back in 2022, when the tide was running against Russia in the war and again, recently, after the U.S. allowed Ukraine to use American weapons against military targets in Russia. "I would like to ask everyone not to speak of the possibility of using nuclear weapons in vain," he said.

When Mr. Karaganov asked the president whether a negotiated settlement was possible even with what the moderator called unreliable interlocutors like the West and Ukraine, Mr. Putin quoted Stalin, saying that sometimes there was no alternative. Mr. Putin also repeated the idea that the government of Ukraine was illegitimate because President Volodymyr Zelensky's five-year term had expired and new elections were postponed amid the war.

Mr. Putin also suggested that any peace treaty would have to be negotiated along the lines of previous agreements in Minsk and Istanbul. Neither of those succeeded in preventing the conflict. While Mr. Zelensky participated in the D-Day commemoration on Friday, Russia was not invited, despite its instrumental Allied role in World War II. Some Russian commentators took um-

brage. Olga Skabueva, a prominent Russian propagandist on state television, mocked Mr. Biden in a post on the Telegram messaging app, saying that "he went into a trance and contacted the souls of dead World War II veterans."

Others, however, noted how changes at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum showed just how much Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine war had isolated the country. That has made the Kremlin desperate for any allies, even the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan once ostracized by Moscow as a terrorist organization. China and India, both major purchasers of Russian oil, did not send high-level delegations.

"Once dubbed 'Russia's Davos'



ANATOLY MALTYEV/RIA NOVOSTI/GETTY IMAGES

and attended by democratically elected presidents and the CEOs of major global corporations, this year's guest list is looking distinctly more war-crimey," the in-

dependent Novaya Gazeta newspaper, published outside Russia, wrote in a summary of the events. It further noted that "the presidents of Bolivia and Zimbabwe

the only heads of state in evidence, "and persona non grata terror outfit the Taliban just thrilled to be invited anywhere."

One of the few frissons of excite-

Vladimir Putin's daughter Katerina Tikhonova, shown onscreen, participating in a forum in Russia.

ment at the forum this year was the appearance for the first time of both Mr. Putin's adult daughters on panel discussions, which have always featured a who's who of the Russian elite.

The two women use different surnames, and the president has repeatedly declined to acknowledge publicly that Maria Vorontsova, 39, and Katerina Tikhonova, 37, were his daughters, even as both took prominent roles at public institutions.

Ms. Tikhonova, who first entered the public limelight years ago through international acrobatic rock 'n' roll dance competitions, spoke remotely to a panel on Thursday about the effort to substitute Russian products for imports, long a pet project for Mr. Putin. Her sister, Ms. Vorontsova, on Friday addressed the use of innovation in biotechnology. Neither was identified as Mr. Putin's offspring.



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Milana Mazavea and Alina Lobzina contributed reporting.

Israeli Military Rescues Four Hostages in Intense Gaza Operation

From Page 1

no hurry to wind down the conflict or to address the issue of who should govern Gaza after the war. Given the hostage rescue, Benny Gantz, a member of Mr. Netanyahu's war cabinet who has threatened to depart over Mr. Netanyahu's refusal to talk about a postwar plan for Gaza, indefinitely postponed a news conference scheduled for Saturday evening, citing "recent events."

Mr. Hagan, the Israeli military spokesman, said the Israeli Air Force struck Nuseirat during the rescue in order to enable Israeli forces to extract the hostages safely.

"This was a mission in the heart of a civilian neighborhood, where Hamas had intentionally hidden among homes where there were civilians, and armed militants guarding the hostages," Mr. Hagan said.

Video showed people running for cover as bombs rained down. After the airstrikes, the streets were so clogged with rubble that ambulances and emergency services in central Gaza were unable to respond to many of the calls to transport the wounded to hospitals, the Gazan Health Ministry said.

Video from inside Al Aqsa Martyrs' Hospital, near Nuseirat, shared by the ministry showed chaotic scenes as medical staff struggled to treat bloodied victims lying side by side on the floor. Two men held up IV bags while next to them a wounded person, whose face was bandaged, writhed under a blanket.

Reports of the numbers killed and wounded varied wildly in the confusion after the attack. Two Gaza health officials said that more than 200 people were killed in the strikes in Nuseirat, including women and children. They did not say how many of those killed were militants.

Mr. Hagan said the number killed should be "less than 100," based on information he had seen. It was not possible to verify either number.

In a post on Telegram, Abu Obeida, the spokesman of Hamas's military wing, said Israel killed some hostages during its rescue mission on Saturday. His claims could not be independently verified. He also suggested that Hamas would take punitive measures against the hostages remaining in Gaza.

News of the hostage rescue was met with joy and relief across Israel.

The main Israeli television stations switched to live coverage of the rescue and its aftermath, breaking the customary quiet and prerecorded programming typical of the Sabbath.

Spontaneous celebrations broke out across the country, and Israeli television broadcast images of the gatherings. In Tel Aviv, a lifeguard at a beach announced the news of the rescue to a cheering crowd of sunbathers.

Isabel Kershner and Adam Rasmussen contributed reporting from Jerusalem. Yara Bayoumy from London and Michael D. Shear from Paris.



EWAN BABA/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

from the lifeguard tower, according to social media posts.

The abduction of Ms. Argamani, in particular, became a symbol of the brutality of the Hamas attack on Oct. 7. In a video from the scene that day, Palestinian assailants can be seen driving Ms. Argamani away on a motorcycle as she cries for help and reaches out to her boyfriend, Avinatan Or. His fate remains unknown.

After her rescue, Ms. Argamani spoke with Mr. Netanyahu. "I'm so emotional, it's been so long since I heard Hebrew," she said in a recording of the call released by the prime minister's office.

In a recorded video statement, Yoav Argamani, Ms. Argamani's father, thanked everyone who was involved in securing his daughter's freedom, including Mr. Netanyahu.

"But we cannot forget — there are 120 hostages who must be released," Mr. Argamani said, calling on Israelis to join a weekly rally in solidarity with the remaining hostages in Gaza. "We must make every effort, in every way possible, to bring them here to Israel, to their families."

President Biden said Saturday in Paris that he welcomed "the safe rescue of four hostages that were returned to their families in Israel," adding, "We won't stop working until all the hostages come home and a cease-fire is reached, and it's essential to happen." Mr. Biden spoke after meeting



ISRAELI ARMY/SHANDOUT, VIA REUTERS

ing with President Emmanuel Macron of France.

Yoav Gallant, Israel's defense minister, hailed what he called a "complex operation" by Israeli soldiers, special forces and intelligence, who he said had "operated with extraordinary courage under heavy fire."

Israeli intelligence officers, Mr. Hagan said, worked for weeks in an attempt to assemble the pieces required for the operation to fall into place. Herzl Halevi, the military chief of staff, as well as the head of Israel's domestic intelligence service, both gave the final go-ahead on Saturday morning.

The Israeli police special forces unit, the Yamam, was also involved, and one of its members, Chief Inspector Arnon Zamora, was seriously wounded in combat and later died of his injuries, an Israeli police spokesman said.

There was an American role as well. A team of U.S. hostage recovery officials stationed in Israel assisted in the Israeli military's effort by providing intelligence and other support, an American official said, speaking without attribution to discuss continuing operations.

The last successful raid to free hostages was in February when Israeli special operations forces raided a building in the southern Gazan city of Rafah and freed two captives held by Hamas.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Above, an image from a video shows Noa Argamani as she is seized on Oct. 7; left, Ms. Argamani is embraced by her father after being freed from captivity in Gaza. Top, Palestinians in the rubble of destroyed buildings on Saturday in central Gaza.

The first hostage to have been rescued, alone by Israeli security forces was Pvt. On Megidish, a soldier. Her rescue took place in late October, three weeks after the Hamas-led attack and days after Israel began its full-scale ground invasion of northern Gaza. Private Megidish, then 19, was abducted from the Nahal Oz military base, along Israel's border with Gaza, where she served as a field observer.

While the freeing of the hostages was cause for celebration on Saturday, it would seem an unlikely scenario for recovering all of the 120 or so who remain captive. That would appear to require a political settlement, which is what Secretary of State Antony J.

Blinken will be seeking to put together when he travels to the Middle East in the coming days.

The secretary is expected to push for a plan calling for a temporary cease-fire that would build to a permanent truce, a release of hostages and an eventual withdrawal of Israel from Gaza.

The trip will include stops in Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Qatar and will be Mr. Blinken's eighth trip to the region since the conflict began. In a statement on Friday, the State Department said Mr. Blinken would urge an agreement on the cease-fire proposal to "alleviate suffering in Gaza, enable a massive surge in humanitarian assistance and allow Palestinians to return to their neighborhoods."

Israel Is Using a U.S.-Made, Precision Guided Bomb in Airstrikes

By LARA JAKES

An American-made, precision guided bomb that homes in on specific targets and, ideally, limits civilian casualties, was used in airstrikes in Gaza that killed dozens of Palestinians, including women and children.

The weapon, the GBU-39, or small-diameter bomb, was used in an attack at a former United Nations school on Thursday and in a May 26 strike in Rafah. In both cases, the Israeli military defended its actions, saying the strikes were aimed at militants using civilians as human shields. The Gaza health authorities said that civilians had also been killed, and there were videos and pictures of women and children among the dead.

Two weapons experts told The New York Times that Israel has appeared to increase the use of the bombs since the start of the war, compared with the war's earliest days when it launched strikes in only 10 percent of airstrikes against Gaza. As a recent spate of Israeli strikes demonstrates, even a relatively diminutive bomb can inflict serious civilian casualties.

"The thing is, even using a smaller weapon, or using a precision guided weapon, doesn't mean you don't kill civilians, and it doesn't mean that all of your strikes are suddenly lawful," said Brian Costner, a weapons expert at Amnesty International.

Early in the war, the Israeli military

mounted full-scale invasions of Gaza cities with tanks, artillery and 2,000-pound bombs, earning it international condemnation for heavy civilian casualties.

Under prodding from the Biden administration, analysts said, Israel has shifted its fighting strategy toward low-intensity operations and targeted raids, and is now relying more heavily on the GBU-39. The bomb weighs 250 pounds, including 37 pounds of explosives, and is fired from warplanes.

Ryan Brobst, a military analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said the shift appeared to start in January or February and "likely explains the change in munitions used."

Last month, an unexploded GBU-39 was found at a school in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip, and the distinctive rear tail fin of the same kind of bomb turned up at the scene of a May 13 strike farther south on a family home and school in Nuseirat that killed at least as many as 30.

And remnants of GBU-39s showed up outside residential homes that were hit by deadly Israeli airstrikes in Rafah in April, at an unidentified location in Gaza in March, and in Tal-Al Sultan in January, analysts said.

These examples of Israel's use of the GBU-39s represent only a fraction of what experts estimate have, overall, been at least tens of thousands of airstrikes with a variety of weapons. But wreckage found in the aftermath of airstrikes and requests to replenish



SANAR ABU ELDOUF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The remains of a GBU-39 guided bomb that did not explode on display at the Explosives Engineering Exhibition in Gaza City.

ish Israeli stockpiles signal that Israel clearly has stepped up its use of the GBU-39s, several analysts said.

"We've been seeing a lot more GBU-39 scrap in the last few months," Mr. Costner said. "The trend has been from bigger to smaller." (However, he said, investigators for Amnesty continue to see evidence of large munitions like the Mark-80 series, which weigh up to 2,000 pounds and were launched into densely populated areas early in the war.)

Only the Israeli military has a precise list of how often, and where, it has used GBU-39s since the war began in October, after Hamas militants killed 1,200 Israelis and took 250 hostages, Israel says. Israeli military officials did not answer questions about

the weapon in Gaza, but said in a written statement to The New York Times on Thursday that "when the type of target and the operational circumstances allow, the I.D.F. prefers to use lighter munitions."

The statement went on to say, "The munitions chosen by the I.D.F. are chosen in a way that match the type of munition to the specific target, with the intention of accomplishing the military goal while taking the environment into account and mitigating the harm to the civilian population as much as possible."

During the first six weeks of the war, Israel routinely dropped 2,000-pound bombs in southern Gaza, where civilians had been told to move for their safety. The strikes reduced apartment build-

ings to huge craters and killed thousands of people, an investigation by The Times concluded in December.

In November, U.S. officials urged Israel to use smaller bombs to better protect civilians. Just a month earlier, the manufacturer of the GBU-39, Boeing Corp., had expedited delivery of 1,000 of the weapons from a 2021 order that had not yet been completed.

By December, President Biden was warning Israel that it was losing global support in the war because of "the indiscriminate bombing that takes place."

"We have made it clear to the Israelis, and they're aware, that the safety of innocent Palestinians is still of great concern," Mr. Biden said on Dec. 12. "And so the actions they're taking must be consistent with attempting to do everything possible to prevent innocent Palestinian civilians from being hurt, murdered, killed, lost."

But even the smaller bombs have caused collateral damage. The first known use of GBU-39s in the current war was on Oct. 24 in Khan Younis, where two family homes were struck with four of the bombs, one expert said.

In January, Israel struck the top two floors of a five-story residential building in Rafah shortly before 11 p.m. It killed 18 civilians, including four women and 10 children, according to an Amnesty International investigation that concluded that the bomb used in the strike was a GBU-39. It was among examples compiled in April by Amnesty International of potentially unlawful use of Ameri-

can-made weapons in Israel, going back to January 2023.

The State Department concluded in May that Israel had most likely violated humanitarian standards for failing to protect civilians in Gaza, but said it had not found specific instances that would justify withholding American military aid.

Current and former U.S. officials said they generally do not share information on its use of GBU-39s with Washington, and a State Department system created in August to track civilian deaths by American-made weapons in foreign conflicts has struggled to compile a comprehensive list. One U.S. official said the May 26 airstrike in Rafah was being investigated as part of the new process to determine whether humanitarian laws are violated with the use of American arms.

Israel has been deploying the GBU-39s since 2008, using them in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon. The bombs have a range of at least 40 miles and are guided by GPS with coordinates for specific targets set before the weapons are launched. Experts say the GBU-39 is so precise that it can hit specific rooms within buildings.

The United States has delivered at least 9,500 GBU-39s to Israel since 2012, including the 1,000 shipped last fall under the expedited order, according to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which tracks arms transfers. Mr. Brobst, of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said more have probably been shipped since.

A Young Political Star Is Raising the Prospects of France's Far Right

By ROGER COHEN

PARIS — France has a taste for revolutions, and in the 28-year-old Jordan Bardella, it has found a mild-mannered, impeccably dressed insurgent who vows to upend the politics of the country in order to save it from “disappearance.”

Mr. Bardella, the president of the National Rally, is the cherished disciple of Marine Le Pen, 55, the perennial far-right presidential candidate. She once called him the “lion cub”; now she calls him “the lion.” A clean-cut, strong-jawed TikTok star, known for his love of candy, he has certainly shown a sure hand in the French political jungle.

As European Parliament elections unfold this weekend, Mr. Bardella, who led his party's campaign, seems poised for a victory that could reshape French politics. An Ipsos poll published this past week gave the National Rally some 33 percent of the vote, more than double the 16 percent of President Emmanuel Macron's centrist Renaissance party.

Even if the effective power of the European Union's only directly elected body is limited, this would be a stark repudiation of the French leader. As elsewhere in Europe, the normalization of the far right has proceeded apace.

It is as if a fractured France, weary of politics as usual and anxious about its future, has abruptly discovered a more acceptable version of the xenophobic politics that long cast the National Rally as a direct threat to French democracy. It has helped that Mr. Bardella is young, possesses a reassuring showmanship and does not bear the name Le Pen.

Indeed, his success has been such that a leadership battle looms. For now, Ms. Le Pen and her prodigal son are a hugging and seemingly harmonious duo (Mr. Bardella dates Ms. Le Pen's niece Nolwenn Olivier). But Mr. Bardella's popularity is such that there is a possibility the wunderkind will eclipse his maker.

Ms. Le Pen retains the stubborn hope of becoming president in 2027, when Mr. Macron's term ends. She has said she would make Mr. Bardella her prime minister if she became president.

“The moderate conservative right is dead in France, and, for the first time, it is possible that the National Rally will come to power,” said Jean-Yves Camus, a political scientist who studies nationalist movements in Europe.

Raised by his mother, an Italian immigrant, in the projects north of Paris, Mr. Bardella marks a break from the cookie-cutter technocrats formed in elite schools who have dominated French politics. He has recast — some would say sugarcoated — the angry message of the nationalist right so effectively that there is talk of “Bardellamania.”

“Our civilization can die,” Mr. Bardella told a crowd of more than 5,000 flag-waving supporters this past week, as chants of “Jordan! Jordan!” reverberated around a vast arena in Paris. “It can die because it will be submerged in migrants who will have changed our customs, culture and way of life irreversibly.”

Mr. Bardella's campaign director, Alexandre Loubet, said that in the event of a clear victory for the National Rally, the party “would demand the dissolution of the Na-



SUB ASTIN BOZON/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES



JEFF PACHAUD/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES



FRANCOIS LO PRESTU/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Jordan Bardella, top, the 28-year-old president of the far-right National Rally, has used his reassuring brand of showmanship to help his party rise in the polls and portray itself as the political home of people reasonably concerned that immigration is out of control.

tional Assembly” and new elections. “If Mr. Macron has a minimum of respect for the will of the French people,” Mr. Loubet said, “he would do so.”

Mr. Macron, who has three more years in office under term limits, is unlikely to do any such thing, no matter the outcome.

In Mr. Bardella's telling, always delivered in a level tone, Mr. Macron has brought France to the abyss through rampant immigration, a lax approach to lawlessness and violence, the loss of French identity, and “punitive” ecological change that makes life unaffordable.

“Everything is going from bad to worse,” said Alain Foy, a concierge who attended Mr. Bardella's rally in Paris. “Sometimes I can't believe what is happening, whether on immigration, purchasing power, insecurity, everything.” His sister, Marie Foy, added, “France is falling apart.”

Mr. Foy said that in the past, anyone disagreeing with the National Rally would quickly label Ms. Le Pen a racist or a fascist.

“But with Bardella,” he said, “the good thing is that he thinks the same, but they can't call him a racist because he's an immigrant child of Italian parents.”

The exact nature of Mr. Bardella's upbringing in the Seine-Saint-Denis suburb is unclear. He has portrayed it as a childhood of unrelenting hardship in projects afflicted by drug dealing and violence, where you could be killed for refusing someone a cigarette, and where his mother, who separated from his father when he was 1, struggled to make ends meet.

However, Mr. Bardella attended a private school, the Lycée Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-la-Salle, where the fees were paid by his father, who had a small business renting coffee and vending machines, said Pascal Humeau, who was close to Mr. Bardella for many years.

Mr. Bardella proved to be a good student with strong political convictions, and in 2012, at age 16, he enrolled in the party he now leads, which was then called the National Front. He had interned for a week with the local police

precinct, an experience that appears to have contributed to his political orientation.

“It was not a working-class upbringing, that's clear, but nor was it privileged in any way,” Mr. Camus said. Although he had gradu-

An even-toned voice raises the specter of cultural ‘death.’

ated with distinction from high school, Mr. Bardella dropped out of college to focus on politics, essentially the only work he has done.

With his deliberate manner and his charismatic good looks, he was quickly identified in Ms. Le Pen's entourage as an ideal representative of a reinvented National Rally, stripped of the anti-Semitic invective of its founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who called the Holocaust a

“detail” of history.

Ms. Le Pen, intent on bringing her party into the mainstream, pushed him forward. Mr. Humeau, a former journalist, became Mr. Bardella's media trainer in 2018. In him, he discovered a “rather sad young man, repeating Ms. Le Pen's formulas, an empty shell, very controlled, but knowing little of what was happening in France or the world.”

Mr. Bardella was, however, a quick study. He learned to smile and appear more relaxed, retaining an air of “consensual humility” before eventually becoming what Mr. Humeau called “the media beast of today who scares his opponents.”

To what end, I asked? “He has had one objective since the age of 17 — to become prime minister and president,” Mr. Humeau said, “and I don't think anyone can derail him.”

If Mr. Bardella has contrived to present a softer face of the National Rally, then there is little or no evidence that his own views or the party's have moderated.

Mass immigration — some 3.1 million immigrants entered the European Union in 2022, more than double the number the previous year — is the core issue in the European election, polls show, along with the struggles of French families to make ends meet as the war in Ukraine has driven up energy and food prices.

In this context, the National Rally has successfully portrayed itself as the home of French patriotism, the party of people reasonably concerned that immigration is out of control.

With his Italian background, Mr. Bardella has been able to argue that the issue is not immigration itself, but the refusal of many migrants to assimilate. On the left, the very word patriotism in France tends to be viewed skeptically, a first step to nationalism and even war.

The benefits that immigrants can bring to societies with shrinking labor forces and tax bases are generally overlooked. Instead, the focus of the right is on migrants, particularly North African Muslims, benefiting from handouts and changing the looks, habits and cultures of urban neighborhoods.

“We have the courage and lucidity to say that if France becomes the country of everyone, it will no longer be the nation of anyone,” Mr. Bardella said this past week. “With the deregulation of migration, totalitarian Islamism does not only give its fanatics an order to separate themselves from the French Republic, but also to conquer it, in order to impose its laws and morals.”

Mr. Bardella has accused Mr. Macron of wanting to expand the 27-member European Union to 37 members, including the Turkey “of the Islamist” President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and of intending to give up France's veto over E.U. foreign policy decisions.

Turkish E.U. accession talks have in fact long been frozen, and Mr. Macron's attachment to French sovereignty is fierce. The mildness of Mr. Bardella's tone can mask a readiness to bend the truth.

He has tried, with vague evasions, to play down his party's longtime closeness to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, a policy now revised, despite the repeated pro-Russian votes of his party in the European Parliament. It voted in 2021 against a resolution in support of Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity” for example.

If Mr. Bardella has been campaigning by raising the specter of the “death” of France, Mr. Macron has also been speaking in apocalyptic terms of late, warning of the “death” of Europe if it does not achieve “strategic autonomy.”

The difference is that Mr. Bardella believes salvation lies in less Europe, not more. The European elections will also be a bellwether of the European idea itself. “I worry that people won't vote for Ms. Le Pen because of her name, with her father and all,” said Jacky Laquer, a retired factory worker who recently attended a Bardella rally in the north of France. “Bardella embodies the future of France.”

Certainly, Mr. Bardella appears unlikely to disappear from the political scene soon. At 28, he has 40 years of political life ahead of him, Mr. Camus said. “That's not nothing.”

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Macron Hosts Biden in Paris, Honoring a Complicated Bond

Observing D-Day As Two Wars Rage

By ROGER COHEN and PETER BAKER

NORMANDY, France — In the sunlight of Normandy, before the surviving American veterans who eight decades ago helped turn the tide of the war against Hitler, President Emmanuel Macron of France spoke this past week of the “bond of blood shed for liberty” that ties his country to the United States.

It is a bond that goes all the way back to the founding of the United States in 1776 and the decisive French support for American independence against the British. Tempestuous, often strained as France battles at American postwar leadership in Europe, the ties between Paris and Washington are nonetheless resilient.

President Biden’s five-day stay in France, a long visit for an American president, especially in an election year, is a powerful testament to that friendship. But it illustrates its double-edged nature. French gratitude for American sacrifice as ever vies uneasily with Gaullist restiveness over any hint of subservience.

Those competing strains will form the backdrop of a lavish state dinner at the Élysée Palace Saturday, when Mr. Macron will reciprocate the state visit that Mr. Biden hosted for him at the White House in December 2022, the first of his administration.

The toasts and bonhomie will not fully mask the tensions between Washington and Paris — over the war in Gaza, how best to support Ukraine and the unpredictable ways Mr. Macron tries to assert France’s independence from the United States.

No recent French president has been as insistent as Mr. Macron in declaring Europe’s need for “strategic autonomy” and insisting that it “should never be a vassal of the United States.” Yet he has stood shoulder to shoulder with Mr. Biden in seeing Ukraine’s right to freedom of choice as no less than a battle for European liberty, an extension of the fight for freedom that led allied forces to scale the cliffs of the Pointe du Hoc in 1944.

“You can’t help seeing the parallel,” Mr. Macron said this past week in a TV interview, portraying Ukraine as “a people confronted by a power I would not name.” He said that, in fact, there is not the same ideology, but an imperialist power that has trampled on international law.

Even so, when the cameras are off, American officials privately talk about their French counterparts with a tone of eye-rolling exasperation. French analysts express frustration at what they consider the Biden administration’s overbearing approach to trans-Atlantic leadership.

Charles A. Kupchan, a former adviser to President Barack Obama at the Council on Foreign Relations, said “the hot mess that the United States is in right now politically” is forcing European leaders to calibrate “whether they can or should put all of their marbles in the U.S. basket.”

That applies particularly to Ukraine, which former President Donald J. Trump, the presumptive 2024 Republican presidential nominee, has not supported in its war with Russia. “In some ways,” he said, “there may have been too much U.S. leadership because it does come about that the U.S. steps back from Ukraine and Europe fills the gap, that’s not going to be easy.”

In an interview with Time magazine posted this past week, Mr. Biden reflected on an early concern of Mr. Macron after he beat Mr. Trump. “I said, ‘Well, America’s back,’” Mr. Biden recounted. “Macron looked at me, and he said: ‘For how long? For how long?’”

Behind that question lurked an-



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, from left, Brigitte Macron, President Emmanuel Macron of France, President Biden and Jill Biden on Thursday at Normandy American Cemetery in France. Left, Mr. Macron and Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on Friday.



LUKOVIC MARIN/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

other: How much American presence in Europe does Mr. Macron’s France really want?

The differences were showcased most prominently in February when Mr. Macron shocked American and European allies alike by holding out the possibility of sending NATO troops into Ukraine, something Mr. Biden has flatly ruled out for fear of escalating the war into a direct conflict with a nuclear-powered Russia.

“There are no American soldiers at war in Ukraine,” Mr. Biden declared in his State of the Union address just days after Mr. Macron’s trial balloon. “And I am determined to keep it that way.”

Mr. Macron, by contrast, apparently is not. Speaking to journalists on Friday after a meeting in Paris with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine, he asked: “Is it an escalation when Ukraine

asks us to train mobilized soldiers on the its sovereign soil? No.”

The French intention appears to be to send a group of military trainers to Ukraine, if possible as part of a broader European effort. Of the Ukrainian proposal that training be done on its soil, Mr. Macron said, “We will use the coming days to finalize the broadest possible coalition to accede to Ukraine’s request.”

Mr. Macron has previously offered to train a 4,500-strong brigade of Ukrainian soldiers. It was not clear where this would take place, although in the past such training has occurred outside Ukraine. Officials close to Mr. Macron said no announcement of the dispatch was imminent, apparently signaling it would not take place during Mr. Biden’s stay, which would almost certainly have appeared provocative.

The two leaders are a study in contrasts. Mr. Biden, 81, has spent more than a half-century in Washington and is a creature of the American establishment who believes passionately in the U.S.-led order created after World War II. When France balked at the U.S. invasion of Iraq, he was incensed, seeing an act of unacceptable defiance from a country that owed its freedom to the United States.

Mr. Macron, 46, is a restless 21st-century president eager to reassert French leadership on the European stage and willing to provoke friends with challenging ideas and statements, suggesting in 2019 that NATO had suffered a “brain death.”

Gérard Araud, a former French ambassador to Washington, said the two presidents differ not only on the theoretical Western tropes on the ground, but on where and how the war should end.

“An explanation between the two heads of state is more than ever necessary,” Mr. Araud said. “It is not only the conduct of the war at stake, but also the prospect of a negotiation after Nov. 5 if Biden is re-elected. What are the real war goals of the West beyond the empty rhetoric about the 1991 borders of Ukraine?”

The chemistry between the leaders has seemed good. “They do get along very well personally,”

said Matthias Matthijs, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies.

But tensions remain, he said, over Ukraine and over the EU Emissions Reduction Act signed by Mr. Biden that provides subsidies for electric vehicles and other clean technologies. The Europeans consider it unfair competition.

France has also been frustrated over the degree of U.S. support for Israel in the war in Gaza. The complaints center on the perceived failure to stop the Israeli advance into Rafah and to rein in Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister. But they also include Washington’s rejection of recognition of Palestinian statehood and hesitations over how Gaza should be governed postwar.

“Arab states have never been so involved and so ready to normalize relations with Israel if a credible pathway to a Palestinian state is established,” said one senior French official who in line with diplomatic practice requested anonymity. “It is frustrating.”

France has not recognized a Palestinian state, as four other European countries did in the past month, but it did vote at the United Nations in May to support including Palestine as a full member of the organization. The United States vetoed against.

Still, with the Biden administration, differences can be finessed, even as the possible return of Mr. Trump to the White House in November induces anxiety in Europe. The leaders have in common the fact that each of them is trying to fend off nationalist right-wing forces at home, embodied by Mr. Trump and Marine Le Pen, a leader of France’s far-right National Rally party.

While president, Mr. Trump treated allies with scorn. He recently made clear he has not changed his mind about them, saying he would be just fine if Russia attacked NATO members that do not spend enough on defense.

Condemning such isolationism, Mr. Biden said of Ukraine in Normandy that “we will not walk away.” The target of his rhetoric was clear: his opponent in the Nov. 5 election. As for Mr. Macron, speaking in English, he told the American veterans, “You are at home, if I may say.”

It was a reminder that when it comes to the United States and France, regular skirmishes do not undo a centennial bond.

2 Presidents Pledge Unity In Support For Ukraine

By MICHAEL D. SHEAR and PETER BAKER

PARIS — President Biden and President Emmanuel Macron of France stressed on Saturday how much they agreed over such other world affairs, including the war in Ukraine, even as their countries have expressed sharply different views of the fighting in Gaza between Israel and Hamas.

Appearing briefly together before reporters after two days of D-Day remembrances, the two presidents declined to take any questions and papered over their stark differences about the Middle East.

Instead, they both asserted the enduring strength of the American-French partnership on climate, the economy, European security and cultural ties.

“Today, I proudly stand with France to support freedom and democracy around the world,” Mr. Biden said, as the two men emerged from a closed-door meeting at the Élysée Palace.

“We see eye to eye on this war raging in Ukraine,” Mr. Macron noted, and he added that he hoped “all members of the G7 will agree to a \$50 billion solidarity fund for Ukraine,” referring to the Group of 7 industrialized nations.

The French president’s comments suggested that the two leaders had reached common ground over a plan to leverage proceeds from frozen Russian assets to provide an upfront loan up to \$50 billion to Ukraine.

American officials had said heading into the meeting that France was the main holdout for such a plan and that they were hoping to win support during the Paris visit.

On Gaza, Mr. Macron noted his government’s support for an Israeli cease-fire proposal that Mr. Biden has strongly backed. But the French president also directly challenged Israel’s role in the conflict, saying it was “unacceptable” for the government’s bombardment.

“It is not acceptable that Israel should not open all checkpoints to humanitarian aid, as requested by

Biden and Macron do not mention discord over the war in Gaza.

the United Nations community for months,” Mr. Macron said. He said Israeli operations in Gaza “should stop.”

France has supported the International Criminal Court’s decision to seek warrants for the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Yulia Svirid, the leader of Hamas in Gaza.

By contrast, Mr. Biden has condemned that effort, calling it an “unacceptable comparison of the two leaders.”

France also voted in the United Nations in May to include Palestine as a full member of the organization, something the United States opposes.

Neither Mr. Biden nor Mr. Macron mentioned any of the disagreements about the Israeli-Hamas conflict.

In a departure from the usual practice when American presidents meet with foreign leaders, reporters from France and the United States were not allowed to ask questions after the Saturday statements, which lasted a combined 16 minutes. In most cases, the two leaders allow reporters from each country to ask at least two questions.

John F. Kirby, a national security spokesman for the White House, declined to explain why that was not the case on Saturday.

“This was the arrangement that was made,” he told reporters last week. “As you know, with any bilateral meeting or, in this case, a state visit, all of that is hashed out between the two sides. And it was decided in our discussion and our planning for this visit that that’s what they would do and make statements to the press.”

Mr. Macron’s warm embrace of Mr. Biden despite the tensions in the relationship stood in sharp contrast to the mood when President Donald J. Trump visited in November 2020.

Just minutes before Air Force One landed in Paris then, Mr. Trump posted a message online accusing Mr. Macron of being “very insulting.”

Mr. Macron then gave a speech assailing nationalism just weeks after Mr. Trump declared himself an American nationalist.

On Saturday, by contrast, Mr. Macron praised Biden as “a partner who respects Europeans,” a line that sounded like a distinction from Mr. Trump, who often denigrated European leaders. “I am proud to be in Europe’s side,” Mr. Macron said.

“You’ve become a good friend,” Mr. Biden said in response.

Vietnamese Journalist Arrested Amid Crackdown on Online Dissent

By SU-LEE WEE

The authorities in Vietnam have arrested one of the country’s most prominent journalists and accused him of “abusing democratic freedoms” by posting articles on Facebook that “insulted” the interests of the state and the legitimate rights and interests of organizations and individuals.

The journalist, Truong Huy San, known to many by his pen name, Huy Duc — was taken into custody last week, according to a prominent Vietnamese blogger. But there was no official confirmation until Friday night, when state news media reported that the Ministry of Public Security was investigating Mr. San for his Facebook posts.

There were no details on the content of the posts.

The arrest is an ominous sign for other writers in Vietnam. Journalists have long been a target for the country’s ruling Communist Party, which frequently crushes

dissent. But Mr. San had for years managed to navigate the very small space for independent thought, often publishing articles that criticized the government. His connections with high-level officials were thought to have been a buffer — until now.

Mr. San’s case is part of a sweeping repression of civil society that many rights groups say has expanded in scale and scope in recent years.

The law that he has been accused of violating is an “overly broad” one that the authorities frequently use against critics of the government, according to Human Rights Watch.

“Huy Duc is the most influential journalist in Vietnam,” said Ben Swanton, a director at the 88 Project, a U.S.-based nonprofit that focuses on human rights issues in Vietnam. “His arrest represents an alarming attack on freedom of the press and is the latest in an ongoing crackdown on reformers.”

Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and PEN America have all called on the government to release Mr. San.

Vietnamese state media reported on June 5 that Mr. San’s case together with the arrest of a lawyer, Tran Dinh Trinh, who was charged with the same offense as Mr. San. Mr. Trinh, a former deputy director of the Hanoi Bar Association, has represented many clients in high-profile legal cases. He was also arrested because of articles he had posted on Facebook.

After Mr. San, 62, disappeared on June 1, his Facebook account, with more than 350,000 followers, was deactivated, his posts taken down.

Screenshots saved by the 88 Project show that on May 26, Mr. San took aim at the police on Facebook with a headline: “A COUNTRY CANNOT DEVELOP BASED ON FEAR.” He criticized the concentration of power under

the Ministry of Public Security, which was most recently led by To Lam, the newly appointed president.

On May 28, Mr. San posted an article criticizing the crackdown on corruption initiated by Vietnam’s powerful Communist Party chief, Nguyen Phi Trong. Mr. San wrote that combating graft needed to be done through institutions and not by “eliminating” several corrupt high-ranking officials.

In 2016, Mr. Trong said that his “blazing furnace” campaign against graft would eradicate “bad roots” and purify the party, but it has also rolled Vietnam with an unusual number of high-level resignations.

If Mr. Trong “does not show a political road map to make the country more democratic, his cleanliness is meaningless,” Mr. San wrote in his May 28 post.

Mr. San received a Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship to study at

the University of Maryland in 2005 and 2006. When he returned to Vietnam in 2006, he founded a popular blog that published social and political commentaries. The Vietnamese authorities shut down the blog in 2010.

In 2012, Mr. San spent a year at Harvard University on a Nieman fellowship, during which he wrote a journalistic account of Vietnam’s postwar boom, “The Winning Side.” The book, which is banned in Vietnam, is widely considered to be the definitive account of postwar Vietnamese history and politics.

According to the 2024 World Press Freedom Index issued by Reporters Without Borders, Vietnam ranks 174th out of the 180 countries and territories.

The country is “the fifth worst jailer of journalists worldwide,” with at least 10 reporters locked up as of December, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Biden is visiting France to attend ceremonies to commemorate D-Day and a state dinner.

In Belgium, Politics Meets 'The Bachelor' Ahead of E. U. Elections

By MATINASTEVIS-GRIDNEFF and KOBARYCKEWAERT

BRUSSELS — In the United States, Donald J. Trump and Joe Biden can barely agree to share a stage for a debate.

In Belgium, the politicians who will face off on Sunday in the country's most contested general election in years agreed to a four-episode reality show filmed over a weekend and set in a castle — most and all.

The show, a political version of "The Bachelor," called "The Conclave," transfixed Belgians in the run up to the vote for the country's national and regional parliaments. The elections are coinciding with those for the European Parliament this weekend, in which 27 European Union countries will vote.

As in many other European countries, the mainstream political establishment in Belgium has shrunk electorally. The far right has surged.

But for Belgium, that dynamic is further complicated by the divide between the country's French-speaking south, Wallonia, and its Dutch-speaking north, Flanders.

The show's conceit is centered on the personal dynamics between politicians who are rivals but must ultimately work together to manage the ree of the far right. Perhaps by putting them together for a few days, they can resolve some of their differences.

If nothing else, the show succeeded in airing the grievances that have made a far-right, anti-immigrant, Flemish secessionist party, Vlaams Belang, the election front-runner. A victory for the party could precipitate a crisis for Belgium by thrusting the issue of Flemish independence to the top of the political agenda and threatening to break the country in two.

Whether the show succeeded in facilitating real-world cooperation is another matter. The parties in the political mainstream have long struggled to come together in key moments, and Belgium has become famous for taking record time to form shaky, multiparty coalitions.

Vlaams Belang's meteoric rise has made that task more urgent and daunting.

Against the backdrop of the stunning grounds and grand interiors of Jemeppe Castle, a medieval chateau, Eric Goens, a journalist, plays host on "The Conclave" to seven prominent politicians from the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, Flanders.

They go for walks in the woods. They cook. They eat together. And they get into arguments.

There are moments of conflict and reconciliation; awkward silences and barely disguised disgust; even sobriety confessional interviews in a chapel.

Among the seven are Tom Van Grieken, the leader of Vlaams Belang, the sitting prime minister, Alexander De Croo, a liberal, and Petra De Sutter, a member of the Green party who is one of the country's deputy prime ministers, and the most senior trans politician in the European Union.

The Bedfellows Are Political

Vlaams Belang, which translates to Flemish Interest, was among the first in a wave of European far-right parties to capitalize on anti-migrant sentiment across Europe. Originally called Vlaams Blok, the party promoted the return of second- and third-generation Belgians of migrant descent to their ancestral homelands.

In 2004, the party was convicted of violating Belgium's anti-racism law and banned from standing in elections.

The party has since changed its name and image, but, critics say, little else. Belgium, a prosperous northern European country of 11 million people, is home to sizable migrant communities, including Muslims with North African roots, who remain the party's main target.

This has led all other Belgian political parties to make a long-standing vow to never govern with Vlaams Belang. The question is whether they can manage to uphold that promise if, as projected, Vlaams Belang comes first in the election on Sunday.

Just as pressing, the party wants Flanders — the northern region that is home to about 60 percent of the Belgian population — to secede from the federal state of Belgium and form its own country.

The question of how to manage Mr. Van Grieken's popularity is perhaps most pressing for Bart De Wever, who led the New Flemish Alliance, a conservative Flemish nationalist party. He was also among the politicians who participated in "The Conclave."

Mr. Van Grieken would like the two parties to join forces, form a Flemish government and use it as a launchpad to ultimately force Flemish independence.

Mr. De Wever wants Flemish independence, too, but calls the secessionist plan "a fantasy." A self-



IMON WOLFF/REUTERS/FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES



Belgium's prime minister, Alexander De Croo, and Bart De Wever, the leader of the New Flemish Alliance party, on "The Conclave." Above, a Vlaams Belang party meeting in Antwerp.

described pragmatist, he is running on a platform that would instead transfer still more powers from Belgium's federal government to its regions, including Flanders.

The tension between the two men boils over in a fireside scene that oozes reality-TV drama.

It's nighttime, and a relaxed Mr. Van Grieken sits by an outdoor fireplace, when Mr. De Wever steps in.

"Did you just start a campfire here?" Mr. De Wever asks.

"Yes, with these woke books that I want to ban, Bart," Mr. Van Grieken chuckles.

"It looks like everyone is gone to bed," Mr. De Wever says, looking around awkwardly.

"They don't want to hang out with us, Bart," Mr. Van Grieken says. "Your fate is that you always

end up with me down the line."

That is the scenario all of Belgium's political establishment would like to avoid. And while Mr. De Wever shares in that disdain for Vlaams Belang, he has long been vague about whether he will honor the vow never to govern with the party.

In another scene, a fellow politician confronts Mr. De Wever: Will he really get into bed with Vlaams Belang?

"I just told you, it's no," Mr. De Wever finally concedes. "I can't partner with someone who does-

n't respect democracy. Sorry, that's quite fundamental."

The conversation foreshadows the intense negotiations that will almost certainly follow Sunday's election. For the audience, the show offers a rare, fly-on-the-wall view into the country's messy politics.

"Maybe you start to understand why things are so hard between leader one and leader two," Mr. Goens, the show's host, said in an interview. "It goes very deep, and you never get to see that in the normal debate."

Bad Blood

"The Conclave" shows how these differences between leaders go far beyond ideology in Belgium. The notoriously protracted post-election negotiations of the past have also left deep scars.

Both supporters of liberal economic policies, one would expect current prime minister, Mr. De Croo, and Mr. De Wever to be natural political partners.

But the pair fell out over the last coalition negotiations, in which Mr. De Wever accused Mr. De

Croo of shyly undercutting him.

"I'm really not looking forward to this, because there is bad blood between us," Mr. De Wever tells the camera before confronting Mr. De Croo.

When the two men finally sit down together, Mr. De Croo tries to convince him that they can join forces this time around, but the conversation keeps going back to old grievances.

"Working together requires a certain amount of trust and reliability," Mr. De Wever tells Mr. De Croo. "That is completely missing."

Mr. De Croo eventually gives up. "You know, let's leave it at that."

"I think we are getting to the point where we are going to say things that we are going to regret," says Mr. De Wever.

Mr. De Croo tries to end on a positive note.

"I'm not a vindictive person," he says, "and if it's about making our country stronger for all Belgians and not splitting our country, then we can work together." That remains to be seen.

Billionaire Faces Sexual Assault Charges

By IAN AUSTEN

OTTAWA — Frank Stronach, the 91-year-old billionaire founder of one of the world's largest auto parts companies, was arrested and charged on Friday in connection with a sexual assault investigation.

In a brief news release, the police force for Peel Region, outside Toronto, said that the time frame of the crime, Mr. Stronach, was alleged to have committed spanned from the 1980s until last year.

Mr. Stronach, the Austrian-born founder of Magna International, was charged with offenses that included indecent assault, sexual assault and forcible confinement. He was released after being charged and will appear later at a court in Brampton, Ontario.

Brian Greenspan, Mr. Stronach's lawyer, said that his client "categorically denies the allegations of impropriety which have been brought against him."

He added: "He looks forward to the opportunity to fully respond to the charges and to maintain his legacy, both as a philanthropist and as an icon of the Canadian business community."

Mr. Stronach turned a one-man machine he founded in 1957 into a global enterprise. Under his management, Magna, which also

assembles vehicles for several automakers, including Mercedes-Benz, tried to take over both Chrysler and Opel, the European arm of General Motors.

Investors in Magna often chafed at how Mr. Stronach used his control over the company through a special class of share to involve it in various, sometimes unprofitable ventures unrelated to making car parts, including a failed restaurant chain, a glossy business magazine, golf courses and horse racing.

In 2010, Magna gave Mr. Stronach about \$1 billion to cede control.

The Stronach Group, which he founded and which is now run by his daughter, Belinda Stronach, owns or manages horse racing tracks throughout the United States.

In 2013, Team Stronach, a proboscis of a party founded by Mr. Stronach, won two seats in Austrian state parliaments.

In a statement, Tracy Furst, a Magna spokeswoman, said that it has no knowledge of the investigation or the allegations that have been raised beyond what has been

reported in the media.

The Stronach Group did not respond to a request for comment.

It is unclear why the charges were filed in Peel, which is part of the greater Toronto metropolitan area. Mr. Stronach lives in York, which is also in the Toronto area and where Magna has its headquarters. Constable Tyler Bell, a spokesman for the police, declined to comment on the investigation.

While he led Magna, which made him at one point Canada's highest-paid executive, Mr. Stronach often offered iconoclastic economic and political theories or comments that some found inappropriate. He began the company's 2007 annual meeting not by discussing his bid for Chrysler, but by asking shareholders who was more attractive to women, himself or his longtime aide, Manfred Gindl.

Mr. Stronach is the second Canadian billionaire to be charged with sex offenses in just over a week. The police in Montreal brought 21 sex-related charges against Robert G. Miller, the founder of Future Electronics, including several counts of sexual exploitation of minors. The police force said that he had had several young girls to perform sexual acts.



Frank Stronach



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Danish Prime Minister 'Shaken' by Attack

By MAYA TEKKELI

COPENHAGEN — Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen of Denmark was attacked on Friday evening in a busy square in Copenhagen in an assault that left her "shaken," her office said, though she was able to walk away. The police said they had made an arrest.

"We have a suspect in custody, and we are now investigating the matter," the Copenhagen Police said on Friday.

The motive for the attack is unclear. The suspect, whom the police on Saturday described as a 39-year-old man, is expected to appear in court on Saturday afternoon.

Kaly Soto contributed reporting.

The prime minister's office released a statement after the attack saying she had been "beaten," several news outlets reported, but it was unclear what injuries she had sustained. On Saturday, her office said she had been taken to a hospital and had sustained "minor whiplash," but was in otherwise good condition.

Several Danish politicians expressed their concern over the episode.

"Mette is naturally shocked by the assault," Magnus Heunicke, Denmark's environment minister, wrote on X. "I must say, it shakes all of us who are close to her."

Ms. Frederiksen, 46, has been prime minister since 2019. She leads the center-left Social Democrats.

The attack came just days before the general election in the European Union elections.

The assault also resonated beyond Denmark's borders, with the prime ministers of Finland and Sweden sending their support. It happened not even a month after Prime Minister Robert Fico of Slovakia was shot and badly wounded in an assassination attempt that he survived.

Ms. Frederiksen was in Norway on Thursday and gave a speech during commemorations for the 80th anniversary of D-Day. She honored the sacrifices of Danish soldiers and extolled the virtues of freedom, saying: "Freedom is not a legacy. Freedom is a fight, a battle, a struggle. Every day. Every hour. Right now."



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FRANCIS ROSSIGNOL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



CAMERON ALI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

At left, security forces celebrated a military coup in Bamako, Mali, in 2010. U.S. counterterrorism efforts in West Africa have largely failed, and troops have been ordered to leave several countries. At right, the \$110 million U.S. air base in Agadez, Niger. The U.S. said it would withdraw 1,000 military personnel from Niger and close the base by September.

In West Africa, Terror's Spread Shows Limits of U.S. Strategy

From Page 1

vested in that relationship and then we're asked to depart."

U.S. officials say they are retuning their approach to combat an insurgency that is rooted in local, not global, concerns. Competition for land, exclusion from politics and other grievances have swelled the ranks of the militants, more than any particular commitment to extremist ideology.

Instead of relying on big bases and a permanent military presence, officials say that the strategy will focus more on well-financed initiatives that include security, governance and development — paying for soldier training as well as for new electrification or water projects.

This kind of holistic approach has been tried with limited success, and U.S. officials and independent West Africa specialists say it faces steep hurdles now.

A U.S. diplomat in the region said that West African governments should share the blame, because some of those partners were more interested in staying in power than in fighting terrorism.

"It didn't work, it's obvious," said the diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to offer a candid assessment of allies. "But this notion that we deployed, it didn't work, therefore it's our fault — I don't buy that."

Some say the foreigners never really understood the conflict. "To be able to help, you have to really know the root of the problem," said Demba Kanté, a corporate lawyer in Bamako, Mali's capital. "They were positioned almost everywhere on Malian soil and collecting their salaries, and we were still facing problems."

As they assess the setbacks and retol their strategy, U.S. officials are also keeping a wary eye on two global rivals: China and Russia.

China overtook the United States as Africa's biggest bilateral trade partner over a decade ago, its investments largely focused on minerals key to the global energy transition. Russia has become the preferred security partner for a number of African countries that formerly welcomed American assistance, creating what many experts see as a Cold War-style competition.

"We've done a lot of things well on the tactical level, including the training of special forces, but they weren't connected to a larger strategy," said J. Peter Pham, a former special U.S. envoy to the Sahel, the vast, semiarid region south of the Sahara where U.S. counterterrorism efforts have been focused.

Mr. Pham pointed to an ambitious \$50 million U.S. electrification project in Burkina Faso that was paused in 2012 after the nation's military staged a coup. "We need to have an integrated strategy, otherwise it's building sand castles at the edge of the beach," he said.

Developing that strategy will be difficult. Washington policymakers are consumed with crises, particularly in Gaza and Ukraine. Meantime, Al Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates are metastasizing in the region, according to U.S. and U.S. intelligence assessments.

"What keeps me up at night is the number of very capable foreign terrorist organizations that see this," Senator Chris Coons, Democrat of Delaware and an Africa specialist, said at a hearing last month.

Mali: A Crisis Spirals

Mali was the first country in the Sahel to be destabilized by jihadists and rebels. It was in the wake of the 2011 civil war in Libya, to the northeast. Well-armed Malian rebels who had defended the Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi returned home when he was killed and started a rebellion. Emboldened by the chaos, Islamist groups began seizing urban centers like the ancient desert city of Timbuktu.

France intervened in 2013, pushing the jihadists out of northern cities. Many Malians viewed the mission as a success.

Then came a much bigger intervention led by the French that pulled in other European countries and the United States, and that expanded to neighboring countries in pursuit of jihadists.

The crisis spiraled, even as France killed more and more fighters. The armed groups ran rampant in the countryside, causing millions to flee their homes. Thousands of foreign forces in air-conditioned vehicles trundled through the Sahelian steppe, trying to take out terrorist leaders. But that steppe became no safer.

France and the U.S. acknowledged that the governments they were working with were widely viewed locally as corrupt and partly responsible for the insecurity, according to Alexander Thurston, a scholar of Islam and African politics at the University of Cincinnati. But they worked closely with them anyway.

"That's a weird kind of contradiction to

Eric Schmitt reported from Takoradi and Accra, Ghana, and Ruth Manon from Dakar, Senegal. Mamadou Tapily contributed reporting from Bamako, Mali.



Special forces from Tunisia, Libya and Italy in training during the annual Pentagon-sponsored Flintlock counterterrorism exercise in Daboya, Ghana.



THE NEW YORK TIMES

get into, in my view — to be reliant upon the people that you're implying are the problem," Mr. Thurston said.

And as the insurgency mushroomed, people began to blame the foreign forces. When, one by one, the governments in the region fell over the past four years, the new juntas found criticism of their military partners was easy to exploit for political gain. Then they threw out the foreign troops as well as thousands of U.N. peacekeepers.

The "flashy scenarios" that local soldiers are trained to deal with during the annual Pentagon-sponsored Flintlock counterterrorism exercise illustrate the yawning gap between how American special operations commanders see the conflict and the reality that what they are facing is "an insurgency driven by poor herders in some of the most remote parts of the world," Mr. Thurston said.

The West has long been seen as projecting its own problems onto the Sahel, said Ornella Moderan, a Geneva-based researcher and policy adviser focused on politics and security in West Africa. Initially it was obsessed with migration.

Now, she noted, there is a Western "insistence on reading everything through the Russian lens."

The U.S. should stop focusing on trying to come up with a "better offer" than

the Russians, Ms. Moderan said.

"What is a better offer from the perspective of military juntas in the current situation?" she asked. "It's an offer that insists less on human rights than Russia does — which means not at all. It's an offer that insists less on the rule of law, less on democracy, and it's an offer that provides more in terms of weapons systems, in terms of remote warfare systems."

The best approach for the West, she said, is to ignore whether Russia is there or not, keep communication channels open and wait for an opportunity to re-engage with countries like Mali if and when they sour on Moscow's influence.

Niger: The Highs and Lows

It was in Niger, an impoverished nation of 25 million people that is nearly twice the size of Texas, where four American soldiers, along with four Nigerian troops and an interpreter, were killed in an ambush in 2017.

After that, American commandos stayed well behind the front lines, working from command centers to help Nigerian officers grapple with intelligence, logistics, artillery and other aspects of big operations.

Those counterterrorism forces trained by the United States and France put a dent in terrorist activity, using intelli-

gence gleaned from MQ-9 Reaper surveillance drones flying from the sprawling air base in Agadez, in the north.

Terrorist attacks against civilians decreased by nearly 50 percent in 2023 from the previous year, analysts said.

After the military takeover in Niger last July, however, the United States suspended most security assistance and information sharing. Terrorist groups stepped up attacks on Nigerian troops. Last October, at least 29 Nigerian soldiers were killed in an attack by jihadist militants in the country's west. A week earlier, a dozen died in the southwest.

The junta leaders began to turn toward Russia for security and to Iran for a possible deal on its uranium reserves, U.S. officials said. American diplomats and military officials protested this spring and criticized the military government for failing to map out a path to return to democracy. The junta accused the Americans of talking down to them.

The junta's message has been: "We don't want anyone from the West to come in here and tell us who we can do business with," Gen. Michael E. Langley, the head of the Pentagon's Africa Command, said in an interview. "I'm seeing this across the Sahel. Our narrative is still, 'Hey, we're here to help.'"

The military takeover in Niger upended years of Western counterterrorism efforts in West Africa.

For civilians in the Sahel, security has gotten worse since the juntas took power. In recent months, unlawful killings and grave violations against children have risen sharply, according to the U.N.

"The challenges plaguing the Sahel are so overwhelming that it's not exactly clear how much the U.S. can help," said Colin P. Clarke, a counterterrorism analyst at the Soufan Group, a security consulting firm based in New York.

"The Sahel sits at the nexus of some of the world's most pressing challenges, from climate change to 'youth bulges' — significant swaths of young people who are unemployed," Mr. Clarke said. "These issues feed into the growth of violent extremist organizations."

Ghana: A New Focus

American and Ghanaian officials fear that Ghana could be next.

Terrorist groups have been pushing south, with attacks in Ghana's coastal neighbors, Togo, Benin and Ivory Coast. A majority of Ghana's 34 million inhabitants are Christian. Muslims make up a large share in the country's poorer north.

That Africa Command conducted three overlapping military exercises, including Flintlock, in Ghana in the past few weeks underscores how much Washington is pinning its security hopes on coastal West Africa.

Some 1,300 special operations forces from nearly 30 countries participated in the annual Flintlock counterterrorism exercise in May. In Daboya, Ghana, about four hours from the border with Burkina Faso, Spanish trainers helped Mauritanian troops hone their marksmanship skills. Ghanaian police worked with Dutch trainers on securing terrorist suspects. In the Gulf of Guinea, Ghanaian, Libyan and Tunisian commandos roze down from assault helicopters to seize stolen in terrorist leaders aboard an Italian frigate in a mock raid.

Brig. Gen. Kweku Dankwa Hagan, a Ghanaian Army officer, said Ghana and its neighbors shared intelligence on militants' activities and had agreed to conduct joint patrols in border areas.

"If they strike Ghana, it will shake our democracy," General Hagan said in an interview in Accra, Ghana's capital. "We are poised to ensure that given the mandate given the armed forces, we protect our country from external aggressors."

The Biden administration is offering help in other ways under the Global Fragility Act, a 10-year plan to blunt the spread of terrorism and violent extremism in the coastal West African nations and other countries.

The act finances a range of initiatives, including conflict-resolution programs to help settle disputes among chiefs and local community service projects like new police stations or solar-powered security lighting.

Unless defense, diplomacy and development programs are integrated and financed, it's like "sprinkling fairy dust around," said Virginia E. Palmer, the U.S. ambassador to Ghana and a diplomat with previous postings in Malawi, South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe, as well as a stint in the State Department's counterterrorism office in Washington.

As the U.S. reformulates its approach, officials say one overriding objective comes through: Stay engaged. That may involve building relationships with new partners or — at some time in the future — rebuilding ties with former ones.

Capt. Scott P. Pentress, a member of the Navy SEALs who is director of operations for U.S. Special Operations forces on the continent, summed up this way: "Trust is earned, and we've learned that throughout Africa, particularly West Africa, that trust is hard to earn."



FRANCIS ROSSIGNOL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

French soldiers during a mission to combat Islamist extremists in Mali near the border with Niger in February 2020.

We Have Late Onset Tay-Sachs... Do You Know What It Is?

Allie & Katie Buryk's Story

It took the two of us, 35 year-old twins, eight years to find out what was wrong.

Our symptoms started slowly. At first, there was difficulty climbing stairs. Our leg muscles were weak and we had trouble standing from a sitting position without using our hands. At times, our legs would just give out and we would fall. And our speech pace increased and sometimes people didn't understand us.

Finally, in 2014 genome sequencing informed us that we had Late Onset Tay-Sachs. (LOTS) disease. Infants who develop symptoms early usually die by age 2-4. Juveniles with symptoms pass away before or in their teens. We are lucky to be alive. But the disease will continue and our futures hold wheelchairs, difficulty swallowing, cognitive decline and perhaps mental illness.

We have decided to go public and raise money, awareness and a search for a treatment. It is for us but, perhaps more importantly, it is for infants and kids. And it's for their families who embark on this overwhelming journey.



Allie (left) & Katie Buryk.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY...

- At the end of April, Sanofi Genzyme announced the clinical trial for the treatment of GM2 gangliosidosis, which is what we have, was discontinued based on the absence of positive trends on clinical endpoints. This is incredibly disappointing as we continue to hope for a treatment option.
- The Buryk Fund sponsors an annual Late Onset Tay-Sachs Think Tank retreat led by Dr. Steven Walkley, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and attended by leading rare disease researchers and clinicians from around the world. The goal is to accelerate research toward effective treatments for Late Onset Tay-Sachs. Since the first Think Tank in 2018, four critically important clinical trials have launched; two gene therapy studies for children with GM2 (known as Tay-Sachs and Sandhoff diseases) and a similar disease, GM1 gangliosidosis, and two small molecule drug trials for adults with LOTS. This year's meeting will take place October 17-19 in Hilton Head, SC.

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Gene therapy is being developed for adults with Late Onset Tay-Sachs. A team at the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Chan Medical School led by Heather Gray-Edwards, DVM, PhD and Miguel Sena-Esteves, PhD has developed an AAV gene therapy and working toward a clinical trial. Your donation makes gene therapy for LOTS patients possible, bringing us closer to treatments.

We will not give up, and we hope you'll join us and the many families who need our help. Whatever your contribution, it will matter and make a difference in our lives and those of so many others.

Please Join us in our fight and in our hope.

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Clockwise from top left: dead and dying Douglas fir trees at Willamette National Forest, Ore., in October; some environmentalists say officials favor logging over conservation; a forester with Douglas fir seedlings for planting in a section of the Callahan Mountains, west of Roseburg, Ore., in 2017; and, the Patton Meadow fire in Fremont National Forest, near Lakeview, Ore., in 2021.

For an Oregon Forest in Crisis, a Response Is Logging

By ANNA KRAMER

Across a patch of the Pacific Northwest, one of North America's most important tree species is dying at an alarming rate. This spring, as in the past several years, the needles on Douglas firs are yellowing, turning red and then dropping to the ground in forests across southwestern Oregon.

Experts blame a mix of factors, including insect attacks, drought and higher temperatures caused by climate change. Decades of fire suppression have exacerbated problems by disrupting the natural balance of ecosystems.

"The droughts and heat and climate change are killing trees widely, and there's no clear way to put that genie back in the bottle," said Rob Jackson, an ecologist at the Doerr School of Sustainability at Stanford University who is researching the ways climate change affects forests and grasslands. "We are priming our forests to die."

The crisis in Oregon shows the critical importance of forest management as climate change alters the natural world. Foresters say that, in many cases, they need to cut down Douglas firs, whether dead or alive, in order to minimize wildfire risk, promote forest health and help ecosystems adapt to the shifting climate. Their plans include selling some salvageable timber.

But those plans have touched a raw nerve with some environmentalists, who distrust government agencies and accuse them of favoring logging over conservation.

"I understand why environmental groups are suspicious, and they should be," said Mindy Crandall, an associate professor of forest policy at Oregon State University. The federal agencies "didn't listen to society for a little bit too long."

The distrust exemplifies a challenge: How do those agencies, which control much of the land in the Western half of the country, navigate competing mandates for conservation, resource extraction and fire safety as forest health declines across the West?

Douglas firs are a keystone species for the region's enormous, ecologically diverse forests, critical to sustaining a range of plant and animal life. They are also one of the most important timber trees in the country, used for home construction and as Christmas trees.

Environmentalists Object to Killing of Firs, Healthy Or Not, as Climate Muddies Land Management

Across southwestern Oregon, more of the species died from 2015 to 2019 than in the previous 40 years combined. The deaths, though concentrated in regions at the lower end of the elevation and rainfall range for Douglas firs, have spread since 2020: While less than 5,000 acres of land in the state exhibited tree death in 2021, that number rose to more than 350,000 acres in 2022.

This year, the Biden administration formally strengthened the Bureau of Land Management's conservation authority, giving the agency more latitude to prioritize environmental concerns in concert with its other mandates. And experts, including Dr. Crandall, said the bureau and other federal agencies had become more evenhanded and clearly concerned with climate change over the last several decades.

But environmental groups still harbor long-held suspicions from nearly a century of government-approved forest clear cuts.

Nathan Gehres grew up in the Applegate Valley in Southern Oregon in the 1980s. At the time, the region was torn apart in a battle over conservation, known locally as the Timber Wars, when environmentalists fought to limit logging projects sponsored by the United States Forest Service and the B.L.M.

"I know people who call them the Bureau of Lumber and Mining," said Mr. Gehres, who now works at the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council, a nonprofit group that tries to develop consensus solutions for natural resource management. "They've made mistakes in the past, and I think there's hardly any government agency that hasn't made mistakes in the past. But also, three-quarters of the Applegate Valley is federal land. And so, they are an extremely important partner."

The B.L.M. is proposing a multiyear project called the Strategic Operations for Safety plan, known as S.O.S., to log living and dead trees. The trees are spread across about 5,000 acres of land the agency manages in the Applegate

Valley region that officials say are most likely to present safety risks in wildfires.

Because it can be very expensive to remove only dead trees, the living trees will most likely be sold as timber, "paying their way" out of the forest, said Elizabeth Burghard, the bureau's district manager.

The B.L.M. is trying community outreach. Ms. Burghard's team recently invited residents on a field trip to view the dying trees in an effort to show the community the extent of the crisis, alleviate skepticism and to persuade locals of the urgency of the problem.

Luke Ruediger, a resident of the region and the conservation director for the Klamath Forest Alliance environmental group, attended that field trip and said he tried to keep an open mind about the B.L.M.'s intentions. But while he was struck by the forest's declining health, he said he remained concerned that the agency might manipulate the situation to justify selling more wood for commercial purposes.

Mr. Ruediger acknowledged that it was necessary to address the fire danger in the area. "But there's this history of heavy forest management here," he said. "There's kind of a history of bias toward the timber industry."

Dominick DellaSala, the chief scientist at Wild Heritage, a forest protection advocacy organization, has visited the forests with Mr. Ruediger to witness the Douglas fir die-off and also said he remained suspicious about the agency's motivation. "What the agencies will do, they'll cherry pick the science to fit the desired outcome," he said.

"You've got to tackle climate change, because that's a lot of what's driving this," Dr. DellaSala added. "And you've got to reduce the pressures on forests through these kinds of logging events."

Representatives for the Bureau of Land Management said that the S.O.S. plan was aimed directly at increasing safety, especially for firefighters. And based on 15 years of monitoring interventions, the agency is confident that its

plans can be successful, said Jena Volpe, a fire ecologist with the bureau.

"When the B.L.M. does commercial timber sales, our primary objective is forest health, and the economic value of the trees is a byproduct of that," said Kyle Sullivan, a spokesman for the bureau's district office in Medford, Ore. "That is something that a lot of the public doesn't necessarily understand. Our commercial timber sales really are aimed at forest health."

Mr. Sullivan said the main focus of the S.O.S. program was removing dead and dying trees, not harvesting healthy ones for commercial purposes.

Researchers in Oregon and across the country stressed that the B.L.M. and other landowners need to manage the Douglas fir decline. It's not just the B.L.M. dealing with trees in crisis. The city of Ashland, Ore., also has operations underway to remove the dead and dying Douglas firs to manage public safety risk and try to improve forest health.

As forests become less healthy, researchers say, leaving them undisturbed will in many cases make them more prone to severe wildfires and more vulnerable to drought stress and disease.

Instead, managing them to increase safety, improve climate resilience and even create sustainable forms of extraction will be increasingly important. That can mean thinning to lower tree density in a given area, removing dead trees or planting species that are more resilient in a hotter climate.

Though it might seem intuitive to remove human involvement and allow the forest to restore some form of equilibrium, researchers said that, after centuries of human intervention, the forests cannot course-correct on their own.

"There's a real need to reduce the density of trees," Dr. Crandall of Oregon State said. "We have tinkered so much with the natural system in the last 150 years, mostly through fire suppression, that the forest is just completely out of whack."

But getting there will be a challenge for federal agencies, said Rachael Hamby, the policy director at the Center for Western Priorities, a nonpartisan conservation group.

"They have to try to make everyone happy, and then they end up making no one happy," she said.

Calls Escalate for Inquiries Into Supreme Court Ethics

By CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats are facing intensifying pressure from the left for inquiries into ethical questions at the Supreme Court, but they say their options are limited given the court's independent status and Republican opposition.

Advocacy groups and progressives are stepping up their calls for Senate Democrats to be more aggressive after Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. rebuffed a plea to require Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. to recuse himself from pending cases on the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol and Donald J. Trump's immunity for any actions leading up to it.

Top Democrats on the Judiciary Committee called on Justice Alito to recuse himself from those cases following reports that two flags associated with the "Stop the Steal" movement were flown outside his residences. The justice said his wife was responsible for the flags and refused to step away from the cases.

Last week, a coalition of liberal groups and House Democrats urged the Senate to open an investigation into Justice Alito's actions, with activists arguing that the Senate needed to stop behaving as if it were powerless.

Representatives Jamie Raskin of Maryland and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, the top two Democrats on the Oversight Committee, have scheduled a round table on the issue for Tuesday. It is set to explore a range of controversies surrounding the court, including unreported gifts and travel provided to justices, and their impact on the court's agenda.

Pressured Senate Democrats say their options are limited.

"The whole country is caught in a supreme ethics crisis," Mr. Raskin said in a statement. "Our democratic values, rights, and fundamental rights are on the line, and everything we have fought for is in danger because of this runaway court."

Senate Democrats have struggled with how to respond to these controversies, ensuring the court. They have cited the refusal of members of the court to engage with them and fierce opposition from Republicans who portray the Democratic effort as a partisan one designed to undermine the credibility of a court dominated by conservatives.

"Keep in mind it's a separate branch of government and has its own authority," said Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Senate Democrat and chairman of the Judiciary Committee. "There are precedents as to what we can and cannot do."

He added that independent news reporting and the work of the committee have given the public a "clear understanding of some of the unethical conduct of several justices."

After a heated session last November, the Judiciary Committee, on a sharp party line vote, approved subpoenas for two conservative beneficiaries of the court to try to compel testimony about their travel and influence on the justices. But the committee has not moved forward with them. Democrats fear that the failure to round up even a majority of senators to enforce subpoenas targeting the court or Justice Alito himself — let alone the 60 votes needed to overcome procedural objections — would put Democrats in an even weaker position and undermine the Senate's overall subpoena power.

"The people who say 'subpoena him' aren't even reading the rules of the Senate," Mr. Durbin said. "You need 60 votes, period. Sixty votes."

Democrats also worry that escalating the conflict with the court could lead Republicans to cease all cooperation when it comes to the Democratic drive to match or better the Trump administration's confirmation of 234 federal judges in four years. They need to seat about three dozen more to exceed that threshold, and Republicans

Limits on Transgender Rights Stall in Some States

By AMY HARMON

State legislatures are ending their sessions this spring with only a handful of new restrictions for transgender people on the books, a departure from the previous two years when passing such legislation became a major focus in Republican-dominated state capitols.

In interviews, conservative strategists and transgender rights advocates offered several reasons for the sudden slowdown. In part, they said, Republican state lawmakers had such a high success rate for bills limiting transgender rights in the earlier years that they had covered a lot of ground already. "We're running out of states to pass things in," said Terry Schilling, president of the American Principles Project, a national conservative advocacy group.

The smaller number may reflect an election-year recognition among Republican lawmakers that voters may rank gender identity issues below the economy, inflation and jobs. Republican leaders in the Georgia House of Representatives told reporters this spring that they had chosen to focus on "kitchen-table" issues, such as an income-tax cut and funding for prekindergarten programs.

Of 28 states where Republicans control the legislature, 24 now prohibit or restrict medical professionals from providing hormone therapies for gender transition to minors; 24 bar transgender students from participating in sports that align with their gender identity; and 12 bar students from using school bathrooms that do not match their sex assigned at birth, according to the Movement Advancement Project, an L.G.B.T.Q. advocacy group that tracks state-level legislation. Most of those laws were passed before this year's legislative sessions.

In some Republican-led states, such measures had not already passed, lawmakers pushed for them in this year's sessions. Bans on transition treatments for minors were enacted this year in Wyoming and South Carolina, and Ohio lawmakers overrode Gov. Mike DeWine's veto of a ban they had passed late last year.

In Idaho, lawmakers made it illegal for school districts to require that teachers use pronouns consistent with a student's gender identity. A new Tennessee law requires schools to alert parents if their child requests to go by a name or pronoun different from those entered on school forms. And the governors of Louisiana and Idaho signed legislation specifying that the term "sex" in state code refers to "an individual's biological sex, either male or female" and that "gender identity" should not be considered a synonym for it.

Mississippi, Utah and Louisiana joined the list of states barring transgender students from school bathrooms that match their gender identity. The Utah measure also bars transgender adults from using locker rooms that align with their gender identity in county parks and other government-owned buildings.

"Public backlash from this legislation was completely expected, but at the end of the day, we do what is best for Utah," said State Representative Kera Birkeland, a



Transgender rights advocates as a Georgia bill to ban puberty-delaying drugs was voted on in March.

Republican and the bill's sponsor. Opponents of the measures said they were disturbed by those that passed, but also relieved that the number of new laws was comparatively low.

"If you would have come to me in 2020 and told me what 2024 looks like so far, I would have been shocked as to a travesty," said Gillian Branstetter, a communications strategist at the American Civil Liberties Union, which is challenging the constitutionality of several laws restricting transgender rights in federal courts across the country. "It's only been a better year relative to some of the most hostile years we've seen for trans people in our country's policies."

Still, in some Republican-dominated statehouses, measures that were similar to those that had passed in other states stalled this year.

In Georgia, the Legislature adjourned without passing bills barring transgender youth from playing on sports teams and using bathrooms that match their gender identity, as well as one restricting their access to medication to pause puberty.

In Kansas, Republicans failed to garner a two-thirds majority needed in the Legislature to overturn Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly's veto of a ban on medical transition treatments for minors, despite holding a supermajority in

both chambers. While lawmakers continue to propose bills curbing L.G.B.T.Q. rights in record numbers, "we're going to have had significantly lower numbers passing this year," said Kathryn Oakley, legal policy director for the Human Rights Campaign, an L.G.B.T.Q. advocacy group.

A few moderate Republicans have pushed back on what they described as government overreach. Representative Susan Cannon, one of four Republicans who voted to sustain Governor Kelly's veto of the medical transition-care ban in Kansas, told her colleagues that for decisions about how to treat gender dysphoria in children, "government involvement is not the answer."

John Dougall, a Republican state auditor in Utah, who is responsible for enforcing the state's new restrictions on locker rooms, has posted satirical videos on social media that often feature himself lurking in a bathroom. Mr. Dougall, who is running for the U.S. House of Representatives, said in an interview that the Legislature ought to have had better priorities than "turning my office into a bathroom monitor."

Some of the bills lost Republican votes this session for the same reason: many lawmakers, who once opposed to same-sex marriage reversed themselves; a personal connection to those affected.

A state senator in Arizona, Ken Bennett, blocked passage of a measure that would have given voters the chance to roll back policies allowing transgender students to be called by pronouns and use bathrooms that correspond with their gender identity. He told colleagues that he had family members who would have been affected if they were still in school, according to the Arizona Mirror.

In states where Democrats control the statehouse, at least two, Maine and Maryland, this year enacted laws protecting people who receive or provide medical treatments for gender transition care from legal action by other states. Now, 13 states led by Democrats have such provisions, according to the Movement Advancement Project.

Still, in a presidential election year that has focused attention on several battleground states, Mr. Schilling, of the American Principles Project, said he believed that gender identity issues could mobilize a crucial few percent of persuadable voters.

His organization will be spending \$15 million on advertising related to the topic in coming months in Georgia, North Carolina, Wisconsin and Arizona, he said, because based on focus groups and previous polling, "the stuff actually moves people from voting Democrat or being undecided to the Republican column."

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From left: Grocery prices are down; President Biden added electric cars to the tariffs on goods from China; and, unemployment is low. Economists say some of Mr. Trump's plans could increase costs.

Trump's Ideas to Drop Prices May Lift Them, Economists Say

From Page 1

the director of economic policy studies at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute.

The post-pandemic inflation wave has subsided, but unhappiness over the elevated cost of living it left behind is dragging down assessments of the economy and of Mr. Biden's performance.

Inflation surged globally as the pandemic receded, not just in the United States. But many economists believe the Biden administration's March 2021 stimulus package was too big and, while it may have contributed to a faster recovery in growth than comparable countries have experienced, it also added fuel to the domestic version of the inflation problem.

In response to questions, the Trump campaign's policy director, Vince Haley, disputed the notion that Mr. Trump's second-term policy plans could raise prices further or even re-stoke inflation, saying that Mr. Trump would also increase energy production, cut regulations and reduce federal spending.

"The sad fact," Mr. Haley added, "is that Joe Biden doesn't have a plan to continue his inflationary policies, laying waste to the wallets and pocketbooks of hard working Americans all while blaming the size of Snickers bars."

Roll Back Rules

Mr. Trump has not released a detailed economic plan, so it is impossible to model the overall effects that he might do.

But to the extent that Mr. Trump offers any specifics when railing about inflation, his primary pitch is to denounce Biden administration policies aimed at curbing climate change by expanding renewable energy. Mr. Trump says he would instead promote more fossil fuel extraction to make gasoline and electricity cheaper.

"We're going to get your energy prices down so low, and that's going to knock the hell out of the inflation," he declared in typical remarks at a rally in Iowa in December.

Mr. Trump has also repeatedly — and falsely — claimed that the United States has "ended oil exploration and production." While Mr. Biden did expand limits on new drilling in the Alaskan wilderness, his administration issued thousands of new permits to drill on other federal lands — outpacing Mr. Trump's record. The United States is producing oil and natural gas at record highs.

Extracting even more oil from domestic soil would put some pressure on energy prices, said N. Gregory Mankiw, a Harvard University professor who served as chair of the Council of Economic Advisers during George W. Bush's presidency. But, he added, "since it's a global market for oil, that effect would be fairly muted."

Mr. Haley, the Trump campaign's policy director, said if Mr. Trump returned to office, he would revive and expand his first-term deregulatory efforts and roll back new environmental rules imposed by the Biden administration.

But, he argued, would also push prices down. Economists agree that whatever the other benefits to society government rules may bring, complying with regulations usually increases businesses' production costs.

And, Mr. Haley said, Mr. Trump would be "working with a Republican Congress to rein in federal spending." Another way Mr. Trump plans to cut back on spending, he added, is through impoundment, the Nixon-era tactic of a president refusing to spend money Congress appropriated for programs he does not like.

Economists also say that cutting back on federal spending would reduce overall demand for goods and services, which could help keep prices down. But while Republicans often decry spending and budget deficits when Democrats are in charge, they tend to behave differently when they control the government. Mr. Trump already worked as president with a Republican Congress in 2017 and 2018, and federal spending and budget



A rally in on the beach in Wildwood, N.J., last month. Donald J. Trump said he would promote more fossil fuel extraction to make gasoline and electricity cheaper.

deficits rose both of those years. During Mr. Trump's four years in office, the national debt grew by around \$8 trillion despite his 2016 campaign promise to eliminate the entire national debt within eight years by renegotiating trade deals and promoting economic growth.

And it is far from clear that Mr. Trump would succeed in his goal of relieving impoundment. Congress outlawed that tactic in 1974.

Shortages of Goods

Inflation — a decrease in the purchasing power of money — increases when too much money is chasing too few goods and services. Prices are almost always rising. Little, and deflation is associated with economic calamity. But during the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, prices rose much faster.

With people hunkering down at home and huge numbers of workers laid off, governments and central banks tried to mitigate the devastation with both fiscal and monetary stimulus — including by directly spending more and by slashing interest rates to encourage borrowing. Then, as vaccines became available, people started spending the money they had saved by not traveling and going out. The job market rapidly recovered.

This surge in economic activity, along with supply-chain disruptions, led to shortages of goods. Around the world, prices for various goods started to rise more quickly in mid-2021, as did energy prices that had been severely depressed when few were going out. Then, in early 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, causing global oil and food prices to surge further. An

outbreak of avian flu caused a shortage of eggs, the price of which soared.

In the United States, inflation peaked in June 2022, at 9.1 percent — a level not seen since the early 1980s. But the Federal Reserve lifted interest rates, supply-chain problems were fixed and the inflation rate fell. In April, prices were 3.4 percent higher than they were a year earlier — still higher than the Fed's ideal rate of price growth, but closer to normal.

Inflation on groceries has dropped particularly steeply. Prices at the supermarket rose only 1.1 percent between April 2023 and April 2024. And wage growth for workers has outpaced price increases over the past year. But the inflation surge left behind higher prices — and lingering discontent. And while inflation plagued economies around the world and many of its contributing factors were outside the control of U.S. policymakers, leaders also made choices.

Congress passed emergency spending bills in March 2020 and December 2020 under Mr. Biden, and in March 2021 under Mr. Biden. The Federal Reserve, under Jerome Powell — who was appointed its chairman by Mr. Trump and then was reappointed by Mr. Biden — bought up bonds and kept interest rates low to boost growth.

Many economists now think Mr. Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill in March 2021 was too big for an economy that was already starting to recover, and that the Fed kept interest rates low for too long. Professor Mankiw said.

Kevin Warth, a former Fed governor and possible chairman nominee if Mr. Trump wins the election, echoed Professor Mankiw's

criticisms of the Fed under Mr. Powell. He also argued that Mr. Biden and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen shared blame for the inflation wave, citing the administration's regulations and "massive new government spending at full employment."

But Jared Bernstein, the chair of the Council of Economic Advisers under Mr. Biden, defended the administration's performance. He pointed to data showing that inflation spiked all around the world amid the pandemic supply shocks before sharply declining, but economic growth and jobs have recovered faster in the United States than in other advanced economies.

"And part of that," he said, "has to do with precisely the policies that they are criticizing."

Still, many Americans remain anxious about high prices, and polls indicate that many people likely to vote in November are penalizing Mr. Biden for higher prices.

Mass Deportations

One of Mr. Trump's most concrete policy plans is a massive crackdown on illegal immigration. Where the government in recent administrations has generally deported a few hundred thousand unauthorized people per year, Mr. Trump is aiming for a tenfold increase in that rate.

The deportation of millions of people would reduce demand for the goods and services they currently consume, and could bring down prices for rental housing as their removal frees up supply. But mass deportations would cause a severe supply shock to the labor market, which could increase the overall cost of living, said Mr.

Strain, from the American Enterprise Institute.

There would be an accelerating shortage of workers for the low-wage jobs that are often performed by undocumented immigrants — from picking crops and working construction jobs to washing dishes in restaurants and cleaning houses and hotel rooms. In many cases, such workers make less than minimum wage with no benefits.

Employers would try to find replacement workers, but it would not be easy. Because the job market is strong — the unemployment rate is below 4 percent — there are not large numbers of Americans in search of low-wage jobs.

Basic economics say the result would be higher prices, as production falls and labor costs go up. For example, if farmers could not find enough workers to pick all their crops, there would be a smaller supply of produce, and it would get more expensive. And businesses would be forced to offer higher wages to attract or retain workers — passing on some of their higher costs to consumers.

Indeed, Stephen Miller, Mr. Trump's top immigration policy adviser, told The New York Times last year that "mass deportation will be a labor-market disruption celebrated by American workers, who will now be offered higher wages with better benefits to fill these jobs."

High Tariffs

Mr. Trump, who as president imposed targeted tariffs on certain products like steel and washing machines, is planning to greatly expand such duties if he returns to the White House. He has floated imposing a 10 percent across-the-board import tax for most products made abroad — the source of many of the goods lining the shelves of stores like Target and Walmart, including electronics, machinery, clothes and toys.

He plans to impose particularly high tariffs on products manufactured in China, with which he started a trade war when president. There is bipartisan support for erecting some barriers to trade with China. Mr. Biden kept Mr. Trump's tariffs in place and added a few more on targeted industries, such as electric cars and semiconductors.

Mr. Trump typically denies that import taxes raise prices. But R. Glenn Hubbard, a Columbia University economist who also served as chair of the Council of Economic Advisers under George W. Bush, said multiple studies using different methodologies had confirmed that the tariffs Mr. Trump imposed were "completely passed on to consumers."

When the government taxes foreign-made goods, importing businesses raise the prices at

which they are willing to sell them to consumers — helping domestic producers of rival goods by allowing them to raise their prices, too.

Robert Lighthizer, Mr. Trump's top trade policy adviser, told The Times for an article about Mr. Trump's tariff plans that the priority should not be cheaper goods but fostering manufacturing jobs for Americans, saying, "You should be willing to pay a price for that."

Deep Tax Cuts

A third major policy proposed by Mr. Trump that could have implications for inflation and prices involves taxes.

The individual and estate tax cuts from Mr. Trump's 2017 tax law are set to expire after 2025. While Mr. Biden wants to extend the cuts for lower- and middle-income people, he wants to let them expire for higher levels of income and for large inheritances. By contrast, Mr. Trump wants to extend the law in its entirety. He has also vaguely indicated that he wants to go further with some kind of additional tax cut.

When Mr. Trump and congressional Republicans enacted the 2017 tax cut law, they made up the resulting gap in revenue by adding to the national debt. If they repeated that move, extending the expiring tax cuts would amount to fiscal stimulus, with more spending money in the pockets of especially wealthy consumers than would otherwise be the case.

More spending would mean higher demand for goods and services, straining prices when compared with a world in which the tax cuts expired as scheduled, Professor Mankiw said.

He also said the potential inflationary aspects of Mr. Trump's policies could be offset if the Federal Reserve were to further raise interest rates.

But such a move would be anathema to Mr. Trump, who loved low interest rates as a real estate mogul, openly demanded them as president and has promised that his re-election would restore them.

How the Fed would operate in a second Trump term would depend in part on whom he chose to replace Mr. Powell, whose term ends in May 2026. It would also depend on whether the Fed reduces its asset holdings in setting monetary policy without interference by Mr. Trump.

Congress established the Federal Reserve as an independent agency, run by a board whose members cannot be removed by presidents without cause. But the conservative legal movement has pushed a theory by which such arrangements are seen as unconstitutional, and Mr. Trump has vowed to bring independent agencies under presidential control.

Jeanna Smialek contributed reporting. Kitty Bennett contributed research.



The elevated cost of living has hurt assessments of the economy and of Mr. Biden's performance.

Pence Stakes Claim as Keeper of Traditional Conservatism

By ADAM NAGOURNEY

Mike Pence could not have asked for a more welcoming audience. For nearly 30 minutes, the man who served as Donald J. Trump's vice president was repeatedly applauded as he offered a vigorous affirmation of his support for Israel at a conference of mostly conservative Jewish leaders in midtown Manhattan.

He barely paused when his questioner, Zvika Klein, the editor in chief of The Jerusalem Post, asked Mr. Pence, an evangelical Christian, to lead the room in prayer for the Israeli hostages captured by Hamas on Oct. 7. "It would be my great honor. Let us pray," he said.

His invocation drew applause and shouts of "Amen."

In the seven months since he dropped out of the race for the Republican presidential nomination, in the face of inevitable defeats in the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, Mr. Pence has been seeking out friendly audiences like this one as he embarks on a mission to reestablish his political career. But just as importantly, he is presenting himself as the guardian of the conservative traditions of a Republican Party that he grew up with and that have since been redefined by Mr. Trump.

He has begun turning up on high-profile television interviews to criticize Mr. Trump's position on abortion, in one example, he announced that his political advocacy group would spend \$20 million this year on appearances and advertisements that promote endangered conservative positions on issues including tariffs, government spending and America's role in the world.

Mr. Pence is the most prominent Republican in the nation to declare that he would not endorse Mr. Trump, the man who chose Mr. Pence when he was governor of Indiana and put him in the White House. And he has made clear that, at the age of 55, he is not foreclosing another bid for the presidency.

"The role I want to play is to be a champion for a broad, mainstream conservative agenda that's defined the Republican Party since the days of Ronald Reagan," he said in an interview before his appearance at the conference. "I see some voices that some voices in and around our party are departing from that — I want my voice, my organization, to be an anchor to windward."

Yet for all that, Mr. Pence is clearly out of step with the party that once embraced him. For many Trump loyalists, he is still the vice president who refused to go along with Mr. Trump to hold on to power on Jan. 6, 2021.

Judas Pence is a dead man walking with MAGA, regardless of the 30 pieces of silver in his PAC, said Stephen K. Bannon, a leader in Mr. Trump's movement, referring to Mr. Pence's advocacy group, Advancing American Freedom. (He made his remarks in a text a few hours before a federal judge ordered him to report to prison on May 31 that serving a four-month prison term imposed on him for disobeying a subpoena from the House committee that investigated the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.)

With his low-key, Midwestern presence, Mr. Pence stands in sharp contrast with the Republi-

Rejected by Trump Loyalists, Former Vice President Clings to Corner of G.O.P.



AMER. HANJIA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



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JORDAN GALE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Former Vice President Mike Pence said he won't endorse Donald J. Trump in November. Above left, Mr. Pence, right, with Zvika Klein, of The Jerusalem Post, at a conference of mostly conservative Jewish leaders in Manhattan. Above right, Mr. Pence, campaigning for President in Iowa in August, never broke out of the single digits in most early polls for the Republican primary.

cans of today, personified by Mr. Trump and, for that matter, by Mr. Bannon. In the interview, Mr. Pence, speaking softly as he settled on a couch, seemed taken aback by the suggestion that he had become an island in his own party, a Republican Robinson Crusoe standing alone as Mr. Trump remakes their party in his name.

"I hope not," he said. "I hope I'm on a continent. I mean I've always been since I joined the Republican Party."

"When I was running for president, people would often say, 'Mike Pence's problem is that he's running in a Republican Party that doesn't exist anymore,'" Mr. Pence said. "That wasn't my experience. Everywhere I went on the campaign trail, people, whether they were supporting the former president or supporting someone

else, almost invariably would say 'I appreciate what you stand for. I'm convinced that this is still a conservative party.'"

Yet the signs of his isolation are abundant. Mr. Pence said he had not spoken to Mr. Trump "for a long time." Republicans say it is unlikely that he will be offered a prominent speaking spot when the party gathers for its convention this July in Milwaukee.

YouGov/Economist poll from March found that 52 percent of Republicans had an unfavorable view of Mr. Pence, compared with 42 percent who had a favorable view of the former vice president.

And despite the way he recalled his reception on the presidential trail, Mr. Pence never broke out of the single digits in most of the early polls, even with the advantage of being a former vice president.

He was forced to drop out of the race well before the Iowa caucuses.

The notion of a former vice president not supporting the president he served is so extraordinary that President Biden invoked it in a sharp-edged joke at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner this year.

By contrast, Nikki Haley, the former United Nations ambassador, and Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor, who both drew far more support in their own unsuccessful bids for the Republican presidential nomination, said they would vote for Mr. Trump. Mr. Pence said he would not vote for Mr. Biden, but would not say who he might support.

"I like Mike very much — I strongly recommended him to Trump in '16," said Newt Gingrich,

the former Republican speaker of the House. But he said: "Mike Pence now finds himself in a party that sounds different than it used to while appealing to a constituency that is different from two years ago. And unfortunately for Mike, that tends to drive him into a corner. At his current trajectory, he is going to shrink down into the Never Trump vote."

"There is no future in the Republican Party in being the anti-Trump," Mr. Gingrich said.

Mr. Pence has walked a fine line as he has sought in these past months to distinguish himself and criticize — a figure as enormously popular in the party as Mr. Trump, a former ally who is trying to muscle Mr. Pence out of the spotlight.

In the interview, Mr. Pence denounced the case against Mr.

Trump that led to his convictions on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records to cover up a \$130,000 hush-money payment to a porn star. "I expect his felony convictions will be overturned. This case should never have been brought."

But at the Jerusalem Post forum, he barely talked about Mr. Trump other than to link himself to Mr. Trump's decision, as popular in this room as the former president himself, to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Mr. Pence argued that it is Mr. Trump who has changed over these past four years, drifting away from traditional Republican positions.

"On a whole range of issues, I have seen the president running on an agenda that's different from what we governed on," Mr. Pence said. "I see the president moving in the direction of some of the isolationist voices in our party. Or the nationalist debt — he never even tried to reform the entitlements that represented 85 percent of our federal spending."

Mr. Pence has been particularly vocal in assailing Mr. Trump on abortion rights. While Mr. Pence and many other conservatives are pushing for a national ban on the procedure, Mr. Trump has called for leaving restrictions to the states. Mr. Pence's position has earned him some admirers in important corners of the Republican coalition.

"He's the steady rudder of the pro-life movement among Republican leaders," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, the president of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, a leading group opposing abortion rights. "He doesn't change. He has never been a person who was testing the winds."

Ms. Dannenfelser, whose organization is supporting Mr. Trump this November, said Mr. Pence would have a well of support from abortion opponents should he decide to return to politics in a post-Trump world.

"On the other side of this coming presidential race, there will have to be a gut check," she said. "And he would be an important and essential part of that gut check."

Tim Chapman, a senior adviser to Mr. Pence's advocacy group, said that the former vice president saw himself as "a keeper of the flame during a pretty tumultuous time on the right."

"Everyone is playing the game of showing how close they are to Trump," Mr. Chapman said. "We don't have to pretend. Everyone knows where we are. We are liberated in ways that no other group is liberated."

As Mr. Pence travels the country, giving speeches and interviews, raising money, presenting himself as a potential future candidate for national office — "I'll keep you posted," he said when asked if he would seek the White House again — his next chapter seems bleak, at least through November.

Mr. Pence is going up against the most powerful figure in the Republican Party since Ronald Reagan. As of today, there seems little room in the Trumpworld for a candidate like Mr. Pence.

"It's rushed," Mr. Bannon said. "But like all career politicians he is addicted to being relevant."

Abrupt Closure of Philadelphia Arts School Spurs Reviews

By ZACHARY SMALL

The Pennsylvania attorney general's office and state lawmakers said Friday that they were reviewing the abrupt closure of the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, which blindsided students and faculty members.

"We are very concerned by the sudden closure of the University of the Arts," said Brett Hanbright,

founder and training future artists and arts leaders. The announcement on May 31 that the university was closing left the future uncertain for more than 1,100 students and 700 employees. A few days later the university's president, Kerry Walk, resigned.

Now, state and local officials are looking for answers. The Philadelphia City Council passed a resolution on Thursday to hold hearings about the closure.

"The answer that this came all of the sudden is not acceptable," Mark Squilla, the council member who introduced the resolution, said in an interview. "We are not willing to take their word for it at this point."

Representatives for the university, including the chairman of its board, Judson Aaron, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Students and faculty members have filed class-action lawsuits against the university because of the closure, which was first reported by The Philadelphia Inquirer.

Ben Waxman, a state representative whose district includes the university, said that his office has been flooded with requests for support from affected students and faculty. He said that he had recently helped the university apply for state grants and that he had been involved in contract negotiations.

"I was actively trying to help them," Mr. Waxman said. "At no time was it said there was any financial issue."

Officials said that it remains unclear how dire the university's fi-

nanial problems are. According to at least one report, university trustees have said they were facing a financial crisis that required up to \$40 million to resolve.

Friday was the official closing day, one week after the shutdown was announced. Several institutions have offered to help stranded students, including Point Park University and Temple University.

There are also concerns about

what will happen to the university's campus in the heart of downtown Philadelphia, which includes nine properties, with nearly 600,000 square feet. The market value of those properties is about \$162 million, according to a city tax assessment from two years ago.

Mr. Saval called the closure "a disaster." "Under no circumstances should this have happened," he said.

Many academic degrees misidentifies one of the degrees he earned at Columbia University. It is a master's degree in real estate development, not in architecture.

An article on Page 38 this weekend about Ibram X. Kendi and the Center for Antiracist Research mistakes how the center's fundraising in 2021 compared with the previous year. It was approximately one-hundredth of the amount raised in 2020, not a tenth. The article also incorrectly describes a recognition given to the documentary adaptation of "Stamped From the Beginning."

The documentary was not nominated for an Oscar, but was named to the Oscar shortlist.

Errors are corrected during the press run whenever possible, so some errors noted here may not have appeared in all editions.

Corrections

METROPOLITAN

An article this weekend about a Metropolitan Transportation Authority program that brings talented musicians to perform in the New York City subway system misstates Iain S. Forrest's stage name. It is Eyeeglasses, not Eyeeglass.

MAGAZINE

The Ethicist column on Page 14 this weekend misstates the type of medical distress that might follow from EEG abnormalities. An EEG reveals potential brain issues, not cardiac issues.

An article on Page 22 this weekend about Benjamin B. Bolger's

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It remains unclear how dire the college's financial problems are, officials say.

a spokesman for Michelle A. Henry, the attorney general of Pennsylvania. "We are reviewing the circumstances of the closure and any transfer or loss of assets."

Other state lawmakers are calling for additional investigations into the university's collapse.

"We are looking into holding a hearing and seeing what broader investigative powers we can use in the state legislature to help us to investigate," State Senator Nikil Saval said. "It should wake many of us up to the fragility of the arts infrastructure in Philadelphia, which is extraordinary given how little support it gets."

The University of the Arts, a nearly 150-year-old institution, was a cultural hub for the state, where many local painters, musicians, composers and actors

In His Final Years, Simpson Found 'No Judgment' Golfing in Las Vegas

From Page 1

member, Leroy Wordlaw, 72, a retired Marine master sergeant. "This is a man who came to us the way he is."

Mr. Simpson had spent his prime years in a rich, white world that was far from his roots in the San Francisco housing projects. At the height of his fame, he lived in a Tudor-style estate in Brentwood, an affluent Los Angeles enclave, and owned an oceanfront home on the sands of Laguna Beach.

During that time, he was revered for his success on the football field and in Hollywood. But he was also criticized by some Black Americans for sequestering himself from them.

Decades later, his reputation tarnished, it would be golf, a sport steeped in whiteness and privilege, that tethered him to a group of Black friends in Las Vegas. He often described his plans with In the Cup as "hanging with the brothers."

"He said, 'This is just what I needed, this club,'" his friend, Trimmain Dunn, 58, recalled. "People who he could relate to, no judgment."

It was this social circle that became an unlikely pillar in the coda to Mr. Simpson's strange trajectory until his death in April at 76.

'That Quiet Murmur'

When Mr. Simpson was acquitted of murder in 1985, a majority of Americans believed the killer had just been set free. His trial had marched out horrific details: his history of spousal abuse and the way the victims—his former wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald L. Goldman—had been so viciously stabbed.

His talent and management agency quickly distanced itself from him. A sign declaring "Home of the Brentwood butcher" was posted not far from his house. Neighbors made it clear that he was persona non grata.

"Where do they want me to go? To Africa? Is that what some of those people would want? Go where?" Mr. Simpson said in an interview with Black Entertainment Television in 1996.

He became even more of a pariah when, in 2007, he and a group of men broke into a Las Vegas hotel room in search of what he said were his personal mementos. He was convicted of armed robbery and kidnapping and sent to a rural prison in Nevada.

When granted parole in 2017, Mr. Simpson returned to a city that seemed uninterested in condemnation.

He lived for a few months in a five-bedroom house owned by his friend James Barnett, a tech entrepreneur. Although he appeared on the *Stu* occasionally, Mr. Simpson preferred to stick to downtown Summerlin, a planned community full of wealthy retirees about 14 miles west in the Las Vegas Valley.

He became a fixture at Jing, a steak and seafood restaurant lined in neon, as well as at Grape Street, a cafe and wine bar. He would drop by Vintner Grill, an upscale bistro, to listen to live jazz and go to Minor League Baseball games.

Living off Social Security and pensions from the *Stu*, the actors' guild, he eventually moved into a gated community and shared a home with his oldest daughter, Amelle, while his son Justin lived up the street. He doted on grandchildren, played fantasy football, had girlfriends and moved around easily in public.

In an odd way his prison time had helped soften the detectives. Some saw his Nevada sentence as a proxy for the punishment he avoided in the murder trial. Others offered apologies, believing the nine years he served for the crime in Las Vegas was too harsh. Requests for autographs and selfies were constant.

Mr. Simpson enjoying any sort of adulation was a stark contrast to those who closely followed his saga and were convinced he was a brutal killer. But for the younger generation, Mr. Simpson was notorious in name only—a relic from their parents' time.

"It would be kind of rude of me to treat him a different way for something that happened that I wasn't even around for," said Christopher Cox, 22, a valet who noted that Mr. Simpson left generous tips.

On rare occasion, someone would call out, "Murderer!" Others were polite, but not always warm. Caustic comments were made out of earshot.

"It was just kind of that quiet murmur on the side," explained Alyssa Ivanoff, 28, a server at Jing who waited on Mr. Simpson.

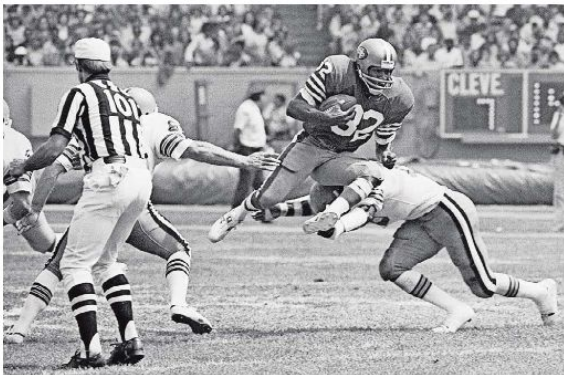
But when admirers approached him—and they often did—he engaged them with charm. It did not matter whether that person was a fan, bewitched by celebrity or looking for a brush with infamy.

Hereveled in the attention, said Malcolm LaVergne, a Las Vegas attorney who represented Mr. Simpson at his parole hearings and is now the executor of his will.

"The biggest punishment you could have ever given O.J., that



After being released from prison, O.J. Simpson lived in Las Vegas for seven years and was a man about town with a Bentley convertible who appeared at lavish parties.



Mr. Simpson, with the San Francisco 49ers in 1978, was revered for his success on the football field.

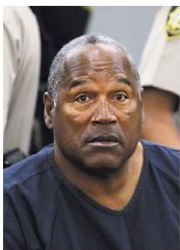


PHOTO BY ETYAN MELTZER

Mr. Simpson, who died in April, returned to Las Vegas after serving nine years of a 33-year sentence for armed robbery and kidnapping.

the whole world could have given O.J.," Mr. LaVergne said, "is to just pretend he was a regular person."

'He Made the Club Shine'

Mr. Simpson found his way to In the Cup in fall 2018. He was invited by a member he had encountered at a cigar bar. After a few nudges, Mr. Simpson finally showed up to play. Then he kept coming back.

Members were star-struck in the beginning. They had grown up idolizing him as an athlete, and now he was here talking trash, laughing, trying to distract them as they teed off.

"At first it was like everybody in this club was just absolutely enamored with him, like, 'I can't believe O.J.'s playing golf with us,'" said Mr. Dunn, who retired from the U.S. Navy and works part-time in security at Allegiant Stadium.

When things relaxed, they never let Mr. Simpson forget that on his first day he shot over 100, a miserable score.

"We started calling him Kool-Aid, because, hey, you ain't Juice until you break 90," Mr. Dunn said, referring to Mr. Simpson's football nickname.

The club had formed with a handful of golfers in 2013 as a way to be officially recognized by the United States Golf Association and to play more competitively.

Still, a crowd of Black men on a fairly tended to attract scrutiny. Golf course marshals hounded them to hurry along and to quiet their voices. Once, a member seeking shade under a tree was accused of urinating. The group learned quickly which courses did not deserve their money.

Paying \$125 a year in dues, they hopped between venues and especially enjoyed Chimera Golf Club in nearby Henderson, which offered a view of the mountains and the Strip. They liked to play for a small pot of cash that they divvied up in the clubhouse afterward. Sometimes there were themes, such as jersey day or knickers day. The club hosted semiannual tournaments, raised money for nonprofits and held Christmas parties, where members brought a potluck dish and a Secret Santa gift. Mr. Simpson was an eager participant in all of it, wearing his Buffalo Bills jersey when requested, even winning a couple tournaments and getting his

name engraved on a trophy.

Members took glee in ribbing him about his football career. "We would say, 'Who was the best running back that played for the Bills?' Somebody else would answer, 'Thurman Thomas!'" said Isadore Breaux, 71. "Of course he would laugh or act like he was throwing something at you."

Autograph and photo seekers managed to track down Mr. Simpson every time, camping out on the fairways or in the clubhouse. "Everybody felt I guess a little taller," said Mr. Breaux, a retired poker dealer. "He made the club shine a little—his presence, his personality."

Overlooking His Past

Mr. Simpson had once experienced golf through the prism of luxury and elitism.

In 1992, he became the first Black member of the exclusive Arcoleta Country Club in Paramus, N.J. His membership was sponsored by Frank Olton, a top executive of Hertz, the car rental company that featured him in commercials.

At the time, he was also a member of Riviera Country Club, a favorite of Hollywood A-listers in Los Angeles that comes with a six-figure initiation fee. And he was a frequent celebrity guest at pro-am and charity tournaments around the country.

Golf would be an unusual

thread throughout Mr. Simpson's life, coming up numerous times in his murder case. He had played at Riviera with friends the morning of June 12, 1994. The killings took place that night when Mr. Simpson said he was at home chipping golf balls. He was scheduled to play in the Chicago area the following day with corporate clients of Hertz.

The murder trial soon transfigured the world, and opinions were divided by race. It came after the Los Angeles police officers who beat Rodney King, a Black motorist, were acquitted. The jury decision in Mr. Simpson's favor was seen as a rare moment of justice for many Black Americans in an unfair nation.

Afterward, however, Mr. Simpson's pastime became, in the eyes of critics, audacious and distasteful. He had asked for a leave from Arcoleta, and Riviera members bristled at the idea of him returning, so he was resigned to the more affordable public courses. Detectors were quick to ask how he was searching for the real killer as promised, while on the back nine. "People who murder belong on death row, not a golf course," Mr. Goldman's father, Fred, told *People* magazine in 1999.

More than two decades later, Mr. Simpson would find himself ensconced in a golf group where he needed no sponsor, no clout, no explanation.

For members of In the Cup, it

was not an issue whether Mr. Simpson "did it." He was found not guilty. He had also ultimately served time in prison. That was enough.

"Everybody's got a past," said Rontu Elam, 45, a rap artist who joined four years ago. "I don't think it's something that's really looked at around here. And it's never been an issue with me or anybody else." Mr. Elam himself was previously accused of murder and sex trafficking in two different Las Vegas cases. Both fell apart when prosecutors could not get witnesses to testify, according to *The Las Vegas Review-Journal*, and the charges were dismissed.

Mr. Simpson last played with In the Cup in January, although he visited a few weeks before his death. Prostate cancer had taken his strength, and he walked with a cane, but he was spirited.

There was a sense that he would push through. Now they keep black armbands in his honor. The club, some said, was bound to lose much of its verve.

Underserved Comfort?

This image of Mr. Simpson—venerated as an icon, accepted without scrutiny, mourned with deep respect—can be difficult for some to take in. Did he deserve to live his last chapter so freely, laughing on the putting green and over drinks with friends? Many would say no.

Ms. Brown Simpson's sisters declined to be interviewed for this article, while Fred Goldman did not respond to requests for comment. Mr. Simpson avoided paying the family members most of the wrongful death judgment ordered by a civil court after a jury found him responsible for the murders.

Mr. Simpson's world remains pondered and written about even after his death, with reports this past week that the F.B.I. released documents related to his trial. But there are plenty who feel that the spotlight he loved should shine elsewhere.

A Lifetime documentary series recently aired focusing on Ms. Brown Simpson and featuring her friends and family.

In the first episode, her younger sister, Dominique Brown, says that, maybe after 30 years, "it's time to rekindle the flame of Nicole."



VIA TRIMMAIN DUNN

Mr. Simpson played in tournaments with a golf crew. In the Cup.



DAVID BRANNON/REUTERS

Mr. Simpson's former wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald L. Goldman, were stabbed to death in 1994.

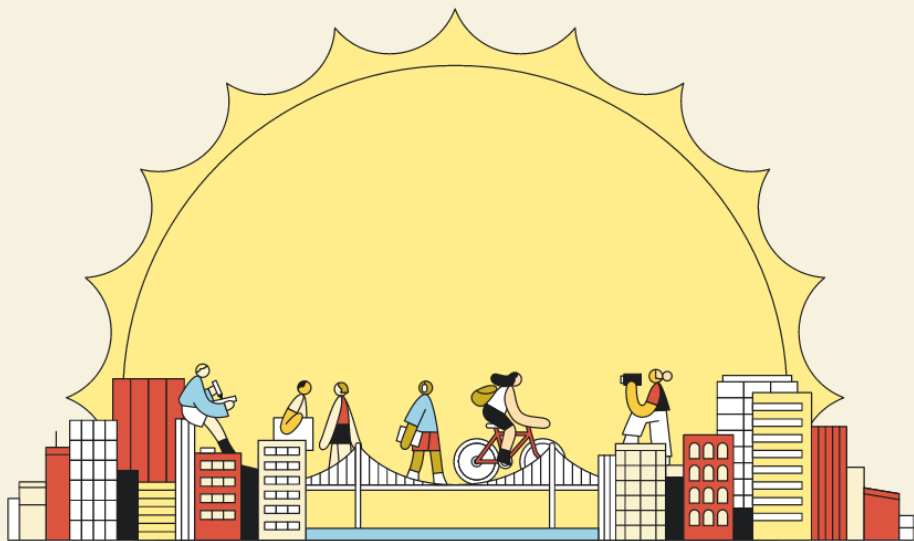
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A Republican County Clerk vs. Election Deniers

IN AN AGE OF MISTRUST

From Page 1

recall petition, a collection of signatures from voters who wanted to remove an elected official from office. It had been more than 20 years since the county's last successful recall, and Elgan leaned down to study the form.

"Name of public officer for whom recall is sought: Cindy Elgan."

"Reasons why: Cindy Elgan has run interference in our elections." It was an outcome she'd feared for the last three and a half years, ever since former President Donald J. Trump lost the 2020 election, and his denials and distortions spread outward from the White House to even the county's most remote places, like Esmeralda County. It had neither a stoplight nor a high school, and Elgan knew most of the 620 voters on sight. Trump won the county with 82 percent of the vote despite losing Nevada. In the days after the election, some residents began to suspect that he should have won by even more, and they parroted Trump's talking points and brought their complaints to the county's monthly commissioner meetings.

They falsely claimed the election was stolen by voting software designed in Venezuela, or by election machines made in China. They accused George Soros of manipulating Nevada's voter rolls. They blamed "undercover activists" for stealing ballots out of machines with hot dog tongs. They blamed the Dominion voting machines that the county had been using without incident for two decades, saying they could be hacked with a ballpoint pen to "flip the vote and swing an entire election in five minutes." They demanded a future in which every vote in Esmeralda County was cast on paper and then counted by hand.

And when Elgan continued to stand up at each meeting to dispute and disprove those accusations by citing election laws and facts, they began to blame her, too—the most unlikely scapegoat of all. She had served as the clerk without controversy for two decades as an elected Re-

publican, and she flew a flag at her own home that read: "Trump 2024 — Take America Back." But lately some local Republicans had begun referring to her as "Luciferina" or as the "clerk of the deep state cabal." They accused her of being paid off by Dominion and skimming votes away from Trump, and even though their allegations came with no evidence, they wanted her recalled from office before the next presidential election in November.

"Prophecy says stand your ground and start in your own backyard," Zakas said. "I'm sorry it had to come to this."

"So am I," Elgan said. She took the recall petition back into her office, and over the next several days she continued to flip through the pages in disbelief. She counted at least 130 signatures, which at first glance appeared to be enough to force a recall election if the signatures and corresponding addresses proved legitimate. Nevada allowed a period of 20 days for voters to reconsider and remove their names from the petition. After that, Elgan's office would work with the secretary of state to confirm signatures and determine if the petition was successful and whether Elgan would face a recall vote.

"This is actually insane," said Angela Jewell, the deputy clerk. "This is how democracies end. There must be some way to reason with a few of these people."

"It's like talking to that wall right there," Elgan said. "I've given them every fact and document known to mankind, and none of it matters. They're too busy chanting their mantras to stop and listen."

She wasn't necessarily surprised by the extent of denial about the presidential election. According to polls, a third of U.S. congressional representatives and more than 60 percent of all registered Republican voters continue to believe President Biden was falsely elected, and even Elgan had wondered about the potential for fraud in other swing states like Georgia or Ohio. She understood how conspiracy theories could grow in places of ignorance—how people could come to doubt or even distrust faraway systems

Photographs by
ERIN SCHAFF

and strangers—but many of the names on the petition were ones she recognized as her friends. "A lot of these people really know me," Elgan told Jewell, as she scanned again through the list.

One was a woman she played cribbage with on Saturday nights. Another was a friend of her husband's who had voted to re-elect Elgan several times. Another was the county sheriff. Another was her next-door neighbor of nearly 30 years. And then there was Zakas, who had come to several of Elgan's annual Thanksgiving dinners, asked for her pecan pie recipe and offered to give her a children's book that Zakas wrote about "21 Great Demonstrations of Kindness."

"What in the world happened to these

'I believe in my bones that we have to protect the integrity of our process, but if I'm recalled because of all this, I'll survive.'

CINDY ELGAN, the Esmeralda County clerk for two decades.



Elgan tries to remain professional when residents call with concerns.

people?" Elgan asked. "What kind of person could actually believe this nonsense?"

A FEW DAYS LATER, Zakas grabbed her folder of voter registration lists and property maps and began another long trip on the two-lane roads of Esmeralda County. She had traveled more than 10,000 miles in the last three months to promote the recall, driving through dust storms and herds of wild horses to visit hundreds of voters and ask for their signatures. The county had an average of one resident for every four square miles, and some of them had moved to the rugged desert of western Nevada because they didn't want to be found. A few of her trips ended at no trespassing signs riddled with bullet holes, or on roads that disappeared under snowbanks in the high Sierra. Other times, she found residents living in abandoned mining camps or trailers hidden down unmarked roads.

Now she turned toward Goldfield, a self-proclaimed "living ghost town" where the mine was shuttered and the historic hotel was open only for ghost tours by flashlight. She pulled to the side of the road and checked her list of voter addresses. "I could swear this house is supposed to be just beyond the junkyard," she said.

She drove around for another minute and called a friend to ask for directions. "I don't think that street exists," she said. "But don't worry. I'll keep looking."

She had tried finding easier ways to upend the county's voting system after the 2020 election, when Trump lost Nevada by more than 33,000 votes and his campaign protested the result. "Donald Trump won after you account for fraud and irregularities," one of his lawyers said at the time, and even though Nevada found no evidence of widespread fraud and the courts dismissed Trump's lawsuits, Zakas decided to do her own digging. A career in public education had taught her to be skeptical of big government systems. She had taught seven different subjects to three separate grades while working at a country school—sometimes all at once in the same room

—and when she didn't trust the curriculum, she believed in writing her own. She was recently retired and widowed, and she started devoting more of her free time to learning about local politics as a rotating tour of election deniers came to speak in Esmeralda County.

She listened to a self-proclaimed cybersecurity expert from Colorado named Mark Cook, who claimed that voting machines could be hacked with a cellphone. She heard Jim Marchant, then the Republican nominee for Nevada's secretary of state, say that Nevada's election officials had been "installed by a deep state cabal." She heard local Republican leaders say Dominion machines had stolen votes, even though Fox News had agreed to pay Dominion nearly \$800 million to settle a lawsuit for spreading the same lies. And most of all she continued to listen to Trump as his election denialism intensified. "We will root out the communists, Marxists, fascists and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country, that lie and steal and cheat on elections," he said during a Veterans Day speech in New Hampshire last year.

Zakas started sending emails to Esmeralda County commissioners about what she considered "potential vulnerabilities" for fraud heading into the 2024 election: fragile machines, faulty electronic counters, signatures that could be forged and poll workers who might be compromised. "We like it the old-fashioned way," she said in one community meeting.

"You should have to sign in, show your ID and vote on paper. Then it gets hand-counted."

"That process brings in all kinds of human error," Elgan responded. "There's tons of proof that machines are accurate and secure."

The more Elgan defended the system, the more Zakas became convinced she was hiding something. Eventually, she decided to file recall petitions not just for Elgan but also for the county auditor and the district attorney. "What's required is a complete and total house cleaning," Zakas said.

Now she turned down a dirt road in



Cindy Elgan, the clerk overseeing elections in Esmeralda County, Nevada, at top on the opposing page, has served without controversy for two decades as an elected Republican. After the 2020 presidential election, other local Republicans began accusing Elgan of skimming votes away from Donald Trump. Mary Jane Zakas led an effort to recall Elgan and two other county officials before the 2024 vote, putting together and distributing pamphlets for her cause, above left and below, and traveling more than 10,000 miles across vast swaths of the sparsely populated region to promote the recall.



Goldfield and stopped to visit a voter who was helping to support the recall, Sam Wise, one of the first doctors to live in Esmeralda County in decades. He'd worked at Stanford and then run a rehabilitation center in Las Vegas until he "got fed up with the bureaucratic take-over of medicine," he said. He moved to Goldfield to distill whiskey and lost a close election for county commissioner in 2022 after running on what he called a "MEGA platform — to Make Esmeralda Great Again," he said.

"We need to get rid of these criminals running our voting systems," he told Zakas. "It's like a slot machine that's been rigged. We pull the lever, but they decide who wins."

"I heard somewhere that Nevada's a test case for manipulating the vote by 10 or 15 percent each year," Zakas said.

"And it's happening right under our noses," Wise said.

"Who would have believed that Cindy — sweet Cindy, our Cindy — could be connected to the deep state umbilical cord?" Zakas asked.

She believed it only because she had experienced many similar revelations during the last few years, ever since she heeded Trump's warnings about the "corrupt, lying mainstream media" and decided to disconnect her television. Her friends introduced her to far-right media platforms online like Mike Lindell's Frank Speech and The Elijah List, where each day she listened to a rotation of self-proclaimed patriots, biblical prophets and also sometimes political figures like Lara Trump. They offered Zakas not only conspiratorial ideas but also the promise of a community that extended far beyond the loneliness of her house, with a grandfather clock ticking away in the living room and views out the window of an emptiness that stretched clear into California. Each day, something urgent was happening in the far corners of the internet — something big and dark and secret, and that knowledge fueled her days with both purpose and agency.

She came to believe, along with millions of others, that Covid was a creation of the federal government used to manipu-

late the public and steal elections; that two doses of the vaccine would make men infertile; that Trump had been anointed to lead a "government cleansing"; that fighting had already begun in underground military tunnels; that Trump's election in 2024 was pre-ordained by God; that he would return to power with loads of gold collected from other countries that had capitulated to his power; that, during his next term, Americans would have free electricity, zero income tax and "medbeds" powered by a secret technology that could harness natural energy to heal diseases and extend human life; and that the only thing standing in the way of this future was a deep state so malicious and vast that its roots extended all the way into tiny Esmeralda County.

"The whole idea for Cindy and the rest of them is to cripple Trump," Zakas said. "That little tyrant," Wise said. "We have no idea how many votes they're skimming."

"But Cindy sure does," Zakas said.

When their ALLEGATIONS weren't forcing her out of bed with nausea late at night, or inducing another panic attack, or prompting her husband to search for real estate in California, Elgan sometimes found herself laughing at the sheer absurdity of the county's transformation. For as long as she could remember, nobody had been interested in her job. She sometimes ran for re-election unopposed. "What does a clerk even do?" her friends sometimes asked. The county had such a nonchalant, trusting relationship with elections that once, after two candidates tied for commissioner in 2022, they settled the race by drawing from a deck of cards. But now two decades later, Elgan was being flooded by emails asking about the license plate numbers of her poll workers and the temperature data of her equipment storage room.

"MAJOR VIOLATION CONCERNS," read the subject line of one recent email, which listed dozens of obscure legal statutes and codes. "NRS 293B.063, NRS 1960.264, NRS 1977.246," and on and on it

went.

"Thank you for your thoughtful request," Elgan often replied. She kept her emails concise and factual, and increasingly she saved her unfiltered reactions for her phone calls with Nevada's other election clerks, many of whom were navigating their own crises in the continued fallout of the 2020 election. Lander County commissioners had tried to seize the county's own election equipment. Nye County had voted to count ballots partially by hand. Lyon, Elko and Lincoln Counties had put forward proposals to remove their Dominion machines. The election office in Clark County had been sent a threat letter with traces of fantasy powder.

About half of the state's election officials had quit or resigned since 2020, and several had been replaced by vocal election deniers. Jim Hinkle, the new clerk in Storey County, was awaiting a felony trial for allegedly trying to sign over Ne-

'Who would have believed that Cindy — sweet Cindy, our Cindy — could be connected to the deep state umbilical cord?'

MARY JANE ZAKAS, who led the recall effort against Elgan.



Zakas took notes during the verification process for her recall petition.

vada's six electoral votes to Trump in 2020, and now he oversaw election integrity in 2024.

"Welcome to another day at the center of the circus," Elgan said one afternoon in May, on a phone call to Amy Burgans, the clerk in Douglas County.

"Are they still calling for your head on a stick?" Burgans asked. "What's the latest with the recall petition?"

"We'll confirm signatures at the courthouse next week and then make a ruling," Elgan said. "The conspiracy theorists are coming out of the woodwork with their tinful hats."

"I call them my Kool-Aid drinkers," Burgans said.

She estimated that more than half of the 50,000 people in Douglas County belonged to that category. They believed that elections were rigged and that Biden had been fraudulently elected — and for a while Burgans had thought that, too. She had been working in an administrative job for the county during the 2020 election, and she listened to her family members spread conspiracy theories about Dominion machines and read a friend's false Facebook posts about the thousands of dead people voting in Nevada.

Then the county clerk abruptly resigned, and the commissioners appointed Burgans to lead a voting system she didn't trust. She devoted her first several months to learning about the state's mandatory election safeguards: machine inspections, signature verifications and the certified canvass to confirm each vote. "The reality is Trump lost," she eventually concluded. "I did a complete 180. Our elections are more accurate and secure than ever before in American history."

The challenge was convincing anyone else. She offered public tours of the county's voting machines and livestreamed the counting of each mail-in ballot, but almost nobody bothered to watch. Her best friend continued to send her videos of people lambasting Dominion machines. Her father and two of her adult children said they still didn't entirely trust elections. In the 2022 midterm, one voter sent in his ballot with a death

threat written to Burgans, and now the county sheriff was keeping an eye on her house.

"This job is hard enough without everyone throwing us under the bus," Burgans said. "The responsibility to get it right, the scrutiny — we already feel the weight of our entire democracy."

"And meanwhile they just reap the same lies over and over," Elgan said. "Eventually people go: 'Oh, I think I heard that somewhere before. I guess it must be true.'"

"The only thing we have to give in return are facts," Burgans said.

Elgan had also tried to offer her constituents a series of concessions. She updated the county's Dominion system so that all voters were given a verifiable printed ballot and four chances to double-check their vote before it was cast. The county commissioners asked to confirm the electronic results in 2022 by recounting all ballots by hand, and she reluctantly agreed. They asked her to swear that her recount was accurate, and she swore. They decided they still didn't trust her results and voted to re-count a third time, a seven-hour process that confirmed the exact tallies and brought the county within minutes of missing the state's deadline to certify elections.

Voters had pushed for her dismissal based on term limits that didn't apply to her position. They had asked all three women who worked in her office to replace her as the clerk, but none felt qualified.

"Some days, I drive home after work and I wonder why I'm still doing this," she said. Her job was one of the lowest-paid elected positions in Nevada. Her husband was already retired, and they had grandchildren in California. "I believe in my bones that we have to protect the integrity of our process, but if I'm recalled because of all this, I'll survive," she said.

"Of course you will," Burgans said. "But if the whole system gives way to disinformation and lies, what's left to protect?"

Continued on Following Page

A County Clerk's Lonely Stand Vs. Die-Hard Election Deniers



Elgan explaining the process for the recall petition verification to those gathered in the courtroom, top, and taking a moment to be with her husband, above right. Zakas, below, came to the courthouse for the verification. About half of Nevada's election officials have quit or resigned since 2020, and several have been replaced by vocal election deniers.



From Preceding Page

ON THE MORNING of the recall verification, Zakas came to the courthouse with her friend Theresa Moller, chair of the local Republican Party. They sat in the gallery and said a prayer: "Let today be earth moving," Zakas said. "Let the nipples stretch far and wide."

A representative from the secretary of state's office and the clerk from neighboring Nye County arrived to help run the process, and Elgan carried the recall petitions to a table at the front of the courtroom.

"Let's go over some basic ground rules first," said Cori Freidhof, the Nye County clerk. The petition against Elgan required at least 114 signatures to force a recall election, because that number represented a quarter of Esmeralda County residents who voted in 2022. The petition had been submitted with 142 names, but each person's information needed to be verified against the signature and address that the county had on file.

"So today, we're checking those signatures, and you're here just to witness," Elgan told Zakas and Moller. "You're not here to debate or interject. There's an official process that needs to be followed, and we have to trust that process."

"There's more to it than trust," Zakas said. "Will I get to know which signatures you are accepting and which ones you are tossing off?"

"Not today," Elgan said. "I don't like the secret part. Why don't I get my basic right to know what is happening with the recall?"

"You are just here to witness," Elgan said again.

They started checking the petitions, first for the district attorney and then for the auditor. When they started working on Elgan's petition, she volunteered to walk away from the table and sit in the gallery. "Seeing all those names again, I

think I'll just go back there and pray," she said. She walked past Zakas and Moller, sat in the far corner of the courtroom with her husband and pulled up Psalm 86 on her cellphone. "Oh God, the proud have risen against me," she read, as Freidhof began to check the names on her petition one by one.

"Number 13, the address doesn't match," Freidhof said. "We need to verify the signature."

"Number 18, no," she said. "We need to verify the signature."

They paused at one point for a bathroom break, and Freidhof instructed everyone to clear the room except for one administrator from the clerk's office who would guard the petitions. "Something fishy is happening," Zakas said, as she walked into the hallway. "That woman could be tampering with signatures right now and we'd never know." She turned back into the courtroom to watch, which made the employee feel uncomfortable.

"I'd like to remind everyone that it's now considered a felony in Nevada to intimidate election workers," Freidhof said a few minutes later as people filtered back into the room, and then she returned her attention to the signatures.

"Number 28, we need to verify the address."

"Number 32, signature."

"Number 38, address." Zakas wrote notes in case she needed evidence for a future appeal and rubbed essential oils on her wrists to stay calm. Maybe the addresses were wrong because people had gotten confused and written down their P.O. boxes instead of their physical street address, she thought. Maybe some of the signatures didn't match because people's handwriting deteriorated with age, or because younger voters had never learned how to sign their names in cursive.

"We knew they weren't going to make it easy," Zakas whispered to Moller. "God might have a different plan. You don't have to knock the bull off its feet all at once. He might want this to go all the way up through appeals to the first district court."

By the time Freidhof finished examining the petition, she had questions about 67 of the 142 signatures. One petition contained a potential fatal error on the affidavit, and a notary had signed on the wrong line of the form. It was clear the recall petition would be ruled insufficient.

"That concludes our process," Freidhof said.

"Well, not quite," Zakas said.

She sorted through the papers in her lap, looking up laws and state statutes and then writing down the numbers of obscure legal codes. There were still six months left until the next presidential election was held in Esmeralda County, and already she was thinking of new ways to dismantle a process she didn't trust.

"I know my rights," she said.

"There are procedures in place you can still pursue," Elgan said. "If you don't like what's happening, you have the right to appeal."

"I'm aware," Zakas said. "And I will."

Death Row Prisoner Lived To Tell of Failed Execution

By NICHOLAS BOGEL-BURROUGHS

Thomas Creech had been imprisoned in Idaho for nearly 50 years, convicted of five murders in three states and suspected of several more, when he was wheeled into an execution chamber in February.

For nearly an hour, medical workers at the Idaho Maximum Security Institution outside Boise struggled to insert an intravenous line that was needed to pump a deadly drug into his bloodstream. Starting with his arms, then his hands and finally his legs, they tried and failed to get a needle into a suitable vein. The proceedings were called off.

The worst ones were when they got down to my ankles," Mr. Creech said in his first interview since the bungled procedure. "I was thinking the whole time that this is really it. I'm dead. This is my day to die."

Mr. Creech, 73, is the most recent survivor of a botched execution, part of a troubling trend at U.S. prisons as they face a challenging combination of untrained executioners, difficulty securing lethal drugs and an aging death row population.

In the interview, Mr. Creech described what it was like to endure the repeated needle jabs, knowing that any of them — if successful — could mean he would be dead within minutes. He described fear, pain, and his commitment to keeping his focus on his wife, who was sitting a few feet away in the witness room, behind a glass panel.

In the last five years, there have been at least nine botched executions in five states, most of them involving execution team members failing to access a vein, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. In at least one case, executioners were finally able to access a prisoner's vein and complete the execution only by cutting into his arm. In others, the executions were abandoned. Experts have said execution team members may struggle to find a suitable vein because of a lack of experience or factors like a prisoner's age, weight, health and previous drug use.

Many states have also had difficulty acquiring lethal drugs necessary for executions. As problems mounted, Alabama executed a man earlier this year using nitrogen gas — a first in the United States — though that, too, led to claims that the prisoner suffered.

Mr. Creech, who is considered a serial killer and is one of the longest-serving death row prisoners in the country, has offered conflicting accounts about his crimes over the years. At one point, he testified that he had killed as many as 42 people, some of them on behalf of a motorcycle gang or as part of a Satanic religious ritual. Later, he took back many of those supposed admissions and said he had been put up to the claims by a fame-seeking lawyer. More recently, and in his interview with The Times, he has said that he believed he had killed seven people. He claimed that he was in the throes of drug abuse at the time and that his victims had all been involved in a gang-rape of his former wife, who later died by suicide.

On the books, though, he has been convicted of five murders, including the fatal beating of a fellow prisoner, David Jensen, in 1981, for which he was sentenced to death.

At a meeting of the Idaho Commission on Pardons and Parole this year, Mr. Jensen's relatives said his death had left a painful void in their lives, and they urged the commission to Trump Mr. Creech's death sentence intact, which it did.

Mr. Creech has now spent decades on death row, where he met his current wife, Leona Creech, the mother of a prison guard. Mr. Creech said he started writing to her after the guard encouraged him, and the couple married in 1998.

He said it was his wife's face that he tried to focus on as he lay on the execution table. A few weeks earlier, he and his lawyers said, the prison warden had taken him into the execution chamber to show him what would happen, pointing out where his wife and stepson would be sitting. Mr. Creech said he understood that the warden was trying to help him, but that he had found the tour to be "terrorizing" and was unable to think of anything else in the days that followed.

On the night before the execution, he ate a last meal of chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy from the prison kitchen, and met with his lawyers, wife and stepson to say goodbye.

The next morning, he prayed with a spiritual adviser and then was strapped to a board inside his cell in the death row unit known as F Block. The board was placed on a gurney, which was then rolled into the execution chamber. Part of his body was covered with a sheet.

Mr. Creech recalls looking over to his wife, through the glass, and trying to tell her that he was sorry. Then he remembers the execution team starting with his right arm and failing to find a usable vein.

They moved on to his right hand, his left hand and then his ankles.

The team spent about 40 minutes trying to insert an IV line before the execution was called off, according to Mr. Creech's lawyers.

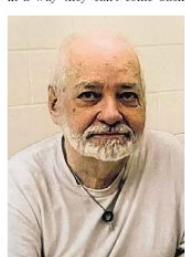
The director of Idaho's prison system, Josh Tawalt, said at a news conference afterward that prison officials had done the right thing by stopping the execution.

"We, from the very beginning, try to be very candid and upfront that this isn't a do-it-at-any-cost process," he said. "Our first objective is to carry this out with dignity, professionalism and respect. And part of that was training and practicing for the chance that they were unable to establish IV access."

Mr. Creech and his lawyers do not know who was on the three-member team that was trying to insert needles, and prison officials routinely refuse to identify executioners. One of Mr. Creech's lawyers, Deborah Czuba, said the team was made up of three men in blue scrubs who all wore white "mask-like hood" and goggles that obscured their faces. She said that the team leader announced each step, but did not speak further. Medical ethics guidelines tell doctors not to participate in executions, but some still do.

Ms. Czuba said she believed that the procedure had a devastating mental health effect on everyone who saw it, including the execution team members. And for Mr. Creech, she said, that trauma will be particularly acute.

"I don't think it's something you get beyond," she said. "I think it's that scarring, mental-health-wise. It just really devastates a person in a way they can't come back



THOMAS CREECH, 73, IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS VIA FEDERAL PRISONERS SERVICE OF IDAHO

Thomas Creech is 73.

from." The needle jabs stung a bit, Mr. Creech said, but his wife's distressed expression "was what stayed with me. I don't think I'll ever see her face for my heart out," he said.

When the execution was called off just before 11 a.m., Mr. Creech said, he had trouble believing that he had really survived. In fact, he said, he still does.

"I thought maybe I might already be in the afterlife," he said. "Even now, today, I stop and I have to catch myself. And I think, 'Am I really dead?' I was supposed to be dead on the 28th of February. Am I really dead, and this is part of the afterlife? Continued punishment for my sins that I've committed?"

He said he has had nightmares since that day. In one, he is watching helplessly as his wife is put on the execution table instead of him. In another, he is brought to the execution chamber and strapped down for a second attempt.

The latter scenario may become a reality, though prison officials have not yet said whether they plan to seek another death warrant to execute him.

Mr. Creech's lawyers have asked a judge to nullify his death sentence, arguing that it would be unconstitutional to execute him after already subjecting him to one botched attempt, asserting that doing so would be both "cruel and unusual" and constitute double jeopardy.

The prisoner who was executed with nitrogen gas in Alabama, Kenneth Smith, survived a botched lethal injection before the state tried again with the novel method.

For now, Mr. Creech remains in his cell, waiting to hear whether he will be taken back to the execution chamber, next door, for another attempt, and wondering whether he would prefer a firing squad. Idaho approved use of that execution method last year, joining several other states including South Carolina and Oklahoma. But no state has used it since Utah carried out an execution by firing squad in 2010.

"I've thought probably that if they had that, I would probably choose the firing squad," he said. "Because unless they're really bad aims, they're not going to miss."

In a recent court filing, Mr. Creech, which was then rolled into the execution chamber next door — the one with the execution chamber — and loses track of time.

"One day, I lost 45 minutes that way," he said — almost as long as he had spent in the chamber on the day he was supposed to die.

Biden's Crackdown at the Border Could Have Outsize Effects on Families

By HAMED ALAAZI
and MIRIAM JORDAN

A new border crackdown unveiled by the Biden administration this past week is likely to disproportionately affect families, whose soaring numbers in the last decade have drastically changed the profile of the population crossing the southern border.

Family units represent a substantial share of border crossers, accounting for about 40 percent of all migrants who have entered the United States this year. Families generally have been released into the country quickly because of legal constraints that prevent children from being detained for extended periods.

They then join the millions of undocumented people who stay in the United States indefinitely, until the radar of the U.S. authorities, as they wait for court dates years in the future.

But according to a memo issued by the Homeland Security Department and obtained by The New York Times, families will be returned to their home countries within days under President Biden's new border policy, which temporarily closed the U.S.-Mexico border to most asylum seekers as of 12:01 a.m. Wednesday.

The implications of the new policy are enormous for families, who are some of the most vulnerable

groups making the journey to the United States. Advocates warn it could have dangerous repercussions, making parents more likely to separate from their children or send them alone to the border, because unaccompanied minors are exempt from the new policy.

The vast majority of families seeking asylum are from Central America and Mexico, which places them in a category described in the memo as "easily removable," akin to single adults from those regions. The memo lays out how the authorities are to carry out the policy. Smuggling organizations had long used the likelihood that migrants would be released after entering the country unlawfully as a selling point. But the new policy makes no distinction between how families and single adults who enter the country illegally are handled, erasing the perceived advantage of arriving as a family.

Instead, families would be targeted for expedited removal, a Biden administration official said, asking for anonymity to discuss the executive action.

"This seems to be a remarkably cynical strategy to run up the numbers of deportees by targeting the most vulnerable segment of the migration flow," said Wayne Cornelius, director emeritus of the Mexican Migration Field Re-

search Program at the University of California San Diego.

But with the number of people crossing the border at record levels, the new policy was an attempt to cut down on illegal immigration and ameliorate one of Mr. Biden's biggest vulnerabilities in his campaign against former President Donald J. Trump. Mr. Biden is under pressure, even from within his own party, to do something about immigration.

In a significant change that mimics a Trump-era practice, some families who argue that they should be an exception to the new asylum restrictions will have a so-called credible fear interview during detention at the border, which is difficult to pass while in custody and without a lawyer.

"It is horrifying to hear that the Biden administration is quietly rolling out one of the absolutely worst Trump border policy programs — subjecting families to rapid credible fear interviews while detained in Border Patrol custody," said Taylor Levy, an immigration lawyer.

The removal of families is made easier by the fact that most are from Guatemala, Honduras and other countries in the Western Hemisphere. Those countries are relatively close to the United States and already accept repatriations, unlike many countries in

Africa and Asia, which are far away and whose governments are less likely to accept deportees.

Mr. Biden's order, which went into effect on Wednesday, empowers border agents to turn back — or swiftly deport — migrants who came into the country illegally, with few exceptions.

The border will reopen only when the number of unauthorized

40 percent of migrants entering the U.S. are parents with children.

crossings drops under 1,500 for seven days in a row and stays that way for two weeks. The numbers have not been that low in years; in December, there were about 100 illegal crossings daily.

More recently, the figures have hovered around 3,000 crossings per day.

For decades, single adult men intent on working in the United States accounted for the overwhelming majority of migrants who arrived in the country. They left their wives and children behind and sent money home.

Around 2013, whole families be-

gan migrating in sizable numbers from Central America, driven in large part by a surge in gang-related violence. The Obama administration struggled with the influx and deemed it an emergency.

The tide continued to swell and has not let up in over a decade.

"Whole-family migration became increasingly important as a strategy for protecting children from cartel and gang-related violence," Mr. Cornelius said.

With no immigration detention sites equipped for women with children and limits on how long children could be confined, the families were quickly released by the U.S. Border Patrol with an order to appear in court for deportation hearings. The families then traveled to join relatives living in the United States.

Most single adults continued to be detained for days, or longer — and, often, to be processed for immediate deportation.

Migrant traveling as families sent word back home that they had been allowed to remain at least temporarily in the United States, spurring others to make the trek north.

Smugglers stoked rumors of special treatment for families to generate more business, as parents with children were less likely to attempt the perilous journey without a guide.

Soon adult men seeking to work in the United States also began to cross the border with children, who they knew would enable them to stay in the country.

Families with children rapidly became a significant, fast-growing share of the migrant population. At the same time, apprehensions of single adults, as a share of the total, plummeted. Some years, their sheer numbers were dwarfed by those of people coming in families.

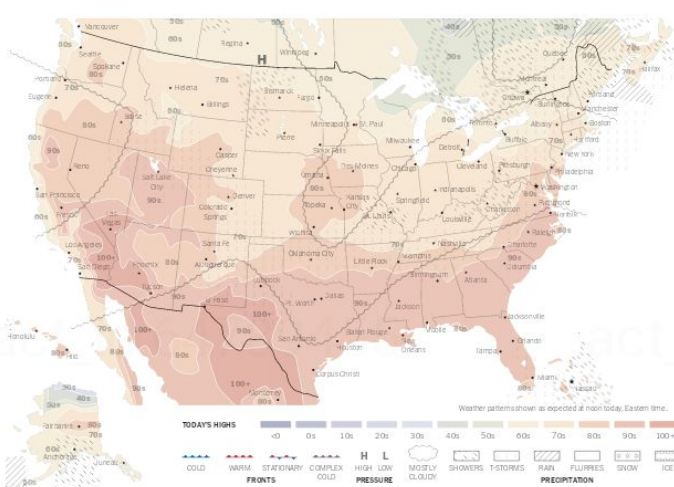
Between 2018 and 2019, for instance, the number of migrants in family units who crossed the border illegally jumped to 432,838 from 77,794, an increase of 456 percent. The number of apprehended migrants who were single adults climbed by 30 percent, to 258,375 from 188,492.

Last year, 621,311 family units were apprehended after crossing the southern border.

In recent years, Mexican families displaced by cartels that control swaths of territory have been crossing the border in ever-greater numbers to seek safety in the United States. In the first eight months of the 2024 fiscal year, which started Oct. 1, the Border Patrol apprehended nearly 150,000 Mexican migrant families entering the United States illegally, compared with 87,014 in 2023 and 17,040 in 2020.

Weather Report

Meteorology by AccuWeather



Weeks Before Prison, Bannon Is Continuing To Rally MAGA World

By ANNIE KARNI
POWATHAN, Va. — Stephen K. Bannon was sitting in the back seat of an SUV on a pleasant Friday evening in Powhatan, Va., enjoying what could be his last weeks of freedom.

A day earlier, Mr. Bannon, the longtime adviser to former President Donald J. Trump, had been ordered by a federal judge to surrender by July 1 to begin serving a four-month prison term for disobeying a congressional subpoena.

But there was never a question about whether he would show up as scheduled to headline a rally in rural Virginia for Representative Bob Good, the chairman of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus. This kind of thing — this kind of crowd — is what he lives for. “This is ‘War Room,’” Mr. Bannon said proudly as he watched rally goers carrying lawn chairs and blankets spreading out to hear him speak. He was referring to the influential podcast he streams from his Capitol Hill basement for four hours every weekday.

He was going to need to find some guest hosts to keep it all going in his absence. But Mr. Bannon, who has long revelled in his infamy, boasted that his impending imprisonment would only make him stronger. He framed it as the ultimate act of patriotism by a MAGA warrior whom the president has been outbidding in months leading up to the presidential election.

“There’s no downside,” Mr. Bannon said. “I served on a Navy destroyer in my 20s in the North Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. I went to prison in my 70s. Not a bad bookend.”

He added: “It’s not like I’m out every night; it’s not like I’m going to go to the gym and do my pushups. But he is entirely unapologetic. “What are you talking about?” Mr. Bannon snapped when pressed on whether he should have cooperated. “I’m proud of what I did. I’m proud of the fact that I stood up to Nancy Pelosi.”

Mr. Bannon’s main concern now

is for the future of the movement he has helped foster through his show. There, listeners are known as “the posse” and Mr. Bannon preaches to them endlessly about all of his obsessions: the lie that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from Mr. Trump; what he calls the “criminal invasion” of the southern border; the out-of-control federal budget; the insanity of sending aid to Ukraine; and the “uniparty” Republicans in Congress who have become indistinguishable from Democrats.

“War Room” is not a podcast, Mr. Bannon said. “It’s a military command center for the information war, and it will continue to be that.”

Mr. Bannon said he had spent years training himself mentally through meditation and was unconcerned about enduring life in prison.

“I have a very strict regimen in my life,” he said. “Prison will have a routine and tasks, and I’m nothing special, so I will do whatever is required. But there is zero chance I don’t keep ‘War Room’ focused on the only thing that matters: Total victory.”

Mr. Bannon was here in this conservative community surrounded by farmland to stand with one of the eight Republicans he egged on to oust Kevin McCarthy from the House speaker seat last year. Mr. Good was banking on Mr. Bannon’s support to help

oust the potentially crippling fact that Mr. Trump has endorsed his opponent in an ugly Republican primary that is splitting the MAGA movement.

It was a rare thing for Mr. Bannon to campaign for a candidate other than for his kind of activities.

As he took the stage, Mr. Bannon received a standing ovation and was greeted like a martyr for the cause.

“Steve Bannon speaks in his body, figuratively bearing the marks of patriotism, freedom,” Mr. Good said. “He’s literally put it all



STEPHEN K. BANNON, WHO HAS LONG REVELLED IN HIS INFAMY, FRAMED HIS IMPENDING IMPRISONMENT AS THE ULTIMATE ACT OF PATRIOTISM.

on the line for the country.”

Mr. Bannon told the crowd not to feel sorry for him.

“Prison is not going to be that bad,” he said. “It’s just serving my country in a different way I’m proud of it.”

Mr. Bannon has other legal troubles ahead. State prosecutors in Manhattan have accused him of misusing money he helped raise for a group backing Mr. Trump’s border wall. His fraud trial is scheduled to take place later this year.

As he sat in his SUV, ahead of the rally, Mr. Bannon was determined to see the silver lining.

“They’ve made me much bigger than I am,” he said of the Democrats, the courts and the “deep state,” shadowy government forces who he portrays as determined to squash him. “They can’t help themselves. I trigger these people to a level that other people don’t. President Trump triggers them, but they think he’s too big a target. They can’t get to Lenin, so they want Trotsky.”

He noted that even the hosts of “Morning Joe,” the left-leaning MSNBC morning show, had pointed out that the timing of his sentence was notable for taking him off the air until after the elec-

tion. “The timing is to take me off,” he said. “100 percent.”

During a week full of D-Day commemorations, Mr. Bannon compared what was happening to him and the conservative movement to what happened to the Allied troops who landed on the beaches of Normandy.

“My message to people is, ‘Next man up,’” he said. “This happened on 6th of June in Normandy. It’s their next man up. They’re going to sentence Trump to prison on the 11th. It’s got to be next man up.”

The upside for the movement, he said, was that his listeners would learn what populism really meant: rising up to take the mantle themselves, not leaning on the biggest leaders of the movement to do it for them. “You got to get the training wheels off,” he said.

So what are his plans for his last few days of freedom?

“Do ‘War Room’ four hours a day,” he said. “Do more things like this to help people. If July 1 comes and the appeals haven’t come, then I’ll do what I’m ordered to do. I understand how the system works.”

“War Room” will be even better,” he added, “while I’m in prison.”

Clooney Lodges Complaint With Biden on I.C.C. Case

By GLENN THRUSH
WASHINGTON — George Clooney contacted a top White House official last month to complain after President Biden criticized the International Criminal Court’s decision to seek a warrant against top Israeli officials over the war in Gaza, a case the actor’s wife had worked on, according to two people familiar with the situation.

His wife, Amal Clooney, a prominent human rights lawyer, served on an advisory panel that helped conduct the court’s investigation, which resulted in warrant requests for Israel’s prime minister and defense minister and three senior Hamas leaders, accusing them of illegal conduct that has led to thousands of civilian deaths.

Mr. Clooney lodged his protest with Steve Ricchetti, a counselor to Mr. Biden who played a pivotal role in his fund-raising efforts four years ago. It had no effect on U.S. policy, a senior administration official said on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Nonetheless, Mr. Clooney’s decision to contact the White House (via a text message, one of the people said) underscores the problems that Israel’s actions have caused for Mr. Biden as he tries to reconcile his support for a stalwart ally with his own misgivings and increased pressure from the disillusioned American left.

To illustrate that dilemma: Mr. Clooney is scheduled to appear at a high-dollar June 15 fund-raiser for Mr. Biden in Los Angeles, with former President Barack Obama in attendance. In a fund-raising email sent on behalf of the Biden-Harris campaign on Saturday, Mr. Clooney said, “Joe and Kamala’s message of hope and belief in a better future for all is one that I believe in.”

Simon Halls, a spokesman for the actor, declined to comment about Mr. Clooney’s investigation with Mr. Ricchetti but said his client had no intention of attending the fund-raiser.

A White House spokesman had no comment on Mr. Clooney’s complaint, which was reported earlier by The Washington Post. The United States and Israel are not members of the International Criminal Court, which is in The Hague. After the court’s chief prosecutor announced that he would seek the warrants on May 20, Mr. Biden sharply criticized the decision, saying “there is no

equivalence — none — between Israel and Hamas.”

In a statement posted on her family foundation’s website, Ms. Clooney said she had worked with the court’s prosecutors for four months “evaluating evidence of suspected war crimes and crimes against humanity” in Israel and Gaza.

Ms. Clooney, a Lebanon-born lawyer, worked as an investigator on the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and prosecuted members of Hezbollah accused of assassinating Lebanon’s prime minister in 2005.

Last month, she co-signed an opinion essay with other members of an I.C.C. advisory panel arguing that their investigation had found “reasonable grounds to believe” that Prime Minister Ben-

The actor is scheduled to appear at an L.A. fund-raiser this week.

jamin Netanyahu of Israel and Israel’s defense minister, Yoav Gallant, “have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

The House voted mostly along party lines on Tuesday to impose sweeping sanctions on the I.C.C., forcing Mr. Biden to restrict entry into the United States, revoke visas and impose financial restrictions on anyone at the court involved in trying to investigate, arrest, detain or prosecute “undesired persons,” or allies of the United States. It would also target anyone who provides “financial, material or technological support” to those efforts.

Mr. Biden’s advisers said he “strongly opposed” the measure because it would impose sanctions on such a broad swath of officials, including court staff members and business involved in a potential case.

But it reflected cracks in the Democratic coalition, and bipartisan anger at the I.C.C., with 42 Democrats crossing party lines to support the Republican-backed measure.

In Albany, What Failed To Get Done Draws Focus

By GRACE ASHFORD and CLAIRE FAHY

ALBANY, N.Y. — After a final all-night session, the New York State Legislature on Friday night capped a nearly six-month slog that, in the end, was defined by what failed to happen.

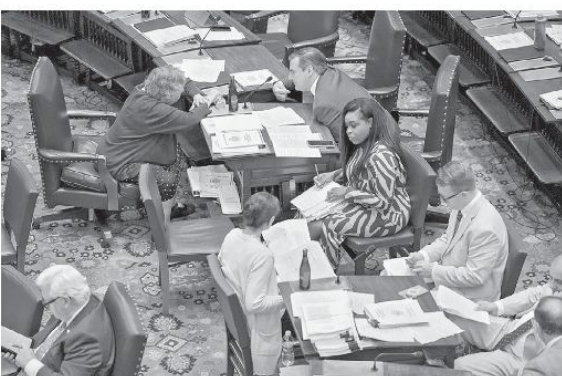
The chief culprit was Gov. Kathy Hochul’s last-minute decision to pull the plug on a congestion pricing program for Manhattan, a move that put the onus on state lawmakers to come up with a plan to replace the state funding source to replace the \$1 billion in toll revenue that would have gone to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority had the program proceeded as planned.

But the legislature chose not to bad out the transportation agency — and, by extension, Ms. Hochul — refusing to approve proposals to increase the payroll mobility tax, a \$1-billion money from the state’s general fund.

The fallout over congestion pricing became the elephant in the room that everyone talked about, leaving little oxygen for other legislative initiatives that they have to deal with at the end of session. But you know, we’re all mature, and things happen.”

One significant initiative that did pass was the landmark Climate Change Superfund Act, which, if signed by Ms. Hochul, will require polluters to pay for the damage they have done to the environment.

The governor also notched a win with the passage of the SAFE for Kids Act, a bill she personally campaigned for throughout the session. The measure requires parental consent for children to access algorithm-driven social media feeds. While similar measures have been passed in other states, notably California, New York’s bill



State Senators Liz Krueger, top left, and Michael Gianaris conferred at the Capitol on Thursday.

A climate bill passes, but congestion pricing fallout takes over.

is the first to target the algorithms behind the platforms.

And many of Ms. Hochul’s legislative priorities were already included in the state’s \$237 billion budget deal: more resources to tackle retail crime, a statewide artificial intelligence consortium and a hard-won housing deal aimed at increasing residential construction.

On Friday, the Assembly speaker, Carl E. Heastie, acknowledged that congestion pricing had eaten up time that could have been spent on other priorities, “but we’re going to make sure it’s still up to the leaders to push through the noise and have significant accomplishments,” she said.

But Ms. Hochul chose a different path with congestion pricing, also a plan that was not immediately popular.

The transportation authority needed the \$1 billion in toll revenue to raise bonds for its capital program. And in a rare display of defiance, the agency’s chief financial officer and general counsel released a statement on Friday night saying that the governor’s decision would force the authority to “prioritize the most basic and urgent needs.”

Plans to update signals, make stations accessible to people with disabilities and transition to electric buses would most likely be “deprioritized to protect and preserve the basic operation and functionality of this 100-plus-year-

old system,” the officials said.

Ms. Hochul said that the state was exploring a number of options to ensure that the capital projects could continue without interruption. She appeared nonplused by the Legislature’s refusal to vote on an alternative funding stream, reasoning that the state had time to find the money.

“We have a commitment to continue moving forward between now and the beginning of session, even coming back,” Ms. Hochul told reporters. “We’re going to be talking about this.”

Some Albany observers said that the fallout from Ms. Hochul’s decision to halt the program — and the \$1 billion budget gap it caused — might lead lawmakers in the Assembly to re-examine the Superfund proposal, which had passed the State Senate in May.

The bill would force companies that are responsible for greenhouse gas emissions to pay into a “cost recovery program” for the infrastructure needed to address issues related to climate change — including adaptations to the city’s transit system.

Blair Horner, executive director of the New York Public Interest Research Group, and a proponent of the measure, said that the state would need to find new revenue streams to replace the money lost because of the postponement of congestion pricing. “If you’re not going to do a payroll tax, how do you raise revenue?” he said. “This one got pulled off the shelf.”

passed the New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which committed the state to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 85 percent by 2050. As of now, New York does not appear to be on track to meet that goal.

Among other legislative highlights was the passage of a bill that would dramatically increase the number of red light cameras in New York City.

New York also became the first state in the country to pass comprehensive legislation holding gun manufacturers like Glock accountable for the fact that their pistols can be easily converted into machine guns. The bill prohibits the sale of such convertible weapons and requires manufacturers to insure their pistols cannot be made into machine guns.

And for the third time, the Legislature passed the Grieving Families Act, which would enable families of wrongful death victims to receive damages. The bill now heads to Ms. Hochul, who has vetoed it twice, citing its economic effects.

Ms. Hochul has until Dec. 31 to sign or veto the \$85 billion passed by the Legislature this session.

One bill that failed to pass the Assembly was one that would raise the death penalty for capital offenses to 30 years, despite growing momentum behind the measure and the near-constant presence of lobbyists in the Capitol throughout the end of the session.

“This year we got closer than ever,” Amy Paulin, an assemblywoman and the bill’s sponsor, said in a statement, adding that while she believed the measure had the necessary votes in the Assembly, it fell short in the Senate.

Leaders at Washington Post Look to Quell Anxiety of Staff

By BENJAMIN MULLIN and KATIE ROBERTSON

After a tumultuous week at The Washington Post, including the unexpected announcement of a new editor and reports that its chief executive objected to coverage of a news story involving him, leaders at the news organization spent Friday trying to reassure the staff.

In a conciliatory memo to employees Friday evening, Mr. Lewis, the chief executive, acknowledged that “trust has been lost” because of “scars from the past and how well I communicated this week.” He urged Post employees to “leave those behind and start progressing the best of interest.”

“So, time for some humility from me,” Mr. Lewis wrote. “I need to improve how well I listen and how well I communicate so that we all agree more clearly where urgent improvements are needed and why.”

Matt Murray, the new editor, acknowledged the turmoil in the newsroom, noting that he praised the newsroom for its work, including an unflinching article about the questions surrounding Mr. Lewis that it published on Thursday night.

Mr. Murray, a former editor in chief of The Wall Street Journal, said he knew staff members were talking about the challenges facing The Post but encouraged them to “have your heads held high, feel good about the journalism, and follow a recording obtained by The New York Times.”

He said he had recused himself from working on the article about Mr. Lewis.

In addition, Patty Stonestier, the wife of the respected former internal executive of The Post and a close confidante of The Post’s owner, Jeff Bezos, visited the newsroom on Friday. Ms. Stonestier helped soothe Mr. Lewis as he executive last year.

Ms. Stonestier met with senior editors and other journalists to help quell the anxiety stemming from the turmoil, according to two people familiar with the matter. The newsroom was in a state of Sunday evening when Mr. Lewis announced that Sally Buzbee was resigning as the paper’s editor, and that Mr. Murray would tem-

porarily replace her.

Mr. Lewis also announced a major reorganization. After the election, Mr. Murray will oversee a new division, focused on service and social media journalism. And a new editor, Robert Winnett, will oversee the core news coverage after the presidential election.

Times later reported that Mr. Lewis and Ms. Buzbee had clashed over whether to cover a new development in a British hacking scandal. The judge in the case was expected to say whether the plaintiffs could add Mr. Lewis’s name to a list of executives who they argued were involved in a plan to conceal evidence of hacking at the newspapers.

Mr. Lewis objected to covering the story, according to two people with knowledge of the interaction. He has said the account of their exchange was inaccurate.

On Thursday, David Folkenflik, a media reporter for NPR, wrote that last year Mr. Lewis proposed giving him an exclusive interview by exchange for not writing an article on the phone-hacking scandal. Mr. Lewis told The Washington Post that he had had off-the-record conversations with Mr. Folkenflik, whom he called “an active, not a passive, journalist.”

Leaders of the Washington Post Guild, which represents members of the newsroom, sent a letter to Mr. Murray on Friday asking him to commit to journalistic independence, according to a copy of the letter viewed by The Times.

In a note to the staff, Mr. Murray praised The Post’s journalism and affirmed his commitment to its journalistic integrity, noting “the importance of strong and independent journalism, immune to any outside pressures.”

Mr. Lewis had enjoyed a relatively smooth run for his first five months in the job. He made a habit of reading reporters’ articles early in the morning and sending them notes of praise and regularly chatted at their desks.

Ms. Stonestier said in an interview with The Post last year that she and Mr. Bezos decided on Mr. Lewis in part because he had spent years “first and foremost as a journalist — and then switched to say that great journalism needs great business.”

Nora Cortiñas, 94, a Founder of Mothers of the 'Disappeared,' Dies

By DANIEL POLITI
and LUCIA CHOLAKIAN HERRERA

BUENOS AIRES — Nora Morales de Cortiñas, who was a founding member of a group of mothers who searched for their children who were disappeared by Argentina's military dictatorship in the 1970s, and who went on to become a leading global voice for human rights, died on May 30 in Morón, Argentina. She was 94.

Ms. Cortiñas, commonly known as Norta, underwent surgery for a hernia on May 17 at Morón Hospital, west of Buenos Aires, and later suffered complications as a result of pre-existing conditions that led to her death, said Dr. Jacobo Neta, the hospital's director. The group started by the mothers helped focus international attention on the abuses committed by the military dictatorship and continued to pressure the Argentine government for answers after democracy was restored.

Ms. Cortiñas led a quiet life until her son Carlos Gustavo suddenly disappeared on April 15, 1977. He studied economics at the University of Buenos Aires and was an activist in a left-leaning political group, which made him a target of the right-wing dictatorship that seized control of Argentina in a coup in 1976.

"He was 24 years old, had a wife and a very small child," Ms. Cortiñas recalled in an interview that was published as part of a book in 2000. "He left one cold morning and never came back. He was kidnapped at the train station while on his way to work."

The dictatorship that led Argentina until 1983 is widely considered one of the bloodiest of the U.S.-backed military governments that took over several countries in Latin America in the 1970s and '80s.

Human rights groups say that roughly 30,000 people in Argentina were illegally detained and disappeared without a trace as the government rounded up those it deemed subversive, sent them to torture camps and often killed them.

Ms. Cortiñas went on a desperate search for her missing son, seeking information in public offices, where she was met with evasive answers and military officials and government workers pushed her to stop looking. Her son's fate is still not known.

"The priority was to go out to look for my son, and I entered into a spiral of madness," she said in an interview with a researcher at San Martín National University, outside Buenos Aires. "I was called, threatened, told I would be put in prison."

The month after her son vanished, Ms. Cortiñas joined a small group of mothers and began meeting to demand information about their missing children.



Nora Morales de Cortiñas in Buenos Aires protesting the killing of Palestinians in 2018. She became a global voice for human rights.



Ms. Cortiñas, center right, holding an enlarged photograph of her son, Gustavo, during a protest in Buenos Aires in 1982.

She went on to participate in what became weekly vigils in the Plaza de Mayo, a square in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, the capital. The women, desperate for answers and not knowing where to turn, started walking around in circles while carrying photos of the missing.

The dictatorship later disappeared three founding members

of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. But that did not deter Ms. Cortiñas and others from gathering in growing numbers as they tried to seize the attention of a society that often seemed indifferent.

"The people passing through Plaza de Mayo didn't see us for many years," Ms. Cortiñas said in an interview with Argentina's National Library. "Like we were in-



The wake for Ms. Cortiñas on May 31 in Buenos Aires. "I want to change this unjust world," Ms. Cortiñas wrote in her 2019 book.

visible. No one approached us to ask what we were doing, because I believe that is what state terrorism produces, that fear of knowing what we were doing there."

Even after the military dictatorship ended in 1983, Ms. Cortiñas made clear that their fight was not over. She continued to demand action from democratically elected governments and later expressed

disappointment in Raúl Alfonsín, the country's first elected president after democracy was restored.

"During the campaign, Alfonsín always promised that the archives would be opened, that we would get some news, that something would be clarified," Ms. Cortiñas said in an interview with an alternative news outlet. "The truth is

'He left one cold morning and never came back.'

that it hasn't happened yet; the archives have not been opened."

In 1986, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo broke up amid internal divisions, with one camp pushing for a more combative agenda. That led to clashes with other members, including Ms. Cortiñas, over what demands they should make under a democratic government.

Ms. Cortiñas became a leader of an offshoot known as the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo-Founding Line. In later years, she continued attending the gatherings at the Plaza de Mayo and became a steady presence in other street demonstrations as she emerged as an activist for numerous issues, including the legalization of abortion.

She was seldom seen without a white kerchief on her head, which was meant to symbolize the diapers their children had worn as babies. It made the group recognized around the world.

"We stood up to a dictatorship and are still fighting — why would we stop now?" Ms. Cortiñas told The New York Times in 2017 during a demonstration opposing leniency for those found guilty of dictatorship-era crimes.

Nora Irma Morales was born on March 22, 1930, in Buenos Aires, the third of five daughters of Mercedes Vincent and Manuel Morales, Catalan immigrants who met in Argentina. Mr. Morales ran a print shop from their home. Ms. Vincent was a homemaker who also worked as a seamstress.

Nora attended school until the sixth grade, which at the time was when girls often stopped their formal education. She married Carlos Cortiñas at 19 and went on to teach sewing and take on odd jobs as a seamstress. Mr. Cortiñas worked for the country's economy ministry and died of cancer in June 1994 at 71.

Ms. Cortiñas is survived by a sister; her younger son, Damián Cortiñas; three grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

She went back to school later in life and studied social psychology, graduating in 1993 when she was 63. She went on to teach courses at the University of Buenos Aires, one of several universities to grant her honorary degrees.

After her death was confirmed, dozens gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in her honor.

"I want to change this unjust world," Ms. Cortiñas wrote in the epilogue of a 2019 biography, "Evolution of a Mother." "I feel the urge to fight. I don't see it as an obligation but as a commitment."

Nonny Hogrogian, 92, Who Brought Multiculturalism to Children's Literature

By CLAY RISEN

Nonny Hogrogian, an illustrator who mined her Armenian heritage to bring diversity and wonder to her woodcuts and watercolors — an approach that helped expand the world of children's literature and made her a two-time Caldecott Medal winner, died on May 9 at a hospital in Holyoke, Mass. She was 92.

Her husband, the poet David Kherdian, said the cause was cancer.

Ms. Hogrogian was among a small number of illustrators to win multiple Caldecotts, considered one of the highest honors in children's literature. She received her first medal in 1966 for the book "Always Room for One More," written by Sorché Nic Leodhas, and her second in 1972 for "One Fine Day," based on an Armenian folk tale that she retold and illustrated.

She also received a Caldecott Honor, an award for distinguished runners-up, for "The Contest" (1977), another Armenian folk tale that she retold and illustrated.

Ms. Hogrogian was a close friend of the renowned illustrators Maurice Sendak and Ezra Jack Keats, and like them she drew on the old-world European artistry and traditions of her immigrant family to broaden American children's literature starting in the 1960s.

"Nonny helped kick open the door for today's multicultural movement in children's books," Richard Michelson, a friend and fellow children's author, wrote in an email. "She paved the way for Armenian heritage in her many books — mining its folk tales and her own history — at a time when most books were more interested in creating a 'melting pot' than a patchwork quilt."

Ms. Hogrogian did much of her work using woodcut prints, though she also used watercolors, charcoal and pen, depending on the project. She said she started by studying the text to see which



Nonny Hogrogian in an undated photograph. She brought diversity to children's literature by evoking her Armenian heritage.

medium it called for, rather than imposing a single approach to all her work.

Regardless of the medium, her books impressed readers with a descriptive simplicity, which on close inspection revealed a complex richness of color and tone. Her works stood on their own as art even as they brought to life the stories being told.

In her acceptance speech after

receiving her first Caldecott, Ms. Hogrogian described her thought process in deciding how to illustrate "Always Room for One More," based on a Scottish folk song about a poor man who keeps welcoming guests into his home.

"Woodcuts, long my favorite medium, were too strong for the gentle folk in the heather," she said. "So I pulled out my watercolors and chalks, some ink and a



Ms. Hogrogian with her husband, the poet David Kherdian, at their home in Massachusetts in 2019. They married in 1971.



Her "One Fine Day" was based on an Armenian folk tale that she retold and illustrated.

pen, and before long, in an almost effortless way, the drawings seemed to flow."

May Hogrogian was born on May 7, 1932, in the Bronx. An uncle gave her the nickname Nonny when she was a child, and it stuck.

Her parents, Mugerich and Rakel (Ansoorian) Hogrogian, were immigrants who had fled the Armenian genocide, a tragedy that haunted much of her work (and that of her husband, Mr. Kherdian, whose parents also fled the country).

Her father was a photoengraver, while her mother took in piecework. Both painted in their spare



She won her first Caldecott Medal in 1966 for "Always Room for One More."

time, which inspired Ms. Hogrogian at a young age. She later described herself as antinately shy child who used her prodigious art skills to draw Walt Disney characters to impress her classmates and teachers.

Ms. Hogrogian studied fine arts at Hunter College in Manhattan, and after graduating in 1953 she found a job designing book covers for a New York publisher, Thomas Y. Crowell.

Though she was allowed to do artwork for some of the books, she wanted to be a full-time artist. She studied woodcuts at the New School and eventually left for a

She drew from the old-world European traditions of her immigrant family.

freelance career.

Work as a freelance designer was hard, and she returned to working for publishers from time to time, and even considered changing careers to become an occupational therapist. Her first Caldecott erased any worries that she had by giving her a steady supply of high-profile work.

Ms. Hogrogian met Mr. Kherdian when she was hired to design the cover of his 1971 book, "Homage to Adana." They married that year. He is her only immediate survivor.

She illustrated several more of her husband's books, even as she continued her own career. The couple lived a peripatetic life, first in Lyme Center, N.H., and then in upstate New York. They also spent seven years in rural Oregon, on a farm with other followers of George Gurdjieff, an Armenian philosopher and mystic.

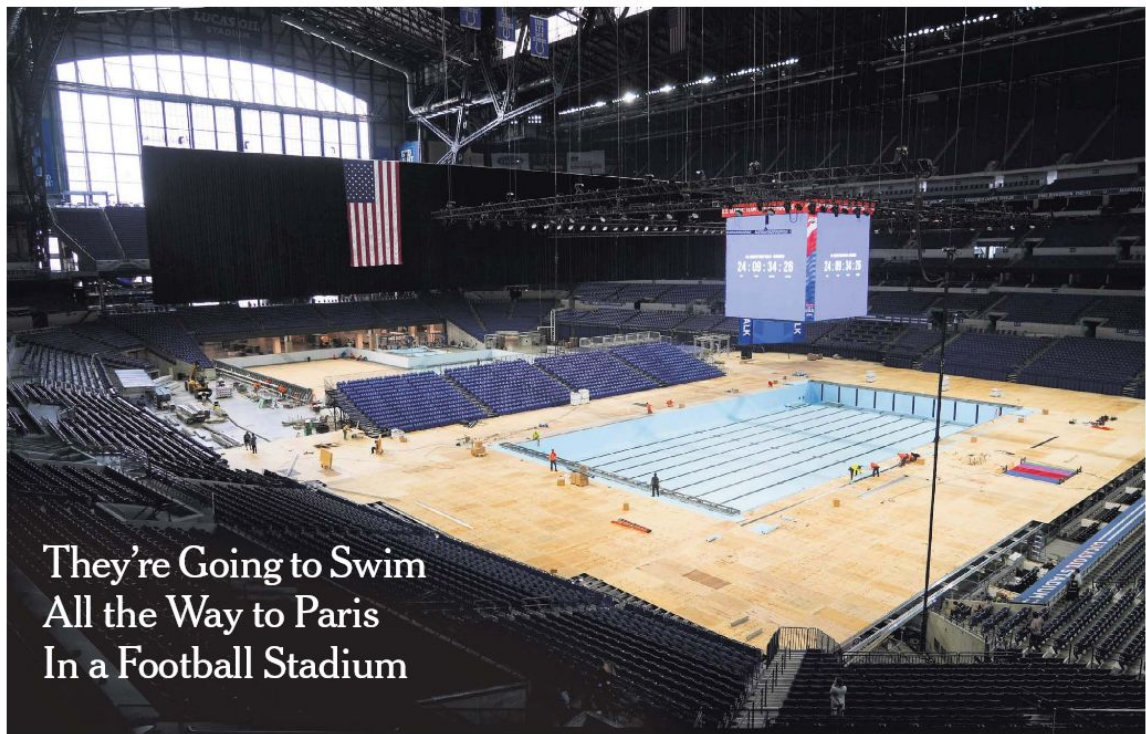
They moved to Armenia after the 2016 presidential election, but a back injury she sustained caused them to return to the United States, first to Black Mountain, N.C., and later to Western Massachusetts.

Ms. Hogrogian said repeatedly that her next book would be her last, and she often referred to herself as retired, even as she continued to work.

"I have probably been busier in retirement than out of it," she wrote in an autobiographical sketch in 2001. But the word "retirement," she added, "indicates more a time in my life when I need to live as I really wish to live, and work is a large part of what I take joy in doing."

Sports

The New York Times



JOE TIMMERMAN/INPHOTO VIA USA TODAY NETWORK

They're Going to Swim All the Way to Paris In a Football Stadium

The U.S. Olympic Trials Keep Outgrowing Venues, And the Home of the Colts Is the Newest Solution

By NICOLE AUERBACH
The Athletic

Three years ago, Shana Ferguson stood on the pool deck at the U.S. Olympic trials in Omaha, thrilled to be staring out at a crowd of more than 12,000 swimming fans. But she dared to dream bigger.

"What would this look like in a football stadium?" she wondered aloud.

Three years later, after countless meetings regarding electrical engineering, plumbing and drainage, wonderment has finally given way to reality. Ferguson, U.S.A. Swimming's chief commercial officer, and her team of vendors are days away from kicking off the most important U.S. swimming meet of this Olympic cycle.

The U.S. Olympic trials are set to run from Saturday to June 23 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, making it the first time the meet will take place in a football stadium. Event organizers hope to see a crowd close to 30,000 for the first night of finals, which would set a world record.

"This is the first time this has ever been attempted in the world," said Mark Dodd, the president of Dodd Technology, which essentially served as U.S.A. Swimming's general contractor for the event. "There will be a lot of people who are going to come to this and take a look at what we built. We're going to be the model."

Ferguson added: "We need to make sure to give these athletes an amazing experience that will be, for many of them, the pinnacle of their careers. We have a responsibility to make this a really wickedly cool environment for them."

It all started, unsurprisingly, with the pool itself, which was built over the past three weeks, with construction beginning May 12 and wrapping up last week. Nearly two million gallons of water were brought in from the nearby White River; the water will be held in tanks that allow it to be constantly circulated, cleaned and chlorinated before it filters in and out of the three pools that have been built.

"When you watch this on television, it will look like an in-ground pool, like the pool is on floor level," Ferguson said. "But we're putting an above-ground pool on the cement and building a deck around it. The pool with the decking will

actually end up striking the first 10 rows of seats."

Elevating the pool deck and fans' perceived ground level creates enough depth for the three required pools. One is the 50-meter-long, 3-meter-deep competition pool — the standard depth for elite swimming — where all eyes will be trained for the nine nights; the other two are warm-up pools, which will be separated from the competition pool by a curtain at the 50-yard line.

Myrtha Pools, a company that specializes in constructing and dismantling large-scale temporary pools, built the competition pool and two warm-up pools. Spear Corporation, in nearby Roanoke, Ind., has handled the plumbing, pumps and filtration. Dodd's team is in charge of the decking, the scoreboard, the signage and other accoutrements that make the event work.

"Really, our biggest challenge was trying to figure out what is traditionally a close-up spectator sport in a small natatorium and scaling it so that it works in a space of this size," Dodd said.

In short, U.S.A. Swimming is trying to keep up with its surging demand. This event continues to grow — and outgrow its venues — seemingly every Olympic cycle. The last time trials were in Indianapolis, in 2009, the event was held at the 4,700-seat Indiana University Natatorium. Trials then went outdoors to Long Beach, Calif., for 2004, then moved to a basketball arena in Omaha from 2008 to 2021. (Myrtha Pools also built the pool in Long Beach and the four pools in Omaha.) In 2016, nearly 200,000 fans attended 15 sessions. The venue could hold about 13,000 for swimming events.

Lucas Oil Stadium can seat far more than that. Its swimming configuration allows for a capacity of around 30,000 with regular stadium seats facing the competition pool as well as some 20 rows of movable seats that will be in front of the midfield curtain to create a fully enclosed oval of fans. Organizers have planned these nights (including celebrations for Father's Day and Juneteenth, which fall during the event). They are also teaming up with the N.B.A.'s Indiana Pacers and W.N.B.A.'s Indiana Fever to help draw new fans who may not know much about swimming.

While there will certainly be seats far from the water's surface, Dodd said the sight lines from more than 25,000 spectators are quite good.

"I don't necessarily know that it'll be weird or strange, but it'll be different," said the coach of the University of Virgin-



JOE TIMMERMAN/INPHOTO VIA USA TODAY NETWORK

Nearly two million gallons of water from the nearby White River are held in tanks that allow it to be circulated, cleaned and chlorinated.



USA SWIMMING

An artist's rendering of the finished product, complete with fans. Organizers hope to see a crowd close to 30,000 for the first night of finals.



JOE TIMMERMAN/INPHOTO VIA USA TODAY NETWORK

The pools were set up on the floor of the stadium, and a deck was built around them. Above, a ground-level view, from beneath the deck.

The construction of a system of three pools — one for competition and two for warm-ups — began on May 12 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

ia swim team, Todd DeSorbo, who will serve as the head coach of the U.S. women's team in Paris. "The more people, the better. And I think the kids will feed off the energy of the crowd."

Those night sessions — where fans will see top-two finishers punch their tickets to Paris — will be memorable, event organizers said. There will be a 50-foot-tall video board behind athletes as they are announced and walk onto the pool deck ahead of each final. Ferguson compared it to player introductions for "Monday Night Football," Dodd said it would be a level of lighting and production similar to WWE. There will also be a center-hung scoreboard (similar to those at basketball arenas) because the scoring and timing need to be centered over the pool.

Perhaps the best benefit of the football stadium is the warm-up pool setup. In Omaha, the warm-up pools were located at the convention center because of space constraints inside the arena. In Indianapolis, they will be a curtain away from the competition pool.

"The thing I'm most looking forward to is actually having space," said Bob Bowman, who coached Michael Phelps through his career and will again take a crop of Olympic hopefuls to trials. "In Omaha, it got so crowded that I just stopped going into the main pool and watching the races because I couldn't get over there quick enough to help people warm up and warm down. So I would just watch it on the big screen in the warm-up pool."

"This is going to be great for participants."

In what Ferguson calls the back-of-house athlete experience, there will be quiet areas, massages, therapy dogs, nutritional assistance, mental health experts and even a video game room.

"So much of this is nerves and hopes and dreams," Ferguson said. "We've got to ensure even in a big stadium that they are still giving the athletes and coaches a feeling of intimacy, where they can have quiet and solitude and focus so that it isn't just big lights and Hollywood and excitement."

In short, this is not just sticking a pool in a football stadium and figuring out where and how to drain the water. It is a new use of a venue that has to serve myriad purposes for multiple stakeholders.

And it will soon be put to the ultimate test — just as the best of the best American swimmers will be.

Nicole Auerbach is a senior writer covering college sports for The Athletic.

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HORSE RACING

Read coverage of the Belmont Stakes from the Saratoga Race Course.



FOOTBALL

How the Ravens' Justin Tucker is preparing for new N.F.L. kickoff rules.



BASEBALL

Smith Well Knows That Time Is Short to Give Back to the Game

By TYLER KEPNER
The Athletic

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — The most aerobic, shortest M.L.B. history was airborne again. Belled in tight, suspended high above Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, Ozzie Smith had hiked for two hours up a mountain, in sandals, to reach this precarious position. The things a grandfather will do.

By zip-lining, Smith was keeping a promise to his 8-year-old granddaughter, Yada, an aspiring gymnast, on a family vacation recently. He is not the daredevil of old, darting nimbly across the infield for the St. Louis Cardinals. But at 69 years old, he is still trim and spry — and eager to go wherever you need him.

"Ozzie has always had a really deep understanding of the importance of the history of the game, and an equally deep belief of the importance of keeping it alive for not only this generation, but for many more generations," Jane Forbes Clark, the chairman of the Baseball Hall of Fame, said. "He also brings to us a wonderful perspective of what the Hall of Fame means to a Hall of Fame member. They're our most important people who serve on the board, and has been the Hall's ambassador for education since his induction in 2002. He sponsors an annual diversity scholarship for an internship program at the museum, conducts clinics for children and gave the keynote address last summer when the Hall opened an exhibit on the Black experience in baseball. Earlier that day, he spoke for this article."

Smith is one of six Hall of Famers who serve on the board, and has been the Hall's ambassador for education since his induction in 2002. He sponsors an annual diversity scholarship for an internship program at the museum, conducts clinics for children and gave the keynote address last summer when the Hall opened an exhibit on the Black experience in baseball. Earlier that day, he spoke for this article.

"The more I come and look around, you don't want to miss it now," he said. "You realize that somebody is probably not going to be here next year."

His former manager, Whitey Herzog, was here during induction weekend last summer. Now Herzog is gone, died April 11 in St. Louis, a proud baseball town that has been in mourning a lot.

Tyler Kepner is a senior M.L.B. writer for The Athletic.



TYLER KEPNER/THE ATHLETIC

Above at right, Ozzie Smith with Eddie Murray during an exhibition game honoring Black baseball history. Smith says people are most interested in his back flips.

The greatest Cardinal of all, Stan Musial, died in 2003. And in the last six years, the franchise has lost other great ones: Red Schoendienst in 2018, Lou Brock and Bob Gibson in 2020, Bruce Sutter in 2022, Tim Lincecum, Mike Shannon and Rick Hummel in 2023. Herzog in 2024.

Five of them have Hall of Fame plaques, all with Cardinals caps. McCarver and Hummel have been honored in Cooperstown for their major league careers. Shannon spent 60 years with the team as a player and broadcaster.

"It's not one of those things you ever thought about, and then one day you're sitting there and you're thinking of Cardinal Hall of Famers, because we were always one of the largest contingents," Smith said, mentioning a group photograph he has at home. "To look at that picture now and realize half of those guys are gone — and we lost them so quickly. There was a long time between losing Stan and losing Red, and when the dominoes started to fall, they fell quick."

There are still a dozen living Hall of Famers who played for or managed the Cardinals, and Al-

bert Pujols will probably join them as soon as he is eligible, for the 2028 class. But the only others with "STL" on their caps, besides Smith, are more recent inductees: Scott Rolen, who played more games with the Phillies, and Ted Simmons, who caught for the opposing Brewers when Herzog, Smith and Sutter won the 1982 World Series.

"Ozzie is revered by the fan base in St. Louis," said the Hall of Famer Jim Kaat, a reliever on the 1982 champions. "The runs he could save and the plays he could make, his personality, the back flip he'd do every year — he just endeared himself to the fans."

Smith was born in Mobile, Ala., but moved at age 6 to Los Angeles, where he attended Locke High School with another future Hall of Famer, Eddie Murray. His home now is St. Louis, and he sometimes wonders if there is any local resident he has not met. They all feel bonded to him anyway, Smith said, and he is cognizant of meeting their expectations.

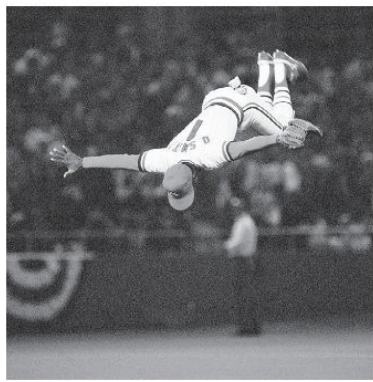
"If this is going to be the only chance that a person has to meet me, I want that to be a pleasant ex-

perience," he said. "I don't want that person to say: 'I met him, but he wasn't what I thought. I don't think he was as nice as I thought.' Because that's what people remember."

Smith visits the Cardinals in spring training but is not closely involved in their operations. He sees the same problems the fans see: The team has fallen from its perch as a perennial power, and finished in last place last season for the first time since 1990. It is "very frustrating," Smith said, when a brand synonymous with player development struggles to nurture its own prospects, only to see them thrive elsewhere.

Smith is also chagrined about some of baseball's recent changes. When he likes the pitch clock, he said: "I do have a problem with everybody getting a trophy. Start with a guy on second base in extra innings? That's not baseball. That's not how the game is played. He didn't earn his way there, he's given that. For us baseball purists, that's blasphemy."

Smith made 15 All-Star teams and won 13 Gold Gloves, but his offensive profile would be an anom-



ST. LOUIS CARDINALS ARCHIVE VIA GETTY IMAGES

aly today: He averaged just 37 strikeouts a season and homered only 29 times in more than 2,600 career games.

That short list of long balls includes a blast to win Game 5 of the 1985 National League Championship Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers. Yet that moment ranks no higher than third, he said, in the comments he gets from fans.

First, Smith said, people want to know if he can still do backflips, as he would before opening day and World Series games in St. Louis. He has not flipped since 2002, when he was 47, and, he said, "it wasn't pretty."

The second most popular topic: his appearance on "The Simpsons" in 1992, his last Gold Glove season. Smith vanished into the Springfield Mystery Spot and missed the big softball game.

"People ask me, 'Are you still in the hole?'" Smith said, laughing. "I say: 'I'm still down there. Hopefully they'll do another version and they'll pull me out.'"

Smith said he never watched the full episode. Then again, his maestro of defensive highlights

has never watched his own best plays, either. If they are on a screen somewhere, he said, he will not look away. But as a fielder, he always wanted to think like a relief pitcher: Forget the last play, good or bad, because the next one is most important.

There are no more plays — not with a glove, anyway — but the game goes on. His job, as Smith sees it, was to better the game by making people happy. And he can do that till the day he dies.

"The things that we do on the field, they transcend," he said. "It carries over into life after baseball. One of the greatest things in the world for me is when people come up and say: 'Hey, you were part of my youth. You created memories for me because I spent so many days at the ballpark with my grandfather and my grandmother and my family.'"

"So that's the real blessing. And that's the only thing I can really do to carry on, just be around, keep myself around as long as I can, so when people do see me, it allows them to think about the good things that happened and the part that baseball played."

Latin American Pitchers Are a Scarce Commodity

By CHAD JENNINGS
and ANDY MCCULLOUGH
The Athletic

The best Latin American starting pitcher in baseball was signed out of Venezuela for just \$25,000. He never ranked as a top 100 prospect and has never made an All-Star team. Like many of his peers, he turned to pitching as a practical matter.

"The thing is, there are too many position players in Latin America," the Philadelphia Phillies left-hander Ranger Suárez said. "So I went opposite. A pitcher. It helped me stand out a little bit."

Suárez, 28, leads the M.L.B. with a 1.70 earned run average. After 17 seasons of professional baseball, he has slowly but surely traced an increasingly rare path: from Latin America to the top of a major league rotation.

Numbers from the league office show roughly 25 percent of major league players come from Latin America and the Caribbean, but

legitimate pitching prospects only after their bodies and skills further develop in college. Justin Verlander, who grew up in Virginia and is now one of the best starting pitchers of his generation, went undrafted out of high school but was the second overall pick after three years at Old Dominion.

Few Latin American players have an opportunity to follow that path. They often sign as young as 16, and many Latin American major league leaguers tell stories of choosing a position when they were young, then staying there. As long as they can hit, even the strongest throwers are kept off the mound.

Kenley Jansen of the Boston Red Sox has the fifth-most starts in M.L.B. history but when he was signed out of Curaçao as a 17-year-old in 2004, he was a catcher, and remained so for years despite his electric arm. When he finally moved to the mound in 2009, he was in the major leagues within a year.

"If I were an American kid, I would not be a catcher in the minor leagues," Jansen said. "Some coach would have already turned me into a pitcher. I would have never hit in professional baseball. They would have recognized the arm."

Although he is a four-time All-Star, Jansen said he wonders if he might have become a starter had he converted sooner and had more time and instruction to develop his secondary pitches. The league's numbers show that 45.3 percent of Latin American players are pitchers, but a disproportionate number are relievers. Some of that disparity is a financial issue.

Two decades ago, elite Latin American pitchers generated some of the largest signing bonuses on the international market. Hernández, Ervin Santana, Francisco Rodríguez and Francisco Lirio signed for nearly seven figures at a time when such hefty deals were rare. Bonuses of that size have dwindled since M.L.B. and the players' union agreed to cap international amateur spending at \$5 million per club in the collective bargaining agreement struck after the 2016 season. The new rules caused teams to become more risk-averse, a calculus that favors hitters.

In baseball, there is a popular saying often attributed to players from the Dominican Republic:



DIBIK HAMILTON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Phillies left-hander Ranger Suárez said deciding to be a pitcher helped him stand out from other players from Latin America.

"Is not 'walk your way off the island.' It speaks to a mentality that Latin American players have to be signed. Plate discipline will not do it, and these days — especially for those who want to sign for big money — neither will pitching. We will never know, but the best Latin American pitcher today just might be the guy playing shortstop or right field."

De La Cruz, the Cincinnati Reds shortstop, who is from the Dominican Republic, has one of the strongest arms in baseball. But he said he has not pitched since he was very young. Tampa Bay Rays center fielder Jose Siri, also from the Dominican and another of the hardest throwers in the game, was more specific: He has not pitched since he was 9. The Mets' Dominican-born right fielder, Starling Marte, was once asked to pitch at an amateur tryout but refused.

"I was never interested in that," Marte said. "I saw other pitchers get hit hard, and I didn't like that." Why would he? The January, more than 35 international amateurs received signing bonuses of at least \$1 million, but none were pitchers. The big money went to hitters, while even the most highly touted arms settled for six or even five figures.

That extends to the domestic amateur draft, where only three high school pitchers have ever

been selected first overall, and two of them never reached the majors.

On the international market these days, teams tend to splurge on a few promising hitters while spreading smaller bonuses to a handful of young pitchers in hopes that one or two will emerge.

The handlers who train and promote amateur Latin American players, who are known as bus-cones and who receive a cut of signing bonuses, recognize this spending disparity and, according to several executives and players with knowledge of the international market, sometimes push elite Latin American players away from the mound. A player like Verlander, had he been born in the Dominican Republic, might have been showcased as a center fielder with the size to hit for power and the arm strength to lead right field.

"They try to train position players so they can get more money," the Reds' Dominican-born starter, Frankie Montas, said. "If you can hit, they're going to want you to stick with hitting as long as you can."

Red Sox right fielder Wilmer Abreu, who is also known for his strong arm, said he was initially scouted in his native Venezuela as a two-way player, and for a while he thought he might sign as one.

But around the time he turned 16 and the scouting intensified, the various people running show-cases and workouts told him to stop wasting time on the mound. Abreu was the age of an American high school sophomore, throwing left-handed, with a fastball that some scouts clocked at 90 miles per hour. Yet there was little interest in seeing how far he could go on the mound.

Mexico comes the former Los Angeles Dodgers ace Fernando Valenzuela among its most well-known baseball players, and since 2000, nearly 65 percent of the Mexican major leaguers have been pitchers. In Puerto Rico, though, right fielder Roberto Clemente is a national hero, and there is a proud tradition of catchers (Iván Rodríguez, Jorge Posada, the Molina brothers) and middle infielders (Roberto Alomar, Francisco Lindor, Carlos Correa). But Puerto Rican pitchers? They are draft-eligible and thus unaffected by the rules and quirks of international free agency, yet, since 2000, 73 percent of Puerto Rican-born players (107 of 146) have been position players.

"I think everybody in Curaçao now wants to be a shortstop or a second baseman," Jansen said. "Nobody wants to pitch, and we have so much great arm talent." There is considerable value,

though, for teams that successfully tap into that talent pool.

In recent years, the Houston Astros have leaned on low-cost Latin American starters — Framber Valdez, Cristian Javier, José Utrique, Luis García and Ronel Blanco — to keep their rotation competitive amid a streak of seven consecutive American League Championship Series appearances. The Phillies (Suárez), Atlanta Braves (Reynaldo López) and Chicago Cubs (Javier Assad) have benefited from strong seasons from Latin American starters this season.

Those are outliers, though. Since 2015, only one Latin American pitcher has won an E.R.A. title and only two rank in the top 25 in wins above replacement for starting pitchers. The Astros, New York Mets and Miami Marlins are the only teams to have used as many as three Latin American starters this season; the vast majority of teams have used one or zero.

Even those pitchers who have thrived might secretly wish they still had a chance to hit.

About pitching, the Mets starter Luis Severino, who converted from the outfield as a 15-year-old, said: "I liked the adrenaline, the competition. But if I had to choose, I would definitely be a position player."

Many prospects on the mound emerge only in college.

fewer than 15 percent of starting pitchers belong to that demographic. The position player leadership is loaded with Latin American superstars (20 of the top 50, according to FanGraphs), but only eight of the top 50 starting pitchers in E.R.A. are Latin American.

The imbalance defies surface-level expectations. In the age of Juan Soto, Ronald Acuña Jr. and Ely De La Cruz, baseball does not have an obvious heir to Félix Hernández and Pedro Martínez as the next great Latin American ace. Twelve of the 25 hardest-throwing position players are Latin American, and so are 11 of the 25 hardest-throwing pitchers, so why aren't more of them starting pitchers?

The top American players tend to pitch and hit at least through high school, and many emerge as

Chad Jennings covers the Red Sox for The Athletic; Andy McCullough is a senior M.L.B. writer. Matt Gelb, Britt Gurnell and Trent Rosencrans contributed reporting.

TENNIS | FRENCH OPEN



ALISSA ANDRA/TARANTINO/ASSOCIATED PRESS
Novak Djokovic during a loss in the final to Rafael Nadal in 2020. Djokovic has lost to Nadal eight times at Roland Garros.

Djokovic Has Legacy Of Greatness on Clay, Bettered by Only One

By CHARLIE ECCLESHARE
The Athletic

PARIS — Is it possible to have won 24 Grand Slam titles and still feel a pang of regret?

If your name is Novak Djokovic, and the regret in question is about the French Open, then yes. For almost two decades at Roland Garros, Djokovic has been the right man at the wrong time.

In the entire history of tennis, there has been only one better male clay-court player than Djokovic: Rafael Nadal, who has won 14 French Open titles and 63 ATP Tour events in clay in total.

The three-time French Open champion Mats Wilander puts Djokovic and Bjorn Borg, who won six French Open titles and 10 majors in total, in the same category as Nadal. "I think he's the greatest player of all time," Wilander said. "I can't put him past Borg, because he won six titles, but I'd put him joint-second to Rafa."

And this year, with an injured Nadal out of the way and the rest of the field inexperienced in the art of winning a Grand Slam, Djokovic has had his body fall apart.

A five-set win over Francisco Cerundolo on Monday, which initially put Djokovic into what would have been an 18th French Open quarterfinal, instead sent him out of the tournament with a torn meniscus in his right knee.

Casper Ruud, his would-be opponent, received a free pass to the semifinals, and Djokovic's chance to have a different kind of closure at Roland Garros — an Olympic gold medal, which he has craved for so long — is in doubt.

Charlie Eccleshare covers tennis for The Athletic.

Were it not for Nadal, Djokovic would surely have more than three French Open titles. Nadal has beaten him here eight times: in two quarterfinals, three semifinals and three finals.

Djokovic is still the only thing resembling a rival that Nadal has had at Roland Garros. Djokovic is responsible for half of Nadal's four career defeats at the French Open, and until this tournament, which carries an asterisk, given Nadal's physical condition — was the only man to beat him here in straight sets.

There was a French Open where Djokovic beat Nadal but still did not win the title.

That was in 2015, when it felt as if Djokovic was cursed to never win at Roland Garros, the one major that eluded him in his quest to complete the career Grand Slam.

Djokovic beat Nadal in the quarterfinals, but his semifinal against Andy Murray went to five sets and, in those days before Court Philippe-Chatrier had a roof, had to be played over two days, meaning he had no day off before playing Stanislas Wawrinka in the final. Djokovic eventually ran out of steam and lost to Wawrinka in four sets.

The next year, Djokovic returned to finally win the title.

When you throw in six Italian Opens, three titles in Madrid and two in Monte Carlo, it's clear that Djokovic is an elite clay-court player. "A clay-court monster," as Gael Monfils said last month.

Two years ago, when he lost to Djokovic in the 2021 French Open final, agrees. "With clay, you always think of Rafa as the dominant one, but Novak, I think is not talked about enough on clay," he said on Monday night. "He is definitely one of the best competitors



A Third Straight French Open Title

Iga Swiatek defeated Jasmine Paolini, 6-2, 6-1, on Saturday in the women's singles final. Coverage at nytimes.com/athletic

MEN'S SINGLES FINAL

Who Carlos Alcaraz vs. Alexander Zverev

When 9 a.m. Eastern on Sunday

TV NBC

and fighters on clay. I think he's done incredible things on the surface — especially in the Rafa era, when he was able to beat him here and in other tournaments."

Djokovic has been much more successful on other surfaces. He has won 10 Australian Opens and seven Wimbledon, and his winning percentage on outdoor hard courts (85 percent) and on grass (86 percent) outstrips his 80 percent on clay. The man himself is aware that it is not where he is at his best.

"Although I grew up on clay, it is not my favorite surface. I like to play on hard, then on grass, and then only on clay," he said in 2021. "Clay is the kind of surface where it is unpredictable, and sometimes for my style of play, tempo and rhythm, it can be quite challenging."

All players adjust to the surface they are playing on, but there are qualities that the best players possess that are universally effective. The main surfaces of the sport's three major tournaments over the past 20 or so years — grass getting slower; clay getting faster — has

also helped players dominate across all three surfaces. Witness the three male players with the most Grand Slam titles all doing so in this period.

Though Djokovic is his best self on hard courts, he is still almost peerless on clay. Even if the general makeup of his game — the flat forehand, the rock-solid backhand — makes him the archetypal hard-court player, Djokovic has qualities that are very well-suited to clay.

One is his durability. Just ask Carlos Alcaraz, who fell away after two grueling sets against Djokovic in last year's semifinal here. Alcaraz won the second set but then started suffering from cramps and ended up losing both the third and fourth sets by 6-1.

"He's really tough on every surface, but here on clay he puts so much pressure on you in every point," Alcaraz said. "In every point — the first point to the last one you have to play long rallies, like seven, eight, nine balls. Every rally, you have to be at your best level."

Last year I couldn't finish the match at my 100 percent because, after just two sets, I was down on intensity. For him, it was normal."

We saw Djokovic's physicality and defensive skills in action during his matches at Roland Garros this year.

Against the 30th-seeded Lorenzo Musetti, Djokovic earned himself three set points in the fourth set with some outstanding defense that ended with a devastating angled backhand. To achieve the decisive break of serve in the fifth set against the No. 23 seed Cerundolo, he clung on in the game by winning a point he looked out of on several occasions before somehow stealing it when his opponent was hustled into an error.

"I had to hit my best shot every single time," a ruffled Cerundolo said afterward.

Clay also allows Djokovic to exploit his gift as the greatest returner in the sport.

His percentage of service games won is at its lowest on clay, but his return hits its highest games won percentage on the same surface. He also uses speed, spin and depth more effectively when returning on clay, partnering with the natural qualities of the surface to neutralize his opponents and get them into rallies where he will be favorite.

One of Djokovic's great skills on clay is his ability to adapt. His game, built on that rock-solid backhand and an angular but relatively flat forehand, is perfect for hard courts. Thriving on clay means making tweaks.

"You see Novak every day on a hard court — he hits a clean ball,

not too much topspin, not too fast, which then makes him a complete animal to be able to win on clay," Wilander said. "The fact he keeps doing this over and over again is why I put him up there with Borg on clay."

That ability to change his game is his greatness, Wilander said, on clay and across the board, and Djokovic's completeness is exemplified by him being the only male player to have won all four Grand Slams a minimum of three times each.

Djokovic's peers are in awe of his versatility and adaptability. Grigor Dimitrov, the No. 10 seed, who finally made his first Roland Garros quarterfinal this year on his 14th attempt, says, "He's one of the very few players that have been able to adapt to any surface and any changes over the years."

Because of his injury, Djokovic will not get the chance for his fourth French Open title, but if he returns to tennis in time for the Olympics, he will have at least one more shot at closure on the courts of Roland Garros.

The 2024 French Open will ultimately go down as another tale of woe for Djokovic, but to have achieved all he has on clay in the era of Nadal will go down as one of his biggest career achievements — even if, on this surface, the biggest winner in men's tennis history came out second-best.

BASKETBALL | N.B.A. FINALS

At 38, Horford Plays Defense Against Age

By JAY KING
The Athletic

BOSTON — Al Horford of the Boston Celtics turned 38 on Monday and has long engaged in a complex relationship with age. Though his longevity receives attention because of his continued status as a key piece on an N.B.A. title contender, it has taken him decades of work to reach this point in his career.

Horford's on-court presence is a feat. Now wrapping up his 17th season, he is one of five players left from the 2007 N.B.A. draft. Only six players older than Horford logged minutes this season. In that group, only LeBron James, Chris Paul and Kyle Lowry were regulars in team rotations.

In a league with enough skill and 3-point shooting to punish some of the best defensive centers, Horford was the oldest N.B.A. big man to receive nightly playing time. To date, he has dodged the factors that can derail a career — injuries, wear and tear and off-court issues.

Horford entered the N.B.A. finals against the Dallas Mavericks ranked 98th in career regular-season minutes played and 26th in career postseason minutes played. His teammates marvel at not just the way he still performs, but also the way he has set himself up to do so.

Jayson Tatum has stolen bits of Horford's daily routine. Payton Pritchard says he watches everything Horford does to pick up how to approach the game. Coach Joe Mazzulla, two years younger than Horford, calls it an honor to coach a player like him. On a roster loaded with hard-working veterans, Horford is the role model for other role models.

Horford has been asked to postpone the inevitable. Long before

fore age started to diminish him physically, he began working toward this type of sustained success. Even before he considered playing this many years in the N.B.A., a realistic possibility, he paid close attention to the work habits of elite athletes. He picked the brains of N.B.A. legends. He worked briefly with Alex Guerrero, three-time Olympic medalist, fitness adviser, and sought advice from Brady, who played for 23 N.F.L. seasons.

If the Celtics go on to win this championship, it will be in no small part because of Horford's ability to hold off the effects of age.

"It's funny," said Horford, a five-time N.B.A. All-Star, "because I feel like everybody has been talk-

practice. Among the options were massage therapy, cryotherapy and flexibility programs.

Werner emphasized these activities were crucial — and not just on the days the players were feeling less than their best. For teenagers, the importance of proper physical maintenance does not come easily. But for Horford, who had watched his father, Tito, take great care of himself throughout a long professional basketball career that included 63 games over three N.B.A. seasons, the message sank in quickly.

"At that age, a lot of guys aren't doing that," Werner said. "There are a lot of other things they're worried about other than trying to stay healthy."

When Horford arrived on campus, Werner and Donovan discussed the need for him to improve his lateral quickness and explosiveness. They believed his body was too stiff. Horford took the message to heart.

He averaged 22.8 minutes per game as a freshman on a team that starred Anthony Roberson, David Lee and Matt Walsh. While finishing 24.8 in 2004-5, the Gators were building the foundation of a team that would go on to win back-to-back national championships.

Horford and his recruiting class, which included Joakim Noah and Corey Brewer, took over the reins of the team the next season. At practices, Florida did an injury prevention program before stretching.

According to Werner, the players went through four stations, which included ankle and lower back work. For a while, Werner and Donovan believed Horford and Brewer were too lax in their attitude during that portion of practice. Eventually, Werner and Donovan called the two players into the office.

"From then on, boy, Horford was serious," Werner said.



MAIGRE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

Horford said Werner's advice persuaded him to take better care of his body. During a three-year career at Florida, he missed two games. Werner remembered Horford had only one injury at the school.

"I had a high ankle sprain," Horford said, "and I kind of played through it."

The Godfather approached everything from the film room to the weight room with great diligence. After winning the national title as sophomore, Horford, Noah, Brewer and Taurean Green returned to Florida and did it again as juniors. In the summer of 2007, those four plus their teammate Chris Richard were selected in the N.B.A. draft.

"They all played in the N.B.A.," Werner said. "We always kind of had a guess that he would probably stick around the longest."

Horford has investigated the approaches of elite athletes besides Brady, including the soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo and James, who has been in the N.B.A. for 21 seasons. If he found something that would benefit him, he pursued it. In his 20s, he reached out to Manu Ginobili and Vince Carter — N.B.A. All-Stars who played into their 40s — for advice. He first hired a personal coach during his second N.B.A. season. His current one has been with him for

Al Horford is one of five players left from the 2007 N.B.A. draft. He has long been diligent about staying healthy.

late in his career. It was the first time Horford had considered playing till 40.

"Danny Ainge is the one that put that in my head a little bit," Horford said.

Ainge believed in the possibility for several reasons: He embraced a clean lifestyle. He possessed an adaptable game, a healthy body and a right mental attitude.

"He's a versatile player," Ainge said. "May not be the same player at 40 that he is at 32, but he's going to be able to still contribute, and that's part of it. It's not just the body part, but the mental part. I think Al has the humility to just play a lesser role and be part of a team."

Horford accepted a sixth-man role this season for the first time in his career. He attempted a career-low 6.4 field goals per game during the regular season. The Celtics used him primarily as a floor spacer, not the offensive hub he used to be.

To preserve his body, he sat out one leg of regular-season back-to-backs. He still prepared to handle large minutes when necessary. That need arose early in the playoffs when Kristaps Porzingis injured a calf muscle in the Celtics' first-round series against Miami. With Porzingis out until the finals, Horford slid into the starting lineup.

On Horford's teammates, it is no secret why he is still a major factor in his 17th season. He does not take days off.

"Horford has long thought about his future. How much longer does he hope to play?" "My whole thing has always been this: as long as I feel good physically," Horford said in February. "I don't want to feel limited. I don't want to be not myself out there. So I don't want to put a limit on it."

Jay King covers the Celtics for The Athletic.

Team Ownership Rules Complicate the Next Move of a Young Star

By TARIQ PANJA

LONDON — To soccer's new generation of superrich investors — risk-friendly billionaires, American hedge funds, wealthy Gulf states — the appeal of a new model for team ownership lay in its simple strategy.

By sweeping up not just a single team but multiple squads and hundreds of players into expansive multiclub networks, these rich new owners believed they could leverage efficiency, best practices and volume into success on the field.

Red Bull, the energy drink maker, pioneered the model. Manchester City, the English champion financed by the wealth of the United Arab Emirates, supersized it through its City Football Group. Jim Ratcliffe, the chairman of the chemicals giant INEOS, brought it to Manchester United when he acquired a major stake in the club last year.

But one of the biggest attractions of multiclub ownership has now run up against a significant challenge: European soccer's governing body is changing the rules.

The problem, European soccer leaders said, is that matches between teams controlled by the same ownership group could compromise the fairness of continental competitions and open the door to self-dealing in soccer's \$7 billion-a-year player trading market.

Aleksander Ceferin, European soccer's top administrator, has tried to straddle the divide. In a podcast interview last year, he suggested that the multiclub model represented a danger to the sport, even as he courted investors by saying that the rules on such ownership might be eased under the Champions League's new format.

The current flashpoint involves one of the most celebrated stories of the recently completed European soccer season: the Spanish club Girona and its talented 20-year-old Brazilian forward named Sávio.

Girona finished third in the Spanish league last season, its fourth year in the country's top division. That performance earned the team a place next season in the Champions League, Europe's richest club competition, and drew the eye of some of the continent's biggest clubs to Girona's top talents.

When it came to signing Sávio,



DAVID BORRAT/EPFL, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

The Brazilian forward Sávio played for the Spanish club Girona last season. He will play in the Champions League next season. For which team? That's not clear yet.

Manchester City had an advantage. Its owner, the brother of the ruler of the U.A.E., is also the holder of the single largest ownership stake in Girona. So the next stop for Girona's breakout star did not seem to be in doubt. The news was all but confirmed in February, when the social media influencer Fabrizio Romano, who specializes in player trading news, declared the deal done.

"Manchester City have signed all documents to sign Sávio from July 1," he wrote in a message to his 20 million-plus followers on X that began with a red-siren emoji.

The rights to Sávio, though, didn't actually belong to Girona. The player had been on loan from the French club Troyes, which is also a member of the City Football Group.

Those types of multiple holdings have become commonplace in world soccer in the past half decade: Data from UEFA, European soccer's governing body, has identified more than 180 teams worldwide, employing more than 6,500 players, that are now part of multiclub networks.

That has created a problem for UEFA. In the past, it had focused mostly on how team ownership affected its competitions, ruling that a single owner could not control multiple teams in the same event.

But with multiclub control on the rise and critics complaining about the integrity of Europe's biggest tournaments — not to mention fears that storied, proud clubs are being reduced to mere feeder teams — UEFA has introduced temporary rule changes.

Under the revised regulations, if an owner reduces its holdings in one of its clubs to less than 30 percent, both teams would be permitted to play in UEFA's tournaments, provided that the teams also ensure they are separately run, without shared board members and other direct commercial or sporting ties.

These rules will be granted for only one season, allowing more time for owners to divest a stake in a competing club below the threshold required by UEFA.

Such an accommodation was made last season for the American owners of A.C. Milan and the French team Toulouse, prompting protests in November that Red Bird, the company that controls both teams, was looking for a buyer for Toulouse.

The revised rules on player movement, though, will be strict. Clubs involved in multiclub ownership arrangements would be barred from loaning or trading any players between their teams if they were participating in the same competition. (This rule, too, was in place for Milan and several other teams last season.)

That would mean Sávio's much-heralded arrival at Manchester City, the Premier League champion, would have to be put on hold if both City and Girona were to play in the Champions League next season. He would still be clear to take part, but it would be unlikely that he could do so in a sky blue City uniform.

(The same issue could affect a prospective move by Jean-Clair Todibo, a defender at the French

club Nice — owned by Ratcliffe — to Manchester United. United and Nice have both qualified for a different UEFA competition, the Europa League, next season. "We understand the UEFA regulations," Ratcliffe's company, INEOS, said in a statement, adding, "Our objective is for both clubs to play in the Europa League. We now await UEFA's decision.")

City Football Group said it had been in contact with officials at UEFA for months in order to find a way to clear both Manchester City and Girona to play in the Champions League. All clubs had a deadline of this past Monday to file final documentation.

UEFA declined to comment on the proposed deal, but a final decision on team eligibility is expected to be announced next month.

A Club Soccer Fight Intrudes on Euro 2024

In front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, the street has been blanketed in artificial turf, and a set of gigantic goal posts has been erected. On the waterfront in Hamburg, two dozen shipping containers have been painted in the colors of the competing nations.

Part of Leipzig's zoo has been handed over for a program of cultural events, though presumably not the bit with the tigers.

Across Germany, the flags are being draped, the marketing plans are being finalized and anything bearing the logo of something other than one of UEFA's official sponsors is being unceremoniously hidden from view. After six years of planning, the European soccer championship — Euro 2024 — is just days away. The teams will start arriving imminently. The fans, in the hundreds of thousands, will follow close behind them.

For the rest of Europe, meanwhile, these are the glorious, hazy days before the carnival begins — a time filled with bunting and sticker albums, stirring television montages, speculative lineups and sweet nostalgia. Or, rather, they should be, because it is hard not to suspect that everyone is going through the motions. It's not that there is no appetite for a tournament traditionally outshone only by the World Cup. But it is definitely of the muted variety. All of the emotions ordinarily associated with one of soccer's showpieces — hope, excitement, fear, wonder about how England will sabotage itself — have been overshadowed by something else, something closer to ennui.

The most immediate explanation for why that might be probably lies in soccer's calendar, which has fallen out of sync in the past four years. The men's World Cup ended only 18 months ago. The last men's European Championship was three years

ago, not four. The game's body clock has gone awry. It is as if the sport as a whole is suffering from jet lag.

Much — though not all — of that can be attributed to soccer's attempts to make up for time lost during the coronavirus pandemic. There has been an almost constant torrent of soccer since that unwanted break in 2020. The extent to which that has exhausted the players has been well documented, but the same logic applies to fans, too. The more games there are, the less they all seem to matter.

(This, certainly, is an issue affecting the Copa América, which also starts this month. Between 2011 and 2020, the Copa América seemed to take place almost constantly. They were never not playing the Copa América. After a while, it became very hard to get too worked up about it unless, presumably, your nation was involved, and even then it was a stretch.)

But there is a more immediate factor in soccer's summer malaise, one that was laid bare on Tuesday, when The Times of London published details of Manchester City's long-awaited legal action against the Premier League, a battle that has the potential — and this is not an exaggeration — to change the most popular sports league in the world beyond recognition.

City's primary aim, as stated in 165 pages of court papers that are simultaneously grave and absurd, is to abolish the league's rules on Associated Party Transactions, the catchy name given to sponsorship deals struck by clubs with companies linked to their owners.

City contends that those companies should be able to pay what they like for such deals, rather than something close to the market rate. The current rules, which require the latter, are anti-competitive, the club's lawyers say, and if they are not lifted, then City will have no choice but to stop funding its women's team and its community work. If that sounds like a naked threat, it's because it is. The possible consequences of what appears to be an off-puttingly technical case could be



FRANCK FAYAU/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Kylian Mbappé will try to win the Euros in France's shirt before pulling on Real Madrid's next season.



CHARLOTTE TATUM/SALL/GETTY IMAGES

After Erling Haaland and Manchester City celebrated a fourth straight Premier League title, the club's legal battle flared up.

profound. Should Manchester City succeed in overturning the rules, it would be the end for anything close to cost controls in the Premier League. That would give free rein to the club — and Newcastle, which like City is backed by what is in effect an agency of a nation state — to pump as much money into their coffers as they like.

In keeping with the spirit of the times, of course, City has dressed this up in populist rhetoric about overturning a hated and self-interested elite, and has thrown in a healthy dose of

flawed libertarian economics. The reality is different: City's aim is the abolition of any specter of competition.

Being able and willing to sink hundreds of millions of dollars into a soccer team without worrying about losses would be a prerequisite for success. Such an environment would, most likely, make the Premier League a spectacularly unattractive investment for anyone except other nation states. At least some of the American owners that currently populate the league would, most likely, have little

choice but to call it quits.

Even if the case fails, the outlook is not much brighter. Later this year, City is scheduled to face — at long last — a hearing on the 15 charges it faces of breaching some of the league's financial rules.

It has now not only questioned the legality of at least some of the rules under which it will be tried, but made it very clear that everything else is open to challenge, too. It is not that City wants to prove itself innocent of the charges. It wants to burn down the whole edifice that allowed it to be accused in the first place.

There is no obvious route back to smooth sailing for the Premier League from here. The league's reality now is that it contains at least one team — its best team — that wants to abolish not only the rules but also the mechanism for making the rules. The legal documents describe the way the Premier League is run as a "tyranny of the majority" (in this case, that appears to be a synonym for "democracy.") City's aim appears to be to turn it into a much more traditional form of tyranny.

But while the stakes are unquestionably high, the timing of the legal developments — a couple of weeks before the European Championship — felt signif-

Manchester City vs. the Premier League casts a long shadow.

icant, too. International soccer is not as accomplished as its club equivalent. Major tournaments are not, as they once were, a showcase for the game in its highest form, a place to see what the future looks like.

The international game's appeal is precisely that it is different: a break from the endless churn of the club game, a switch in tone and focus, and to some extent, a space. It is an escape valve for the emotional pressure that builds up over the course of a long and arduous season. In its basest form, it gives everyone someone different to berate.

As the (appropriately) intense coverage of the Premier League's most pressing existential tussle proved, though, the idea of a break from club soccer is anathema. This is not deliberate, of course: The Premier League has not decided to fall apart in June on purpose, simply because fans' eyeballs were drifting elsewhere.

Instead, it is a function of how all-consuming the club game has become, how supporting a team no longer appears to be an occasional, passive leisure activity, but an active, full-time job — one that demands permanent attention and public performance, one that is inextricably entwined with your very sense of self.

In that landscape, a major tournament can never capture the imagination because the club season never ends, not really. There is always another managerial appointment, another player transfer, another attempt to reshape the rules of the league so that they meet your highly personal definition of fair.

That is not to say, of course, that Euro never will not sweep the continent at some point in the next few weeks. By the time the latter stages roll around, eight countries, at least, will be fully engaged. But even as the prospect of glory draws ever closer, there will be a buzz, a noise in the background, an inescapable reminder that real life goes on, that the summer ends, that this is not the part of the game that really matters.

Rory Smith is a global sports correspondent for The New York Times. Sign up for his weekly world soccer newsletter at nytimes.com/rory.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE TELEVISION ACADEMY

June 9, 2024

Dear Hollywood,

Please let this be the year we finally embrace change. The year we truly find Equity, and see artists of color represented across not just one category, but **ALL** categories.

I know you're tired of hearing words like "inclusivity" and "diversity" - treading water while you try to understand how to put actions behind these sentiments.

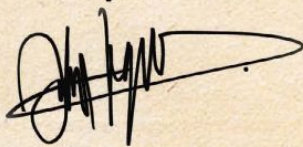
Look no further! It's simple! There are hundreds of prolific non-white artists who deserve to be considered for Awards this year, not because they are simply... Black, Brown, Indigenous or Asian but because they are truly great... exceptional artists who have achieved that greatness with a foot on their neck for far too long.

Let this be the start of a new era.

Let us not continue to white wash our Awards shows. Instead let this year be the catalyst that inspires the Next Generation of minority and underrepresented artists...a generation who might finally see a reflection of themselves on that stage and think ...

"If they can, maybe I can too..."

Your peer,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Leguizamo', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John Leguizamo

Writer, Actor, Producer, Director & Colombian American
who won't ever let anyone tell him "no"

Inside Culture

THIS WEEK FROM THE ARTS DESK

CULTURE DIARY

Oluremi C. Onabanjo

PHOTOGRAPHY CURATOR
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

As a curator in the photography department of the Museum of Modern Art and a Ph.D. candidate in art history at Columbia, Oluremi C. Onabanjo squeezes as many exhibitions and talks as she can into an already packed schedule.

"I tend to absorb heaps of images, texts and sounds in one day," she said. A New Yorker for the past 12 years, she previously lived in Kano and Lagos, Nigeria; Johannesburg; Fair Lawn, N.J.; and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

"Living in New York has given me a political education," she said, "taught me how to look alongside and think with artists, and made me sensitive to how the forces of history structure the contemporary conditions of social life."

Onabanjo tracked a few days of her cultural life, noting some of the books, music and conversations that inspired her. These are edited excerpts from phone and email interviews. **ANNIE ARMSTRONG**

WEDNESDAY

At the moment, my days start at 5 a.m. I am currently A.B.D. (all but dissertation), which means that I'm in the final stretch. With a full-time job, this requires being resourceful with my time: rising early to crank out two hours' worth of pages every morning before heading to the office, so that I can hopefully finish a full draft of my dissertation by December. At first it was slow going because I'm not naturally a morning person, but the words are coming more easily as the



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ILLIOTT JOHNSON-BROWN JR. FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

From top: Oluremi C. Onabanjo, a MoMA photography curator, preparing for an exhibition; browsing at Revolution Books in Harlem; creating a tentative floor plan for the exhibition; reviewing a photograph by Seydou Keita with a colleague.



months pass — especially as the sun rises earlier to keep me company.

READING "O Defeito de Cor" by Ana Maria Gonçalves. "Slave Rebellion in Brazil" by João José Reis. **LISTENING TO** "Don't Touch My Hair" by Solange. "Green Grasshopper" by Marcia Griffiths.

THURSDAY

We recently closed a yearlong presentation of Ernest Cole's work on the fourth floor of the museum. We took Cole's 1967 photo book, "House of Bondage," as a site of departure for an exhibition on the structures of settler colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, as well as their echoes stateside. Aperture released that book, along with a new one, "Ernest Cole: The True America," which takes up his photographic production in the United States — the subject of a forthcoming documentary directed by Raul Peck.

READING "To Our Land" by Mahmoud Darwish. "The Cry of Black Worldlessness" by Parashie Chigumadzi. **LISTENING TO** "Mannenbergh" by Abdullah Ibrahim. "Strasbourg / St. Denis" by Roy Hargrove.

FRIDAY

I rarely get the opportunity to talk with colleagues in the field about the politics of curatorial practice. This is what made "The Radical Practice of Black Curation" so special. Organized by Tina Campt at Princeton University and Tavia Nyong'o at the Park Avenue Armory over two days, an international group of curators came together to think about the status of Black curatorial work in a time of "racial reckoning." It was a precious conversation for me, spent thinking about the brilliant curators Gabi Ngobeco and Legacy Russell, both directors of crucial centers of experimental art.

READING "Discourse on Colonialism" by Aimé Césaire. "No Roses From My Mouth" by Stella Nyantzi. **LISTENING TO** "Help" by Duval Timothy. "Carmen" by Olivia Dean.

SATURDAY

On Saturdays, I spend most of my time looking and reading. Moving steadily across the city's galleries and museums, I find moments to read on the subway or at a pit stop for coffee and



pastry: The motley crew of art shows currently populating my hit list include Francesca Woodman at Gagosian, "Melissa Cody: Webbed Skies" at MoMA PS1 (which I loved during its first stop at MASP in São Paulo), Sonia Delaunay at the Bard Graduate Center, Counter Histories at Magnum Foundation and Arthur Jafa at 52 Walker. No matter who is on view, I stop by Artists Space.

READING "Great Expectations" by Vinson Cunningham. "Montaza Mehri's Substack." **LISTENING TO** "Dangerous Kipwaa Freestyle" by Ab-Soul. "Get Close" by Ani Lennox.

SUNDAY

I often joke that one of the reasons I'm still in New York is because I live uptown. I've never resided below 110th Street, and I have no inclination of changing that anytime soon. One of my favorite places in Harlem is Revolution Books, an independent bookstore. I've witnessed some of the most nuanced conversations about politics and culture, theory and criticism inside and in front of that bookstore. On a good day, I pick up a secondhand book from one of their carrels out front and pop across the street for a bottle of wine from Pompette. The owners are good people and just opened a pretty excellent wine bar next door, Musette.

THE QUEUE

I'm the West Africa bureau chief, covering 25 countries from my base in Senegal. I try to read a lot, but even listening to audiobooks on 2x speed, I can't get through half my virtual book stack.

RUTH MACLEAN

TOUKI BOUKI

FILM

On my daily walks around Dakar, Senegal's coastal capital, I try to spot locations from this 1973 masterpiece by Djibril Diop Mambety. Dakar has changed so much in the past 50 years, and the purple flares and open spaces are mostly gone. But the atmosphere and style that "Touki Bouki" captured is still here.



From "Touki Bouki"

ABDOULAYE KONATE

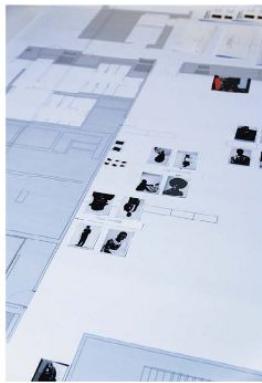
ART

If I were in Brussels, I'd go to Abdoulaye Konaté's exhibition at Galerie Templon. He is a Malian artist who creates huge, colorful, mesmerizing tapestries from bazin fabric and embroidery. I'll have to be content to look at photos of his exhibition at the last biennale in Dakar — the region's hottest art event, this year scheduled for November.

KING OF BOYS

TELEVISION

What I love about Netflix's first original Nigerian series is that every so often the lead character, Eniola Salami — a mafia boss and formidable middle-aged woman — will pause. The action will stop. And Salami, played by a withering Sola Sobowale, will come out with the perfect Yoruba proverb for the occasion.



THE FRONTLINES OF PEACE

BOOK

Séverine Autesserre argues that peace is primarily made by local insiders, not by political deals, elections or what she calls "Peace, Inc." — the multibillion-dollar industry where outsiders try to end conflicts. As an outsider trying to understand conflicts, I find this book useful.

TEMS

MUSIC

"If Orange Was a Place." Tems's 2021 E.P., is one of three things I've downloaded on Spotify, so I tend to listen to it when I'm on a plane somewhere over the Sahel or Nigeria, her birthplace. It's somehow the perfect accompaniment, her rich voice cutting through the airplane noise.



Arts & Leisure

The New York Times

A Plan To Seize Stardom

For Glen Powell, part of the job of making movies is selling them.
BY BROOKS BARNES | PAGE 8

EVANFOLIO/GETTY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

4 CLASSICAL

A year in the life of five students who attend the Curtis Institute of Music.

BY JO SHUA BARON E and JAMES ESTRIN

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In 'Clipped,' a docudrama about an N.B.A. scandal, Cleopatra Coleman gets to spread her wings. BY ALEXIS SOLOSKI

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The sculptor Urs Fischer, with work on view in Las Vegas, sizes up the city's blue-chip-art potential. BY NANCY HASS

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Cyndi Lauper schedules a final tour while she can still perform the way she wants to. BY AMANDA HESS

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Headliner

MY TEN

Kirby Walks the Red Carpets in Doc Martens



ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES

When Kirby accepted the role of Ruby — a Bondish M-meets-Q foil to a private detective played by Colin Farrell — in the Apple TV+ series “Sugar,” she found herself among kindred spirits. “All of us sort of bounce,” she said about the ability of her co-stars Farrell and Amy Ryan to move seamlessly between drama and comedy. Kirby’s own bouncing has taken her to shows like “Killing Eve” and “Barry.” She stars as a commercial cleaner in her latest film, “We Strangers,” an observation on assimilation and belonging. In a video call from Los Angeles, Kirby (who last year dropped her surnames Howell-Baptiste) spoke about her cultural necessities. These are edited excerpts. KATHRYN SHATTUCK

1 D.I.Y. Massage With Lacrosse Balls

My new best friend. The lacrosse ball is basically a Thai massage that you can take around with you everywhere. Super easy, but it’s fantastic. I just roll it around on my back or my foot. It’s instant pain relief.

2 Fly by Jing Sauces

They’re these incredible Chinese sauces by this chef called Jing. You can put them on everything and anything — from boiled eggs to ramen noodles. I buy these sprouted peanuts from the farmers’ market. And then I just chop up some shallots, do some black sesame seed and mix the Fly by Jing sauce in. It is truly a winner.

3 A Good Body Scrub

I’ve only had a couple of facials in my life, and I don’t always make as much time as I should for those things. But a good body scrub — I feel renewed, and you can do it at home. I would love to have one that I could tell you that’s my go-to, but I actually don’t. Maybe someone can read this and become my favorite brand.

4 Farmers’ Markets

That’s one of the things I actually miss the most when I’m not in Los Angeles. Every meal I make from the farmers’ market feels so much more nutritious and delicious than anything I could ever make from the supermarket with the exact same ingredients.

5 Filling Starbucks Cups With Water

I drink vast amounts of water, so much so that my boyfriend tells me that I’m diluting my blood. I just think that he and most people are dehydrated. I keep them everywhere. I feel like what happens is, if you don’t drink enough water, you get to the point where you feel like you’re almost dying.

6 Vintage Gold Jewelry

I’m sort of a maggie. I love shiny things. I’m not really like a diamond girl, but I do love if there are beautiful old gems. My boyfriend recently bought me an absolutely stunning gold ring that looked like branches, and it had emeralds in it. It was probably one of the greatest gifts I’ve ever been given. Certainly the best gift that man has ever given me.

7 Doc Martens

Probably one of my big London tells is that I’m a girl who loves Doc Martens. I’ve worn them in lieu of heels on red carpets multiple times. It doesn’t feel like you phoned it in, and you get to be the only woman who’s comfortable all night.

8 Thrift Stores

My mom has always been a market trader in London. She did Portobello Road for a long time, and that’s largely a vintage market. I kind of joke when I say this, but I love other people’s stuff. There’s a life behind it, a story. I also feel very passionately about recycling and reusing the resources that we have here. I feel like we have everything we need. We just have to distribute it better.

9 A Flat White and a Good Croissant

I’m pretty English in that I’m a tea girl. So coffee becomes kind of my treat. I’ll find a coffee shop, I’ll sit down perhaps with a book, sometimes with nothing, and look and think with a good flat white and a really good croissant. It resets me.

10 ‘A Seat at the Table’ by Solange

If someone said you could only listen to one album for the rest of your life, I think it would be that one. I remember listening to it when it first came out. I was filming in Pittsburgh, I had a couple of days off and wanted to go to Washington, D.C., because the National Museum of African American History and Culture had just opened. I did the drive on my own, and I played that album the entire way.

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Classical



Students, some barely adolescent and some adults, come from all over the world to study at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Here, DIMITRIOS MATTAS and his double bass struggle through the airport.

The Students In This School Live Entirely For Their Music

By JOSHUA BARONE | Photographs by JAMES ESTRIN

PHILADELPHIA — Delfin Demiray had packed too much. She was leaving her home in Ankara, Turkey, for the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. An 18-year-old who had never been to the United States, she didn't know what to expect.

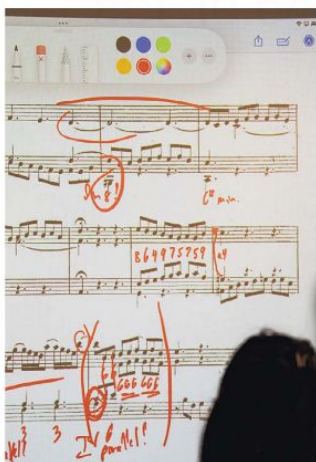
As she prepared for her flight in August, loading her suitcases with clothes and books, she was still surprised at the turn her life had taken. Demiray had played piano since she was 8, and had a gift for reproducing music she heard on TV at the keyboard; she also liked to improvise with friends and write melodies of her own. But she didn't think of herself as a composer until a year ago, when she applied to Curtis and, to her shock, was accepted.

Her move to the United States would make her parents empty-nesters, but she tried not to think too much about the sadness of saying goodbye. "It's just how life is," said Demiray, now 19. "I feel like they are living their dreams through me."

Her story is not so rare at Curtis, an extremely selective, tuition-free school whose roughly 150 students come from around the world to study with almost monastic focus. Even among conservatories, it is exceptional, with a wide age range — from pre-adolescence to post-baccalaureate adulthood — and a personalized approach, of schedules and repertoire, for musicians who live almost entirely for their art. "We know what it feels like to have to go to bed early on a Saturday night because you have to wake up Sunday morning for a lesson," said Dillon Scott, a viola student, "and we all know what it feels like to have a performance that was objectively good, but still could've been better."

Some of the students are already professionals who perform outside school, as well as on the campus of Curtis, which maintains a full orchestra, an opera program and chamber music groups. Many of the musicians form friendships that lead to collaborations that endure throughout their careers. The list of alumni reads like a musical hall of fame, with titans like Leonard Bernstein and current stars like Lang Lang and Hilary Hahn.

During the 2023-24 year, The New York Times followed five students as they settled into new lives, pushed their artistry and planned as much as they could for an uncertain future.



SCOTT, A 20-YEAR-OLD from Lansdale, Pa., about an hour away from Philadelphia, grew up determined to attend Curtis. He still feels a sense of awe as he walks into its main building, a historical mansion on Rittenhouse Square. "These four years are going to have the potential to be absolutely instrumental and life-changing," he said. "But it's not going to be dropped on my lap."

Few students, even few professionals, behave like Scott. His mind is a fire hose of ambition and enterprising passion. He approaches music critically, wondering how he can use Curtis's resources to unearth the work of overlooked, often Black, composers and bring it to audiences beyond the tired demographics of classical music.

Having already spent countless hours in the library assembling a list of about 25 composers, noting all their works and locating

their scores, Scott programmed a series of on- and off-campus concerts for the fall, accompanied by talks, and brought 14 other students on board. At community performances, he smiled at the sight of security and staff members from school who had come with their families, and at how visibly different the audience looked from a typical Curtis performance.

Busy with concerts, too, was a 25-year-old French soprano named Juliette Tacchino. She started the fall staring down her final year and auditions, but other singing opportunities quickly arose as other singers dropped out of performances. On one program, she sang the role of Sophie in a scene from "Der Rosenkavalier" under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin, the music director of the Metropolitan Opera and the Philadelphia Orchestra, who teaches at Curtis.



DELFIN DEMIRAY, above, a 19-year-old composing student from Turkey at Curtis. Above left, a screen in a counterpoint class. Left, a piano lesson with Keiko Sato. "Everything we have in music is a matter of perspective," she says.

Classical

The experience was double-edged. Tacchino, a sensitive wellspring of calm, was also occupied with being a resident coordinator at Lenfest Hall, where she took care of younger students and organized events like a trip to an animal shelter and a screening of "Maestro." But Tacchino missed the movie because she had the flu. She had already been feeling under the weather as the stress of her added work was taking its toll, and the flu made things worse. She lost her voice several times, and even when she did get a break, visiting her boyfriend in Montreal over Thanksgiving, she was preparing for auditions.

One of Nézet-Séguin's students was Micah Gleason, 23, an easygoing yet fiercely skilled conductor and singer, also in her final year. She lived off campus with her partner, in an apartment outfitted with a school-provided piano, a mirror for watching herself conduct and equipment for her side gig as a photographer.

Like Scott, Gleason thinks about how to push beyond the conventions of performance. For a fall concert in which she was both conducting and singing Berio's "Folk Songs," she brought in a lighting designer and tried to hire a movement director. (There, she was less successful.) In her free time, she started emailing people she knew to line up work after Curtis.

In the orchestra for that concert was the 17-year-old flute student Julian Cheung. He had been at Curtis since he was middle-school age, and because he was a minor, he lived with his parents, originally from Hong Kong and Kazakhstan, on Rittenhouse Square. They had moved to Philadelphia for his education from Seattle, where they still traveled during school breaks to visit family.

Cheung, an only child with a mature sensibility and wry humor, is both independent and still very much a teenager. He has friends at Curtis but often eats dinner with his parents at their apartment. His mother helps with some of the logistics of his musical life, but otherwise he manages his own time, finding the space to work on his home-school education. During the school year, he also took German lessons because the language might come in handy when he finishes at Curtis in 2025; he would like to continue his studies in Europe.

In student housing, Demiray was quickly making new friends. She was closest with her roommate, a horn player. They would gather on staircases at Lenfest with other students to sing choral music for fun. After attending a party during her first week, she joined a group to organize one of her own, a masquerade for the holidays.

During the semester, she also finished a string quartet that she had started on the flight from Turkey. As she rehearsed it, she realized how open she was to her music changing in the hands of others; it was the kind of lesson that can't really be taught in the classroom. "It reminded me," she said, "that everything we have in music is a matter of perspective."

FEW CURTIS STUDENTS truly take time off during the month between semesters. Demiray, back in Ankara, read Kant and watched movies, but also continued to compose. Gleason, getting an early start on spring work, took on a conducting project at Dallas Opera. Cheung, at least, made room for catching up with friends and family in Seattle, and skiing.

Scott had a difficult time winding down from the fall semester, which he found excitingly intense: life at home, he said, was like "a vacuum." At first, he didn't sleep well because he felt as though he should be doing something. After a few days, he felt himself relax as he took his dog, a Rhodesian Ridgeback called Nandi, for long walks.

Tacchino went home to France, but as a resident coordinator, had to return early to prepare Lenfest for the spring semester. She had also picked up a tour in Florida, where she had never been. She saw more alligators than she would have liked, and it was unpleasantly hot, but she felt refreshed when she got back to school for more auditions and a starring role in Poulenc's one-act opera "Les Mamelles de Tirésias."

She had long been looking forward to that; her father, who had recently died, knew Poulenc. Tacchino grew up hearing about the composer, and listening to his music, including four-hands piano works that her parents would play. To her, the opera sounded like home.

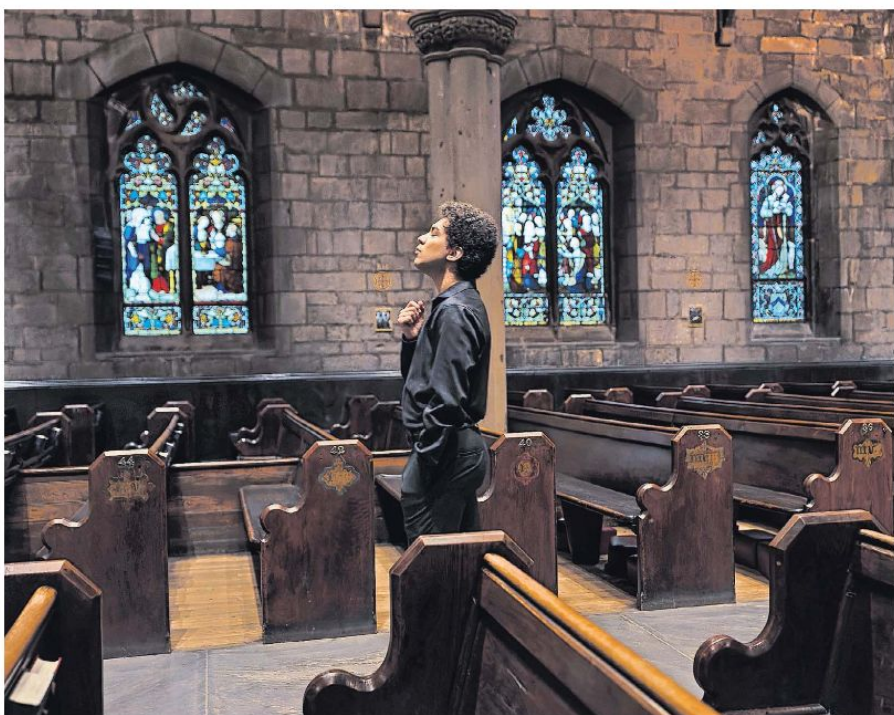
IN THE NEW SEMESTER, Cheung went on tour with other Curtis musicians. He liked the independence of it, which felt like a taste of professional life, for better or worse: Not having to worry about school, he could focus on music, even with a hectic schedule. One concert in Florida ended around 10 p.m.; he and his fellow students got back to their hotel at 11, fell asleep around midnight, and were ready to board a shuttle at 4:50 a.m. to catch a flight to Dallas. But during downtime, they would go to a beach, or when the weather was bad, play cards in their hotel rooms.

After an entrepreneurial fall, Scott shifted his attention to technique. He had been gently directed to do so by his teachers, who include Curtis's president, Roberto Diaz. Scott believed, he said, that "the better I can play the viola, the more credibility I'm going to have to advocate for the things I want to do."

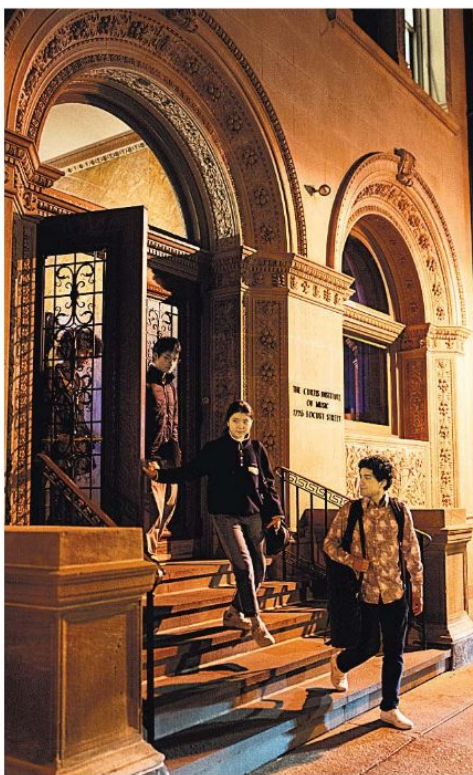
He also relaxed a little by reading at night, taking up the Ray Bradbury stories he had loved as a child. In practice rooms, though, he was hard at work on a Bach suite and George Walker's Viola Sonata, from 1989. He reached out to Walker's son, and tracked down the violist who had first recorded the piece and a scholar who had written about it. Scott repeatedly returned to the score to mark it up; he thought about what story Walker was trying to tell with the music. The school decided to record his performance, and asked Scott to bring it back for a new-music concert next year.

THE WEEK BEFORE "Les Mamelles de Tirésias" opened, Tacchino tested positive for Covid-19. After months of unreliable health, and audition after audition, she was feeling overwhelmed. She was frustrated by the mixed messages she seemed to be re-

CONTINUED ON FOLLOWING PAGE



DILLON SCOTT, above, before performing at St. Mark's Church in Philadelphia. Right, practicing in his dorm room. Below, Scott with students who were part of the Black composers concert he put together. Bottom, working with Roberto Diaz, who is also president of Curtis.



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These Students Live for Their Music



FROM PRECEDING PAGE
ceiving: that she was so young, that she was starting to get old, that she sounded great, that she wasn't quite right for something. A comment by the tenor Matthew Polenzani, who gave a talk at the school, resonated with her. "He said, 'There are days when you're going to have the most incredible audition of your life, and you're not going to get anything, and another day, you're going to sing the crappiest audition of your life and get four gigs.'"
Tachino's optimism held alongside her determination. She recovered in time for the Pouenc premiere, and decided to stay at Curtis an extra year, to perform in its centennial celebration. In addition, she got into a young artist program in Paris, L'Atelier Lyrique, where she would work with the conductor David Stern.
Gleason's persistence paid off, too. Be-

cause of her emails, she was absent during the spring semester, working at the Juilliard School in New York on a production of Mozart's "La Clemenza di Tito." She signed with a manager, Intermusica, and continued to apply for conducting jobs. One, she turned down because she didn't actually want it; another was in Chicago, where she and her partner used to live. They decided that regardless of any job, they would move there after graduation.
At a concert to showcase the work of composing students, Demiray presented her first piece for orchestra. She was the youngest on the program, and the evening was such a blur, she didn't remember most of what she saw on video later. In the moment, she said, it felt like something simply happened and was over, but with some distance, she started to recognize how much progress was reflected in those 15 minutes.



TACHINO HAD ONE more starring role left: the title fox in the Curtis production of Janáček's "The Cunning Little Vixen." It was yet another gig she had picked up after someone else dropped it, and it required her learning the material within a month. "But," she said, "I feel like so many careers started out like that. It's exciting."
She received enthusiastic applause at the first performance, but the relief barely registered because after the run she would still have to present her master's project. (The night of her final bows, she stayed up until 2 a.m. working on it.) Then she was done with the semester, though she had to stick around, in her other role, as resident coordinator. Comfortable with the year she'd had, she left to see her boyfriend in Montreal.
On the eve of graduation, Gleason presented a workshop performance of a chamber opera she was developing with

MICAH GLEASON, above, a singer and conductor, who finished at Curtis last month. Below, at work in her apartment. Far left, a mirror is a crucial part of her conducting regimen. Left, her inspiration is Yannick Nézet-Séguin.



Joann Evans, a former classmate from Bard College and her duo partner. With the move to Chicago, she wasn't sure whether she would walk at the graduation ceremony; but she was able to make it. "You only go to Curtis once," she said.
Cheung played in Gleason's workshop, before leaving Philadelphia for Seattle and an audition for a piccolo seat at the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. As a 17-year-old with a year at Curtis left, he wasn't expecting much, but after two days, he was offered the job. "It's an amazing opportunity," he said, "but there's a lot to be considered."
It will be complicated, for example, if the orchestra wants him to start immediately, while he still has school (not to mention high school) to finish. If he could wait, he would take the position for a gap year he already had planned. But as he looked forward to the rest of the summer, including a program at



Classical



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES GELMAN, THE NEW YORK TIMES



JULIETTE TACCHINO, left, with the cast of "Cunning Little Vixen." Far left, drawings in the makeup room at "Vixen." Below, Tacchino, a soprano, before a production of "Les Mamelles de Tirésias."



JULIN CHEUNG, left, a flautist. Far left, with his mother, Yuliya Cheung; he lives with his parents. Below that, Cheung and others posed after a performance.



the idyllic Verbier Festival in Switzerland, he wasn't sure what would happen.

Scott landed a place at Verbier as well, in a different program. At the end of the semester, he took account of the year and congratulated himself on tripling his social media followers, playing the pieces he wanted to play and even starting to compose music of his own. He was already thinking about ideas for the next year, and the year after that.

As Demiray packed up her room, she felt sad to be leaving her new friends. At times, she had spent 24 hours straight with these people, experiencing things for the first time together. Back in Turkey, she was happy to see her parents, to have time to swim and to compose without a schedule. But she was also, in a way that surprised her, excited for the return of fall.

"Now," she said, "I feel like I have two families."



Micah Gleason, center right, holding up a fellow student at a graduation rehearsal. The intense musicians were finally able to relax.

Film



JACOB L. COHEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Savvy Actor Learns the Hollywood Game

Glen Powell understands what studios and audiences crave.

By BROOKS BARNES

LOS ANGELES — The cookies weren't selling. It was a blustery day in suburban Austin, Texas, in 1996, and Lauren and Leslie Powell had a sales quota to meet for their Girl Scout troop. But it was that cookie time of year: Thin Mints and Caramel deLites were seemingly up for grabs everywhere.

Glen, their 8-year-old brother, suggested a marketing gambit. "He had us make signs that advertised free gift with every purchase," and we put them up around the neighborhood," Leslie recalled.

Glen was the gift.

"He would hide in some honeysuckle bushes and pop out after a purchase to perform Elvis songs," she said, laughing. "That's my big brother. Ain't nothin' but a hound dog."

I confess: Until I heard stories like that one — and spent time with the hound dog himself — I didn't have high hopes for this profile. Glen Powell? I figured he was a dumb jock who coasted into a movie career on his all-American good looks. Boring.

Yes, fine, Powell has been having a bona fide Hollywood moment. He stood nude on a cliff top with Sydney Sweeney in "Anyone but You" at Christmas. He is currently starring on Netflix in "Hit Man," a comedy-drama-thriller-romance. And in July, Powell will be outrunning big-budget tornadoes in "Twisters."

But a superstar in the making? C'mon. I met Powell, 35, for breakfast in April at the Sunset Tower Hotel in West Hollywood, Calif. He showed up in a tight blue polo accented with a chain necklace and chest hair. (Perhaps he was in character, I snarked to myself, as Good-Looking Frat Guy, a bit part he played in "Stuck in Love," a 2012 romance.) An omelet was ordered. Tabasco sauce was summoned and squirted. He scratched his armpit.

Got it.

Over the next two and a half hours, however, a captivating person emerged. He dismantled my cynical assumptions one by one — starting with the notion that he had coasted into a movie career. In fact, he struggled for years to gain a foothold in Hollywood. His first agency dropped him. "Lucky to be cast as a dead body in a crime show," Powell was told after the split.

It also became clear why studios finally started to see Powell as a ticket-selling successor to Tom Cruise, Matt Damon, Keanu Reeves, Will Smith and other rising (or problematic) action stars: Powell has a sharp mind for business, and, at least for now, box-office dollars motivate him more than awards. He has also acquired a bit more ruggedness with age, making him a more credible leading man.

"To be a lasting success in Hollywood, you have to make people money," he said. "You have to go: 'Who is the audience for this? Are you giving people a reason to buy tickets?' And if you don't have a very clear answer, move on, no matter how much you may love the script or want to work with the director."

He crossed his arms and leaned across the table.

"I find the gamification of the business fun," he continued. "How do we make money that is watched and rewatched over decades?" He cited a half-dozen examples, including "Field of Dreams," "Training Day" and "Tootsie," and added, "When a movie is really watchable — engaging enough to captivate generations of people — that's true cultural power."

I stammered and tried to process the "Tootsie" shout-out. Powell charged forward. "Small, intimate movies are also on my 'lango board of things I want to do,'" he said. "But watchability is an important word. This is where I think actors who want to be serious get it wrong. Flogging yourself and showing how tortured and serious you can be — people often don't rewatch, which takes all the power out of it."

You have to understand: Actors almost never talk this way. They usually insist their

career plans involve "just letting things happen," perhaps sensing that having box-office ambitions could expose them as uncool, or set themselves up for failure.

Publicity can be another touchy matter. It's part of the job; studios pay stars to act in films — and to promote them. But a lot of stars, including Emma Watson, Adam Driver, Joaquin Phoenix, Lupita Nyong'o, Jonah Hill and Bradley Cooper, do not like to serve themselves up endlessly for interviews. It's an anxiety-provoking drag: Can't we just let our work speak for itself?

Powell is the opposite.

"I always find it lame when actors are like: 'I just want to act in the movie. I don't want to promote the movie,'" he said. "If you want this career, part of your job — a big part — is doing everything you can to help sell your movies. Doing publicity matters. You've got to give people a reason to care."

Just like selling cookies.

"STOP TRYING TO MAKE GLEN POWELL HAPPEN," read one cardboard sign.

"It's never gonna happen," read another.

Powell's parents, Cindy and Glen Powell Sr., were holding the makeshift placards above their heads at a promotional event for "Hit Man" last month. The gag was partly a comment on their son's success. The movie, directed by Richard Linklater, gave Powell his first title role: sink or swim, all on him. His parents were also poking fun at the voluminous media attention that Junior had lately received.

The stunt generated an inferno of "Hit Man" publicity, in part because Powell fanned the flames. "The Hitman... Killed by his own parents," he posted, along with crying with laughter emojis, on Instagram, where he has 1.6 million followers.

It was a savvy piece of self-deprecation — coming at a moment when, frankly, he does seem a bit overexposed. In cahoots with Sweeney's his "Anyone but You" co-star, Powell aggressively worked the publicity circuit in December and January to support that film, resulting in a promotional campaign that bordered on performance art. "Anyone

but You" had a terrible opening (\$6 million over three days) but went on to collect an astounding \$220 million.

"I know it's a lot," he told me, speaking of his workload, "but I'm kind of going full tilt right now for a reason. There is a moment in Hollywood when you have political capital, and you have to spend it before you lose it."

Powell has signed up for a dizzying number of projects (while passing on others — reluctantly, he said — including new chapters in the "Jurassic Park" and "Jason Bourne" franchises). His movie docket includes "Huntington," an A24 dramatic thriller about the conviving heir to a multibillion-dollar fortune, and "Monsanto," a legal drama directed by John Lee Hancock ("The Blind Side") and produced by Adam McKay ("The Big Short"). Powell is also set to star in a remake of "The Running Man," a minor Arnold Schwarzenegger hit from 1987, and perhaps in a retooled "Heaven Can Wait," Warren Beatty's 1978 body-swapping comedy.

His television jobs include a "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" series for Amazon — with him in the Robert Redford role — and "Chad Powers," a comedy Hulu series about a college football player.

Powell, of course, is also ready to get re-gressed at a moment's notice for "Top Gun 3," after playing the cocky pilot Hangman in "Top Gun: Maverick" to wide acclaim. (A sequel to the sequel is in development at Paramount Pictures.)

That adds up to easily in excess of \$500 million worth of projects on studio assembly lines, based on a back-of-the-envelope tally of estimated production and marketing costs.

And there are more films percolating: J.J. Abrams hasn't directed a movie since "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" in 2019, but he has a secret project in the works and Powell is in talks to play the lead. "I think Glen has just begun to scratch the surface of what he is capable of onscreen," Abrams recently told The Hollywood Reporter, adding, "He's not just an actor, but a legitimate writer and producer as well."

Powell helped produce "Hit Man." The

Film

"dumb jock" (mea culpa!) also co-wrote the screenplay with Linklater.

They loosely based the script on a 2001 *Texas Monthly* article about a mild-mannered man who worked undercover for the Houston police as a pretend assassin. Over a decade, more than 60 people unspectacularly hired him; he wore a wire to gather evidence to use against them in court.

In the movie, Powell's fauxthug man adopts a dozen personas using wigs and accents. While in disguise, he ends up falling for a client (Adria Arjona) with secrets of her own; it all leads to a sizzling romance.

The result is part screwball comedy and part "Body Heat," with some "Borat" flavoring. Reviews have been through the roof, prompting early awards chatter.

"Glen is one of the most curious people I have ever met, which is part of what makes him a terrific collaborator," Arjona said. "The script he wrote with Rick was so smart and so unlike anything I had read. He can produce. He acts incredibly. He has like eight or 12 abs. Glen has it all."

He's also, apparently, a helluva good time. Arjona first met Powell over a late lunch in Los Angeles in 2022. They were both doing *Dry January*. "It was to see if we were going to get along," she said. "Cut to four tequilas later, five hours later. He genuinely has become a close friend."

POWELL'S RISE in Hollywood started in 2015 with "Scream Queens," a comedy-horror television series. The show, a Ryan Murphy production, lasted only two seasons, but Powell's performance as an oversexed college student turned heads.

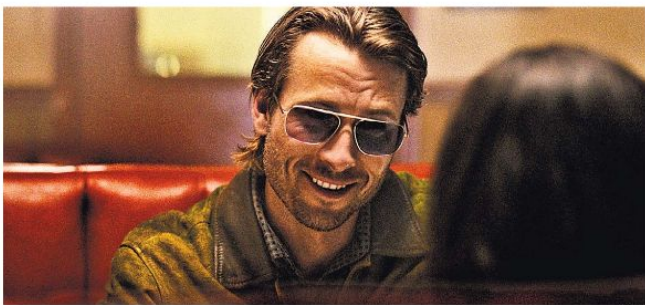
"I remember saying to him at the end, 'You are going to be a big, big movie star,'" Jamie Lee Curtis recalled.

She played a college dean, and their first scene together was formidable. "He was basically nude in a bed," she said. "I'm in a negligee and a kimono. We're meeting for the first time two minutes before. It could have been awful."

She continued: "But he was, of course, because he's Glen, the sweetest guy ever. He does physical comedy really well — he's funny — but he also has depth. He is maybe not unattractive. I feel the same way about Glen as I do about Jake Gyllenhaal."

Perhaps because Powell is from Texas (and has a slight twang to prove it), he is often likened to Matthew McConaughey. "Red meat for red states," as one studio marketing executive described Powell to me, almost licking her lips. That quality has been in short supply among young male stars, a line-up that includes the twee (Timothée Chalamet, Tom Holland), the arty (Daniel Kaluuya, Barry Keoghan) and the dreamy (Michael B. Jordan, Austin Butler).

Machismo is a Hollywood cliché for a reason: It works. There is something about



Top, Glen Powell stars in "Hit Man" on Netflix, which he also helped write and produce. Next month he will appear in "Twister" with Daisy Edgar-Jones and Anthony Ramos.

locker-room swagger that certain audiences find irresistible. Powell dials up that part of his personality as needed. "My job is not to debunk the fantasy, but rather to become the fantasy," as his character says in "Hit Man."

Powell loves the Texas Longhorns, bro, and has been known to put back 40 ribs at the Salt Lick BBQ in Driftwood, Texas. His euphemism for sex is "smokin' the brisket," or so he told *Men's Health* in November. He apparently has a dimple on his tush. "Real crowd-pleaser that dimple," he said.

Less is made of the fact that he is single. "Dating me right now would be a nightmare," he said. "I basically have no free time." He has a photo of his parents as his iPhone lock screen and texts with his sisters almost every day. He carries around a little dog like Paris Hilton circa 2010.

"I have many sides, Brooks," he teased

over breakfast, launching into a rather excellent impersonation of a cigarette-wielding Cruella de Vil. (Rule one of showbiz: Play to your audience.)

In his next film, "Twisters," he goes full-on Cracker Barrel as a former bull rider who dodges airborne farm equipment while recklessly driving straight into tornadoes. He then shoots fireworks into the funnel clouds for beer-drinkin' pals to record on video and post online.

"When you love something," Powell's tornado chaser says in a suddenly serious moment, "you spend your whole life trying to understand it."

I WAS SURPRISED to learn that Powell was a child actor. He started performing with a Texas musical theater company when he was in fifth grade, learning to tap dance — there is video evidence, according to his sister Leslie — and appearing in "The Music Man" and "42nd Street."

He played sports, lacrosse and football in particular. But mostly he was fascinated with movies. His second-grade project was on Steven Spielberg's use of practical effects in "Jurassic Park." In 2003, when he was 14, he got his first movie role as "long-fingered boy" in "Spy Kids 3: Game Over." Two years later, he played a paperboy in "The Wendell Baker Story," a part that required him to get hit by a car, which he practiced with his mother in a church parking lot.

In 2006, his mother drove him five hours to Shreveport, La., to audition for Denzel Washington, who was directing and starring in "The Great Debaters." Powell got the part — and a powerful agent: Ed Limato, who represented Washington. A year later, Limato called Powell in his dorm room at the University of Texas at Austin.

"Ed said, 'If you're going to spin the wheel on an acting career, now is the time to do it,'" Powell said.

So he dropped out of college and moved to Los Angeles in 2008. "Ed always told me, over and over, that the definition of a movie star is somebody who guys want to grab a beer with — fun, not threatening — and who women want to date and bring home to meet their parents," Powell said. Limato, who helped turn Mel Gibson, Richard Gere and Kevin Costner into big stars, also gave Powell another crucial career tip: Don't take on a role in a big franchise too soon, however tempting the paycheck; stars are built in smaller movies of varied genres.

Limato died two years later, leaving Powell without an advocate.

It was a rough time for the young Texan, who supported himself through coaching community sports and small acting jobs (a Dockers commercial, an episode of "The Lying Game," a cable series). The William Morris Endeavor talent agency had dropped him, and he began to question whether superstardom was even achievable anymore. Hollywood, undercut by video games and YouTube, has long wondered the same thing itself.

Michael B. Jordan might say yes. But Garrett Hedlund, Taylor Kitsch, Taylor Lautner, Ansel Elgort, Ryan Phillippe, Zac Efron, Alex Pettyfer, Eric Bana, Ben Barnes, Armie Hammer, Alden Ehrenreich, Charlie Hunnam, Miles Teller and Jai Courtney might beg to differ.

Powell regained his footing, first with "Scream Queens" and then with small but notable roles in "Hidden Figures" and Linklater's "Everybody Wants Some!"

"Glen is methodical in his thinking," Linklater said. "He's actually pretty cerebral." Not long after Powell moved to Los Angeles, Limato introduced him to Lynda Obst, a fellow Texan and a producer of his like "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days," "Contact" and "Sleepless in Seattle." She hired Powell as an intern, a job that involved reading scripts (two or three a day, when he wasn't popping out for auditions) and giving feedback. It was how he learned how Hollywood runs.

"He was adorable — charm off the charts," Obst recalled. "But that is not what impressed me, and it's not why he is succeeding."

She said: "Actors can turn on charm but they can't turn on intelligence. Glen is smart and learned about developing scripts and the structure of movies. It made him independent and wily."

Powell is clearly making a mark. But making the leap to Tom Cruise-level stardom — or even, say, Channing Tatum-level fame — is still far from assured.

Then again, he does like to prove people wrong.

HIT THE ROAD THIS FATHER'S DAY WEEKEND



STEPHEN FRY AND LENA DUNHAM ARE THE DOUBLE-ACT YOU NEVER KNEW YOU NEEDED."

-THE TIMES



Television



She's Versatile and Busy, With Breakout Qualities

Cleopatra Coleman's profile could soon rise with a new docudrama about a scandal.

By ALEXIS SOLOSKI

Cleopatra Coleman began with red, swirling it toward pink with a fine-tipped brush. An oval appeared on the paper, and then smaller marks joined it — ears, eyebrows, a line for a nose. “I always draw this woman,” Coleman said. “I don’t know why.”

This was on a bright May morning and Coleman, a star of the FX limited series “Clipped,” streaming on Hulu, was at Happy Medium, an art cafe around the corner from her temporary apartment in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. She had passed it on walks with her dog, George, a rescue Yorkiepo, and had often felt jealous of the customers there at night, on dates. So this morning, on a day off from filming a new series, “Black Rabbit,” she had taken herself on a date. She had even dressed for the occasion, in a thrift-store T-shirt with a New York State Summer School for the Arts logo. Charcoal and pottery tempted her, but she settled on watercolor.

To the picture, Coleman, 36, added a long neck, small breasts, two teeth. More colors came — purple, sunset orange, hints of green — all representing different emotions. Then she took a fresh sheet and began again, painting the same figure in different shades. Since the early days of the pandemic, she has drawn and painted this woman hundreds of times.

“It’s always the same woman,” she said. In her professional life, Coleman is almost never the same woman. An actress since her teens, she has bounded among genres and forms. Though her look is distinct — high forehead, full lips, limpid brown eyes — she is often nearly unrecognizable from one role (“The Last Man on Earth,” say, or “Dopesick”) to the next (“Infinity Pool,” “Rebel Moon”). It’s a versatility that has allowed her to stay relatively

anonymous. But given her audacious performance in “Clipped,” as V. Stiviano, the disgraced former owner of the N.B.A.’s Los Angeles Clippers, and the promise of “Black Rabbit,” a starry drama set in the world of Manhattan nightlife due out next year, Coleman’s name and face are about to become much better known.

That’s what her colleagues want for her. “I hope she breaks the [expletive] out,” Gina Welch, who created “Clipped,” said in an interview. “She’s such a star!”

And Mo McRae, who directed her in the film “A Lot of Nothing,” doesn’t understand why it hasn’t happened already.

“It is shocking to me — I’ve thought about it a lot and it doesn’t make sense,” he said. “She’s extremely talented, she’s professional, she’s beautiful, she’s intelligent, she’s all of the things.”

According to Coleman, celebrity has never been her goal. As a woman obsessed with painting someone else’s portrait, she prefers to disappear into her roles. “You just put it out there,” she said, daubing yellow onto her picture. “It’s not your job to tell someone how to feel. None of it’s yours. You’re just a vessel!”

Coleman grew up in Byron Bay, Australia, the daughter of a Scottish father and a Jamaican mother, hippies with strong artistic leanings. Her first experience of performance was clambering to the front during a belly dance class that her mother led. She studied ballet and modern dance and made her acting debut in one of her father’s short films. Acting was, for her, an irresistible calling. She liked Byron Bay, but by the time she was a teenager, she persuaded her parents to leave.

“I’m very, very blessed to grow up in such an open, creative community where it’s not weird to want to be an artist,” she said. “But it’s also a small town, and so ambition doesn’t really go with that.”

The family moved to Melbourne. Though her parents were no longer romantically involved, they all lived together



at first, the better to support her. Quickly she was cast in a commercial and then in roles on children’s television. That was fine for a few years, but as a mixed race actress she sometimes felt limited by what the Australian industry offered her. She knew that the writers and directors never had someone who looked like her in mind.

“I had to be undeniable,” she said. “I had to literally go in and change their minds completely.”

She often played tough girls back then

Cleopatra Coleman, top, who stars as V. Stiviano in the FX limited series “Clipped,” strives to disappear into her roles. “You just put it out there,” she said. “It’s not your job to tell someone how to feel.” Above, from left are Jacki Weaver, Ed O’Neill and Coleman in “Clipped.”

or sexualized characters, even though sexuality is a quality she rarely leads with, in life or work. After high school, she visited Los Angeles and then moved there as soon as she was out of her teens.

Hollywood brought more opportunities, but despite her experience, she still had to fight for every audition. She took whatever was available — comedy, drama, horror, satire, science fiction — and used to feel self-conscious about that. “I thought, ‘Oh, do I need to pick a lane?’” Eventually she realized she was creating her own lane. And while there’s not much overlap between a loopy sitcom like “The Last Man on Earth” and an eat-the-rich horror film such as “Infinity Pool,” she often found herself in projects that attempted an exaggerated or heightened reality.

Mildly allergic to celebrity, but curious about this next professional phase.

Coleman thinks that she understands why. “I can go there,” she said. “I’m intense, man. That’s all I can say!”

Mary Steenburgen, her co-star and eventual romantic interest on “The Last Man on Earth,” had another theory. “She has an ability to go deep into her own sense of truth,” she said of Coleman. “Cleopatra has this beautiful belief in her character and the moment.”

That belief served her well in “Clipped,” playing a character who could easily be dismissed as a bimbo, a gold digger, or a fame-hungry grifter leveraging her intimate relationship with the wealthy N.B.A. owner Sterling — played by Ed O’Neill in the series — for riches and renown. The real Stiviano did eventually achieve a kind of fame when she recorded Sterling making racist remarks that were later leaked to TMZ, touching off a scandal that resulted in Sterling’s ouster from the league in 2014.

Welch, the showrunner, said V. was like an Edith Wharton heroine: “unapologetically ambitious and materialistic and vain. You want to see them eat the world.” But played by Coleman, V. invites compassion — she is as naive as she is calculating, as good-hearted as she is manipulative and ambitious. She accepts a duplex and a Ferrari as her due. But she is also in the process of adopting two young boys, a fact true of the real-life Stiviano. (The production attempted to contact Stiviano, but she did not participate in the show or in the podcast it was based on, “The Sterling Affairs.”)

Welch said that Coleman “wanted to make sure that people still felt empathy for the character.” It worked, at least during filming. Welch found herself writing more for V. and shaping episodes in favor of the character’s point of view, a tribute to Coleman’s performance.

Coleman could relate to the character’s ambition and to her status as an outsider in a world she longs to join. “I just saw her as an outlier and a misfit and I know what that feels like,” she said.

Other elements came harder. V. is overtly sexual, a quality Coleman hasn’t played that often. But for the character, she saw it as means to an end, another tool. “She wasn’t comfortable with it,” she said of Stiviano. “So I didn’t have to pretend that I was comfortable with it.”

Whether in a pantsuit or French lingerie, V. stands out and takes up a lot of space, which felt strange to an actress used to disappearing. In her off hours, Coleman lives quietly — reading, writing, taking her dog, who has become something of a local celebrity, to dog parks. (“There’s a reason why he’s not here, because he would completely pull focus,” she joked.)

Coleman finished off the second painting. She couldn’t say exactly what her subject represents, but in her face Coleman saw humor and resilience, she said. “She’s sardonic and she looks like she’s been

through hell, but she’s cool with it because she knows she’s going to be OK.”

Resilience has kept Coleman going for 20 years, throughout a career in which she has rarely occupied the spotlight. So even if she isn’t looking for fame, and is mildly allergic to celebrity, she’s curious about this next professional phase.

“For me, it’s about, ‘Ooh, this is available to me now, this juicy character,’” she said. “That’s what’s exciting, and I hope that continues. Because I have so much more to give.”

Film

Siblings Embrace the Family Business

With 'The Watchers' and 'Trap,' the Shyamalans thrill.

By ESTHER ZUCKERMAN

The Shyamalan family is very close. How close? During a video interview with the sisters Saleka, 27, and Ishana Night Shyamalan, 24, their dad, the "Sixth Sense" director M. Night Shyamalan, called Ishana on the phone. The sound interrupted Ishana speaking about the differences between her and her father's filmmaking process.

"I'm like, you know we're on this call right now," she said with a laugh, ignoring the ring.

Given this familial bond it makes sense that the Shyamalan siblings are both on the cusp of major career moments this summer made in collaboration with their father. Ishana's feature directing debut, "The Watchers," with Night as one of the producers, arrived in theaters on Friday, while Saleka, a musician, portrays a pop star in and wrote original songs for Night's latest, "Trap," due on Aug. 9. The fact that both projects are emerging around the same time is coincidental, Ishana and Saleka said, but they are happy to share in the celebration.

"I feel like in some ways we've always done that, since we were growing up, experience things together," Saleka said. "So it feels right even though it was unplanned."

In an era where discourse over nepotism in Hollywood runs hot, the Shyamalans wear their name proudly. Fans noticed that there was a poster for "The Watchers" in the "Trap" trailer. The sisters did acknowledge the advantages that come with their lineage, but they have tried to make up for that with discipline. "It's really about meeting that privilege and honoring that with as hard a work ethic as we can, by being as kind people as we can and holding ourselves to the highest standard possible," Ishana said.

But no matter what they chose as professions, Saleka said, their dad was probably going to be nearby. "He's just a super involved parent," she said.

In a separate interview, Night said that the Shyamalans are traditional in many ways even as they chart their own paths. "We're a classic Asian Indian family, but maybe the difference slightly that's interesting is rather than aiming it toward medicine, or engineering, or law — your only three options — we aimed toward the arts," he said. "Codifying a process is the difficult part because in those fields those steps are already predestined and laid out for you, whereas this is amorphous."

To that end, Night involved them in his process at a young age. Saleka and Ishana's formative memories — they also have a younger sister, Shivani — were on the sets of Night's films. His 2006 feature "Lady in the Water" was born out of a bedtime story that their father told them when they were sleeping in adjacent twin beds. During filming, they watched it become real. (The film, which was panned upon release, also became an early lesson in criticism, and how not everyone will feel the same way about your work that you do.)

In the Shyamalan household, art was a "sacred thing," Ishana said, and creative pursuits were taken extremely seriously. Saleka started piano lessons when she was 4, and Night said she would practice three hours a day even when the family was on vacation.

When Saleka, who sings emotionally rich R&B songs and has opened for Boyz II Men, decided she wanted to compose her own material rather than go to a conservatory, Night initially dismissed the idea. "In a classic immigrant Indian dad process: I was like, 'Well, that's ridiculous,'" he said. He later admitted he was wrong not to trust her desires.

Saleka said, "I think once he saw that I had passion for it in the same way that he had a passion for film, he understood it and was like, 'All right, I'm with you, let's make this happen.'"

Inspired by their shared love of Prince's "Purple Rain," Saleka and Night came up with "Trap," a thriller about a father who takes his daughter to see her favorite artist,



EVIL/DON FRESA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Saleka Shyamalan, left, and Ishana Night Shyamalan are working with their father, M. Night Shyamalan.

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SUNDAY 12:00PM

OLD JOY
DANIEL LONDON
SUNDAY 12:00PM

MARGARET
EXTENDED CUT
SUNDAY 12:00PM

NEVER RARELY
SOMETIMES ALWAYS
SUNDAY 12:00PM

THE PANIC IN NEEDLE PARK
JESSIE MOORE
SUNDAY 12:00PM

FULL METAL JACKET
SUNDAY 12:00PM

ACADEMY MUSEUM LUNCH SELECTS
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*Q&A w/ Filmmaker & MARIKA TOULAYE 5Y

ROBOT DREAMS
12:00 (U), 2:30, 5:30, 7:30

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12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

FLIPSIDE 12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

HANDLING THE UNDEAD
12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

THE COOK, THE THEFT, HIS WIFE & HER LOVER
12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE
12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

LA CHIMERA
12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

MAN RAY 12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

NYE
12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

Film at Lincoln Center
CONRAD THE ADDUCTION OF EDGARDO MORTARA MON 10:15, 1:15, 4:00PM

EVIL DOES NOT EXIST
TUE 10:15, 1:15, 4:00PM

IN OUR DAY MON 8:00PM

SOPHIA LOREN: LA SIGNORA DI NAPOLI
TUE 10:15, 1:15, 4:00PM

THE SIGN OF VENUS TUE 10:15, 1:15, 4:00PM

MORE THAN A MURDER TUE 10:15, 1:15, 4:00PM

THE VOYAGE TUE 10:15, 1:15, 4:00PM



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Art



COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

Making It Big on the Las Vegas Strip

The Swiss artist Urs Fischer finds the entertainment mecca 'artificial, but in a good way.'

By NANCY HASS

LAS VEGAS — The Swiss artist Urs Fischer suggests beginning our day together with coffee in the Village. Not the Manhattan neighborhood of Greenwich Village — on the edge of which he lived from the mid-aughts until several years ago, commuting to giant studios in Red Hook, Brooklyn; and Long Island City, Queens — though if you squint, there's a resemblance to its earlier era. The maze of disorienting lanes, lots of cobblestone (sort of), Italian-suggestive stands with neon marquees that sell iced lattes (watery) and cannolis (soggy).

No, this is the Las Vegas version, tucked beyond an ocean of slot machines in the far corner of the timeless, low-lit New York-New York Hotel and Casino on the stretch of real estate called the Strip. "There's more to see here that's interesting than some other newer places," he said, leaning back on a metal bistro chair in front of the faux glassed-in storefront of a stage-set tenement building that showcases a top-hatted mannequin wrapped like a mummy, holding a wicker basket of prosthetic hands and feet. "It's artificial, but in a good way."

That is a matter of taste, as is the very notion of Las Vegas itself. Fischer, 51, known for his conceptually extravagant, hard-to-

categorize works (a house made from loaves of bread, a giant pit dug in a gallery floor that looked as if it could collapse the building, a shower of huge blue plaster raindrops suspended from the ceiling, a series of supersized cast wax figures-cum-candles of people including the artist and director Julian Schnabel and the collector Dasha Zhukova, which melt to the floor over the course of an exhibition) has been visiting the city sporadically for three decades, most recently from Los Angeles. That's where he lives with his two daughters — Charlotte, 15, and Grace, 8 — in a modest-size but verdant 1920s home near Dodger Stadium.

In December, however, he became a more permanent presence in the desert entertainment mecca when the delay-plagued, 67-story Fontainebleau, a casino and 3,644-room hotel that cost \$3.7 billion, debuted its "Urs Fischer Gallery."

In the middle of the cavernous space, on a round pedestal, stands a craggy, otherworldly 46-foot-tall, 17-ton, gold-leaf and cast-aluminum abstract sculpture called "The Lovers #3," which suggests two asteroids from dueling solar systems locked in an embrace. A pair of monumental vividly colored paintings — big as Times Square billboards — adorn the walls flanking it. The longest escalator in the state — 150 feet — runs up one side of the room to a near-bare mezzanine; the idea is for visitors to see the enormous works by one of the art world's superstars from a drone's-

eye view.
Urs Fischer and his "The Lovers #3," a 46-foot-tall, 17-ton abstract sculpture at the Fontainebleau Las Vegas.

Bringing blue chip art to Las Vegas, where some 40 million tourists visit yearly and there are nearly three million local residents, is not a new idea, but in execution it has often proved an awkward fit. For a couple of years, until the pandemic, the brothers Lorenzo Fertitta and Frank J. Fertitta III, who are among the most aggressive collectors in the country, installed a truckload of their Damien Hirsts in the Palms Casino Resort, which they owned at the time, including a 60-foot-tall bronze headless male figure called "Demon With Bowl" and a three-section shark suspended in formaldehyde they installed in a bar (scandal ensued when it turned out the piece was made in 2017, even though Hirst had dated it to the 1990s).

Steve Wynn, the casino pioneer, displayed his Renoirs and Picassos for a while at one of his hotels, the Bellagio. (Jeff Koons's crowd-pleasing, multicolored, stainless steel sculpture "Tulips" lives on the first floor of the Wynn Plaza mall.) A 2009 Jenny Holzer LED display wraps around the Uber pickup area of Aria, a hotel owned by MGM, and Maya Lin's cast silver squiggle, longer than 80 feet, meant to represent the Colorado River hangs above the reception desk. Still, Las Vegas is not likely to dethrone New York, Hong Kong or Paris as a world art capital anytime soon.

In fact, it is the largest city in the United States without a major museum, despite a

series of false starts and the longtime advocacy of the art critic and academic Dave Hickey, who lived in the city for nearly two decades. Late last year, the city announced a deal for a new institution supported in part by Elaine Wynn, the businesswoman and former wife of Steve Wynn, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which is run by Michael Govan. His unlikely affection for Las Vegas springs from his decades as a frequent visitor to check in on Michael Heizer's "City" the mammoth land art piece that Govan unwaveringly championed, four hours north. Under the deal, LACMA would lend important works to a planned 70,000- to 90,000-square-foot museum, near the downtown performing arts center, which will be aimed at residents rather than tourists. It will be realized within a decade, Govan said, but "school kids in Las Vegas really shouldn't be taking field trips to the Strip."

Still, on a late spring afternoon, strolling along the 4.2-mile stretch of bedazzled casino hotels, one after the other, as well as a Walgreens that appears to loom the size of New York's Museum of Modern Art, Fischer, burly with sleeves of fading tattoos — "I'm over that," he said — has little need to see his art in a traditional museum setting.

Known for his subtly bemused but often unreadable demeanor — a manner that is in keeping with his work, which tends to reinterpret and sociopolitical messaging — he seems, in many ways, an ideal

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13



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Art

Urs Fischer, Making It Big on the Las Vegas Strip

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

bridge between Las Vegas's art-as-decora- tion and the community's inchoate urge to become a full-fledged, culturally rich metropolis. Leave it to other artists to shudder at what they may see as the insurmountable tackiness of the locale. Fischer, who early in his career supported himself as a nightclub bouncer, waves away such concerns with a bearish hand. Over the years some critics have seen his output through an anti-consumerist lens, an interpretation drawn in part from his use of organic materials — dough, unfired clay fruit, melting wax — that can decompose during the course of a show, but he balks at such readings. He had no compunction at having one of his works be central to the Fontainebleau's image.

"I don't look down at this place," he said, referring to the city. "I think of it as an everything-burger. Is it good? I don't know. It has a lot of ideas. It's red-blooded." He stops to watch two older, uniformed veterans basking along an elevated walkway with a microphone and a small amplifier, shakily belting out "Easy like Sunday morning."

"Some people might see those guys and think, 'Wow, that's sad,'" he said, dropping a \$20 in the bucket, "but I think, 'Wow, what a great way to get out of the house, away from your wife, and pick up a few dollars.'"

Such puncturing of pretension is his métier, which he pairs with an appetite for intellectual meanderings (Jane Jacobs's conflict with Robert Moses, the artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman's underappreciated paintings, the history of pine trees) and a sharp taste for detail, including for things that other artists might dismiss as cheesy or commercial. For that, Las Vegas and its open spirit of humanity provides the perfect tide pool through which to wade.

"Urs is interested in absolutely everything," said Rudolf Stingel, the New York-based Italian painter and installation artist with whom Fischer has been close since the two had side-by-side studios in Berlin at the beginning of the aughts. "He wants to examine execution and process, no matter what the thing is. He's not a snob."

Jessica Morgan, who curated the 2013 survey of his work while she was in charge of international art at Tate Modern and now is the director of Dia Art Foundation, referred to him as an "omnivorous image maker, but not someone who spends a lot of time comparing himself to other artists or making a lot of judgments."

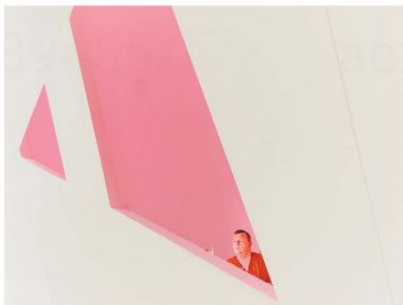
When he's in Las Vegas, rather than ferreting out his peers' work — he has never checked out Lin's sculpture or Holzer's installation or ventured the 22 miles to his fellow countryman Ugo Rondinone's "Seven Magic Mountains," an installation of fluorescent-painted stacked boulders in the desert — he prefers to stroll the Strip.

He might take in such details as a woman's Mona Lisa backpack (Jeff Koons's *Louise* is *Vuitton*); how a planted median of blue palo verde trees, Parkinsonia florida, forms a vertical axis with the exterior edge of the mammoth Cosmopolitan; the way that someone has impaled the butt of a cigar with a plastic martini sword, and left it, poetically arrayed, in a standing ashtray near the curb.

Riding up the elevator to survey the Immersive Van Gogh attraction and its merchandise — a sea of "Sunflowers" puzzles, mugs and tates — on the third floor of the Shops at Crystals, which bridges several casinos, Fischer is all-in: "This stuff, it doesn't take away from the real Van Gogh. They're just different executions." He is less enthusiastic when he spots a James Turrell art installation nearby, commissioned by the mall developer — a flood of purple light — in an



Urs Fischer at the "Tea and Tulips" display at the Bellagio. Below left, the New York-New York Hotel and Casino. "I don't look down at this place," he says of Las Vegas. "I think of it as an everything-burger. Is it good? I don't know. It has a lot of ideas. It's red-blooded."



Fischer peering out of an illuminated portal at a James Turrell installation at the Shops at Crystals. Right, photographing an ashtray of cigarette butts, a cigar stub with olive skewer and a candy-box ribbon in front of the Wynn Casino & Hotel.

ignored corner where the tramway, escalator and elevator meet.

"Context is everything," he said, shaking his head slightly. "This is not good." More appropriate for its setting, it perhaps too kitschy even for him, is the Bellagio's giant lobby installation, "Tea and Tulips," with a 20-foot high pink-and-purple teapot and a giant hot air balloon decorated in fondant colors. "Sometimes Instagram makes the decisions," he said, with a shrug, inspecting the engineering for its huge, hovering violet-and-zurc hummingbird sipping from a caldron-size hibiscus. "They have to go with it."

As the sun begins to set, and the crowds emerge from the hotels, changed from sneakers and shorts into more sparkly garb for a night at the tables or at David Copperfield, the question looms: Does he believe, as Gowan does, that Las Vegas may be moving toward a future in which its atmosphere will be tempered with art-forward urbanity — a setting in which "The Lovers #3," in all its monumental ambiguity, might seem more at home?

Sure, Fischer said, that would be great — but as always, he playfully hedges his bets. Or perhaps now is the opportune time for an idea that he and the Turner Prize-winning English artist Keith Tyson pitched to the Venetian resort in 1999: "We thought that during the Biennale they should do their own version, set up pavilions with art from every country — the Venice Venice Biennale. I mean, you could do it really well, for real. To me, it makes a lot of sense."



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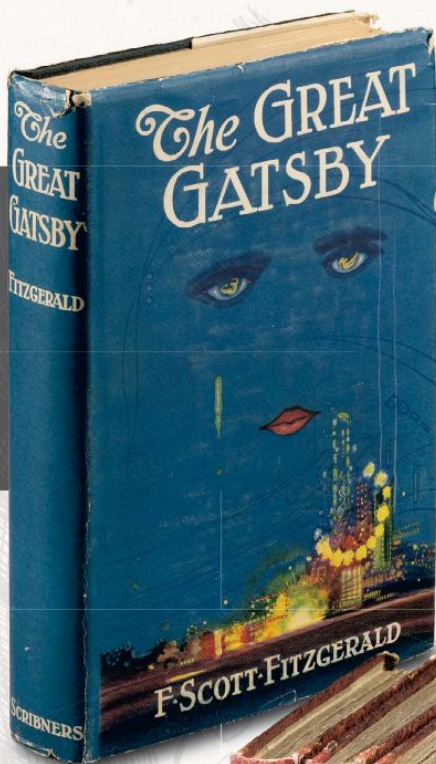
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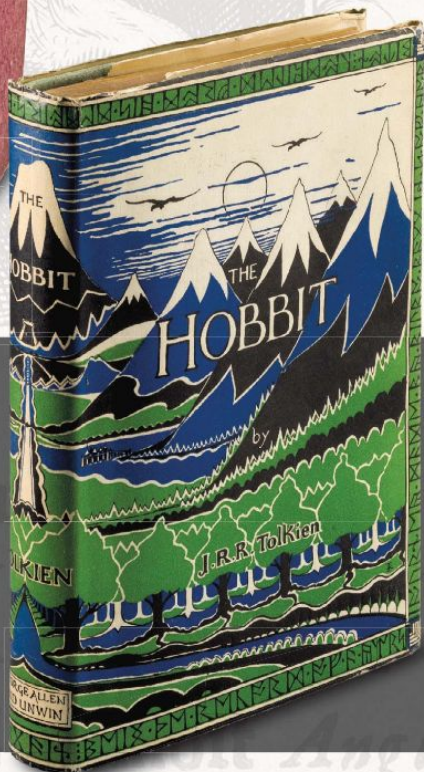
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Pop

True to Herself, Time After Time

Cyndi Lauper, 70, prepares for what she calls her farewell tour.

By AMANDA HESS

One Friday afternoon in May, Cyndi Lauper stepped out of her Upper West Side apartment building and into the streets of New York. She wore glitter-encrusted glasses, sneakers with rainbow soles and a stack of beaded bracelets on each arm. A rice-paper parasol swung in her hand. As she walked, she examined the crowds and remarked when glints of interest caught her eye.

"Of course, up here it's fashion hell," she allowed of her neighborhood. And yet, every few blocks she rubbernecked at another woman's look, her famous New York accent lifting and tumbling in pleasure at what she saw.

"Look at these dames, how cute are they?"

"Did you love those pants? I kind of loved those pants."

The pop icon and social justice activist has nothing left to prove.

"Look at this lady," she said, stepping off the curb and clocking a passerby. The woman moved nimbly, tomato-red streak in her silver hair, body draped in shades of fuchsia and cherry as she pushed the gleaming metal frame of a walker. "Fabulous," Lauper exclaimed. "Come on!"

At 70, the pop icon and social justice activist isn't just charging back into the streets. On Monday, Lauper announced her final tour, the Girls Just Wanna Have Fun Farewell Tour, which will have her headlining arenas across North America from late October to early December. And "Let the Canary Sing," a documentary about her that premiered at the Tribeca Festival last year, is streaming on Paramount+.

Lauper has not staged a major tour — "a proper tour, that's mine" — in over a decade. But now her window of opportunity is closing, so she's leaping through it. "I don't think I can perform the way I want to in a couple of years," she said. "I want to be strong."

And until recently, when she finally agreed to sit for the director Alison Ellwood, she could not envision committing her life story to film. "I wasn't going to do a documentary, because I'm not dead," she said. More to the point, she did not feel particularly misunderstood. From the moment she danced across the city in the 1983 video for "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," she felt that she had articulated precisely what she wanted to say.

"Everything I wanted them to understand was in that video," she said of her fans. She has a lot of people who get her. The clip has been viewed on YouTube more than a billion times. Forty years later, she holds it up as a thesis, the key to decoding her artistic perspective and understanding everything that followed. After all, "you never have to wonder where a New Yorker stands," she said. "They'll tell you, straight up."

CYNDI LAUPER, BORN in Brooklyn, raised in Queens, bopped around the house to the Beatles' songs, her older sister, Elen, singing McCartney's parts and Lauper taking Lennon's. It was her earliest lesson in harmony and song structure. But when she left home at 17, it was with a copy of Yoko Ono's feminist conceptual art book "Grapefruit" in her hands.

Ono taught her that "you can create art in your head, and then you can view things differently," Lauper told me. This attitude served her well as she tried (and often failed) to work as a painter, a shoe saleswoman, a racetrack hot walker, an IHOP waitress, a gal Friday at Simon & Schuster and the singer in a cover band.

Singing other people's music in Long Island clubs and dive bars, Lauper struggled to find her place. She tried to channel Janis Joplin, but "I was stuck inside her body, and she didn't like it, and I didn't like it," she said. She tried to sound like Gene Pitney, and "it came out sounding like Ethel Merman." After a while, "You start to feel that you're just not good enough."

But really, she was just not good at being



STYLING: JEFFREY MAYER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, Cyndi Lauper last month. The video for her 1983 hit "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," below, has been viewed on YouTube more than a billion times.

anyone other than Cyndi Lauper. When she started writing and arranging songs for herself, "I told the stories that I knew about the women that I knew," she said. "About my mom, my aunt, my grandmother." They guided her back to the rhythms of her own life, even if, in the beginning, few were interested in listening. "My first concert was to 14

people," she said, "and I did the encore, OK?"

The documentary's title is a line ripped from a real-life courtroom drama: Early on, Lauper's career got entangled in the ambitions of an ex-manager, who sued her to retain control of her music. She sank to bankruptcy trying to escape him. When the judge sided with Lauper, he banged the gavel and said, "Let the canary sing."

Once freed, Lauper connected with Robert Hazard, who had written a track called "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." He'd arranged it as a rock song from a man's perspective — the girls were the ones he imagined sleeping with — and Lauper had some edits. She recast it as a gleeful public announcement, calling out a sexist double standard ("Oh mama dear, we're not the fortunate ones") while claiming liberation from the workplace, the home and the patriarchy. And she rearranged the notes, pitching her voice so high that it could not be ignored. "I sang that high because I was trumpeting an idea," she said.

And then there was the video. "That video was what you call 'inclusive' nowadays, and that was the most important thing," Lauper said. In addition to the Italian American pro wrestler Lou Albano, Lauper featured her mother, her lawyer, her manager, a crop of record-company secretaries, and a racially diverse group of singers and dancers. "I was sick of the segregation" of the music industry, she said. "It's people together that create a style."

MTV was still in its infancy in 1983, and it was fortuitous that Lauper's debut album, "She's So Unusual," came out just as the network was ascending. She saw her public image as a visual art form. Her makeup artist was a painter, and her stylist was a vintage buyer.

"People sometimes get the wrong idea that it was very thrown together," Laura Wills, the founder of the vintage shop Screaming Mimi's, said of the singer's style.

"People just didn't look like that." In the early '80s, Lauper worked for Wills, often bartering her labor for clothes. When her career took off, Wills started styling her, and the pair often constructed Lauper's outfits as if sliding chips across a poker table, as in, "I'll see your polka-dot socks and striped capris, and I'll raise you a plaid top," Wills said. "I'll see your polka-dot socks, striped capris and plaid top, and I'll raise you a paisley hat."

Lauper seemed to shoot to fame as a fully formed feminist icon. She refused to tell interviewers her age ("I'm not a car," she said), and she insisted that they recognize the politics behind her aesthetic choices. "I wore the corset to undo the power of the binding of women," she told the press. She graced the cover of Ms. Magazine and recorded the 1986 song "True Colors," which resonated with her in the wake of a friend's death from AIDS.

"I know that I probably lost business because I talked about AIDS a lot," she said, but figured "I ought to stand up like any good Italian and stick up for my family, you know?" In 2008, she founded True Colors United to help combat homelessness among L.G.B.T.Q. youth. And in 2022, she created the Girls Just Want to Have Fundamental Rights fund to support abortion access and other reproductive justice movements.

In 1985, Lauper won the best new artist Grammy after the release of "She's So Unusual." The album — and songs like "Time After Time" and "All Through the Night" — broke records. But something odd was happening. She looked around and saw versions of herself everywhere. "When I first became famous, I felt like the whole world just kind of went" — here Lauper made a sharp slurping noise — "and sucked everything up. The jewelry, the color, the corsets on the outside, the whole thing. And then used it. Spit it out. Next!"

Lauper was accused of being a manufactured package. "No, it was me. That's how I



Pop

dressed. That's how I looked. That was my community," she said. "I have a brain."

When Lauper got a call that a movie studio was adapting her big hit into a movie, she balked at its fluffy premise. "I guess it was about a couple of girls... trying to have fun," she said. (Sarah Jessica Parker and Helen Hunt starred.) Lauper refused permission to use her song, so it featured Hazard's version with other vocalists instead. "For me, it sucked," she said. "You took my style. And it had nothing to do with me at all."

In the '80s, Lauper was compared so closely to other female musicians that it was implied there was no space for all of them. She was pitted against other women — mainly Madonna, who released her debut album the same year. On chat shows and in schoolyards (and even on the charity single "We Are the World"), celebrities and fans were asked to choose one. "It was like apples and oranges," Lauper told me. Or as she put it in *Newsweek* in 1985: "She's just doing her thing. My thing happens to be different." It was a shame, Lauper said: "I would have liked to have a friend."

Though she fought her battles mainly alone, Lauper has inspired generations of women. Among her acolytes are Nicki Minaj, who in April brought her onstage in Brooklyn to duet on the song that samples her, "Pink Friday Girls." When an interviewer asked the 26-year-old singer-songwriter Chappell Roan, "How does it feel to be called the Gen-Z Cyndi Lauper?" she replied, "I think Cyndi Lauper is the Gen-Z Cyndi Lauper."

Lauper made 11 more albums after her debut — among them a blues record, a country record and a dance record. In the early 2000s, she walked over to Broadway, starring in "The Threepenny Opera" and writing the music and lyrics to the musical "Kinky Boots" after Harvey Fierstein, who wrote the book, tapped her for the gig. "There's a small group of people I consider my children; she's one of my daughters," the actor and writer, 72, said. Fierstein told me that he had suspected Lauper's talents were underused in rock, and he wrote a song that she would never sing herself.

"My favorite was recording she made on her phone, in the beauty parlor, with her head in the dryer," he said. (Lauper was often multitasking.) Her autograph competed with the salon noise. "It's really hard to sell a \$10 million production on a recording of an autograph song with a dryer background," he



PICTORIAL PARADE AND ACTORS & PRODUCTIONS/GETTY IMAGES

said. "But that's what we did." Lauper won the Tony for best score, the first woman to win alone.

In an industry that requires the rapacious pursuit of the new and the cynical extraction of identity, Lauper was never willing to abandon herself. She had forged the revolutionary style, sang the totemic song. She inspired millions, billions, of fans to be themselves. Why should she have to change who she was?

AS LAUPER AND I TRAVERSED the Upper West Side, we ducked into an exhibition about the abstract artist Sonia Delaunay, passed the original Screaming Mimi's location (now a dry cleaners) and wound back to her apartment, where she invited me up.

Past the doorman, past a cheetah-print doormat and a cheetah-print curtain, two little pugs named Lulu and Ping awaited Lauper's return.

She disappeared to arrange a plate of ginger cookies, the same kind Jackson Browne always sent her on Christmas, while her husband, the actor David Thornton, told me about their meet-cute on the set of the 1991 film "Off and Running." She played a fake mermaid, he played a murderer. Off the set, he was struck instantly by her winning sense of humor.

"She's the Rodney Dangerfield of rock 'n' roll," he said. As in, she is so funny that she does not always receive the respect she deserves. "I don't think anybody has any idea how hard she works," he said.

To prepare for her tour, she blasts the stereo in her apartment and dances and sings, vexing the pugs. She works with a vocal coach four days a week. And she trains like it's a sport. Her weekly exercise routine includes physical therapy, weights, stretching, physical therapy, weights, yoga, more

weights, yoga, aerobics, physical therapy, weights again. She's been chomping on huge salads that make her feel like a horse.

"But when you're a singer, you have to be an athlete," she said. "You can't [expletive] around. When you're 20, yeah. But when you get older? No."

As the tour approaches, she's been daydreaming about "all the crazy stuff I tried that didn't work" in the long arc of her career. The butterfly-winged black dress that she was meant to reveal as she stepped out of a cocoon. The bit where she was supposed to change behind a backlit screen like an old cartoon character. A kind of mechanical skirt that resembled a globe, slowly spinning her around as she sang.

She's not exactly sure what she'll pull off this time. Whatever changes, one thing remains the same: "Who the hell I am is who the hell I am."

The New York Times

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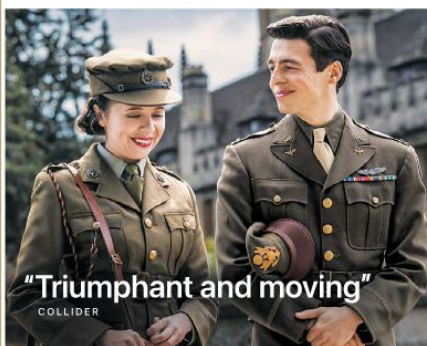
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The European Central Bank's new interest rate after its first cut in five years.

The European Central Bank cut its key interest rate to 3.75 percent from 4 on Thursday, the first time it has cut rates since 2019. The move marked a divergence from the U.S. Federal Reserve, which is maintaining high rates in the face of stubborn inflation.

Like central banks around the world, the E.C.B. had raised interest rates over the past two years to fight a surge in inflation, which began as the global economy rebounded from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The E.C.B. started raising interest rates in July 2022, a few months after the Fed, ending its era of negative rates. The increase, half a percentage point, was the first of 10 straight for the European bank, taking rates to the highest level in its history. It has held rates steady since September; inflation in the eurozone is now lower than in the United States.

Inflation has been a persistent problem for European governments and policymakers over the past few years as the region's economy reeled from a surge in energy prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Supply chain disruptions also hit European economies hard. Inflation climbed above 10 percent in October 2022.

By this May, though, inflation had fallen to 2.6 percent in the eurozone. That's still above the E.C.B.'s target of 2 percent, but it is expected to get close to the goal late next year.

Even as the E.C.B. cuts rates, the Fed has signaled that it will not be doing so anytime soon.



While the economy of the eurozone has stagnated in the E.C.B.'s bid to tame inflation, the U.S. economy has not been slowed as much by the higher rates. Prices have also continued to rise faster than the Fed's 2 percent target.

"There has already been divergence in the economies," said Mariano Cena, an economist at Barclays. "So if there is divergence in policy, it's because of the different trajectories of the economies."

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ROHIT CHOPRA, director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which on Monday established a registry of nonbank businesses that have violated consumer protection laws.

'There is only so much time that a lender can provide a borrower in terms of patience and looking the other way.'

ETHAN PENNER, chief executive of Mosaic Real Estate Investors, a firm in Los Angeles, on the distress in commercial real estate.

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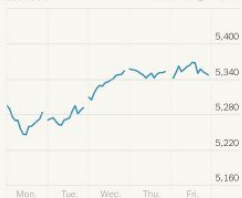
The New York Times

Markets Last Week

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S&P 500

Week's change: -1.3%



Industries

Week's change



Best performers

Friday's close

Week's change

1. Hewlett Packard (HPQ)	\$20.03	+13.5%
2. Carnival Corporation (CCL)	\$16.70	+10.7
3. NVIDIA Corporation (NVDA)	\$1,208.88	+10.3
4. Expedia Group Inc. (EXPE)	\$123.06	+9.0
5. Illumina Inc. (ILMN)	\$113.70	+9.0
6. Insulet Corporation (PODD)	\$191.42	+8.0
7. Oracle Corporation (ORCL)	\$125.92	+7.4
8. Uber Technologies Inc. (UBER)	\$69.31	+7.4
9. Norwegian Cruise Line (NCLH)	\$17.79	+7.2
10. Autodesk Inc. (ADSK)	\$216.05	+7.2

Worst performers

Friday's close

Week's change

1. Vistra Corp. (VST)	\$85.07	-14.1%
2. Bath & Body Works Inc. (BBW)	\$45.84	-11.7
3. Builders FirstSource (BLDR)	\$146.26	-9.0
4. Constellation Energy (CEG)	\$198.00	-8.9
5. Mosaic Company (AMOS)	\$28.28	-8.6
6. AES Corporation (AES)	\$19.87	-8.0
7. GE Vernova Inc. (GEV)	\$162.08	-7.9
8. Dollar General Corporation (DG)	\$126.61	-7.5
9. Halliburton Company (HAL)	\$34.08	-7.1
10. FMC Corporation (FMC)	\$56.66	-7.0

Leading international stock markets

Week's change



Major stock market indexes

Consumer rates

Last Week

— Borrowing Rate (30-year fixed mortgage) 7.3%

— Savings Rate (one-year CDs) 2.6%



Price of gas per gallon

As of May 31

— Weekly average \$3.43



SundayBusiness

The New York Times

THE NAPOLEON OF YOUR LIVING ROOM

RH's Gary Friedman is out to conquer the world, one luxurious sofa at a time.

BY DAVID SEGAL | PAGES 6-7

Some colleagues call Gary Friedman, chief executive of the former Restoration Hardware, "The Sun": He gives off a warm glow on good days and burns you on bad ones.

CLIFFORD CLAYTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

An A.I.-Generated News Site Prized Clicks Over Truth

By KASHMIR HILL
and TIFFANY HSU

The news was featured on [MSN.com](#): "Prominent Irish broadcaster faces trial over alleged sexual misconduct." At the top of the story was a photo of Dave Fanning. But Mr. Fanning, an Irish D.J. and talk-show host famed for discovering the band U2, was not the broadcaster in question.

BNN Breaking contaminated the internet with error-laden content.

"You wouldn't believe the amount of people who got in touch," said Mr. Fanning, who called the error "outrageous."

The falsehood, visible for hours on the default homepage for anyone in Ireland who used Microsoft Edge as a browser, was the result of an artificial intelligence mistake.

A fly-by-night journalism outlet called BNN Breaking had used an A.I. chatbot to paraphrase an article from another news

site, according to a BNN employee. BNN added Mr. Fanning to the mix by including a photo of a "prominent Irish broadcaster." The story was then promoted by MSN, a web portal owned by Microsoft.

The story was deleted from the internet a day later, but the damage to Mr. Fanning's reputation was not so easily undone, he said in a defamation lawsuit filed in Ireland against Microsoft and BNN Breaking. His

is just one of many complaints against BNN, a site based in Hong Kong that published numerous falsehoods during its short time online as a result of what appeared to be generative A.I. errors.

BNN went dormant in April, while The New York Times was reporting this article. The company and its founder did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

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As C.E.O. pay shows, the rich are getting richer, leaving rank-and-file workers behind. BY JEFF SOMMER



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Cash here, cash there: Leaving money around the house can create problems for heirs. BY MARTHA C. WHITE



8 AFTER THE FIRE

In Chinatown, a bookstore rebuilds with a detour through a food hall's basement. BY JORDYN HOLMAN

For Chief Executives, the Sky Is the Limit for Pay

The big picture is still riches at the top and lagging wages for most of the rank-and-file.

THE ANNUAL TALLIES of chief executive pay for 2023 have arrived, and they are fascinating and irritating, in equal measure.

There is already so much evidence that chief executives are earning a fortune in money — while most employees are not — that these annual revelations can't be called shocking news.

But this year, there's a new wrinkle: Companies must disclose how much the stock holdings of chief executives increase when the market rises. By that measure, too, they are amassing extraordinary wealth.

From any angle, the specifics are eye-popping.

In 2023, using traditional measures of executive pay, four chief executives of publicly traded companies were each rewarded with more than \$150 million:

■ Jon Winkelried of TPG, a private equity company.

■ Harvey Schwartz of the Carlyle Group, also a private equity firm.

■ Hock Tan of Broadcom, a semiconductor and data-center giant.

■ Nilesh Arora of Palo Alto Networks, a global cybersecurity company.

Besides, new rules stemming from the Dodd-Frank law of 2010 have gone into effect. They focus on how the market changes executive pay each year, yielding a second highest-paid chief executive list.

These new numbers — called compensation actually paid (CAP) — are often even bigger than the traditional chief executive payday bonanzas. That's the case for a man whose outside pay is already a major issue for his company: Elon Musk of Tesla, who gained \$1.4 billion in 2023 — more than any other chief executive.

But that stunning figure is only theoretical and based largely on stock that Mr. Musk no longer has a legal claim to. The holdings reflect an earlier \$46.5 billion pay package that a judge in Delaware has voided, and that Mr. Musk is fighting to reclaim. Tesla shareholders are set to vote on Mr. Musk's pay on June 13, and court battles are likely to continue for a long while.

So now we have two complete data sets using distinct and complementary analytical methods, both demonstrating what we've always known: It's good to be the boss.

But how good, exactly? Chief executive pay data, gleaned from the filings of all publicly traded companies and assembled at my request by the executive compensation research firm Equilar, provided fresh answers.

Traditional Compensation

First, consider the longstanding methods for assessing executive compensation required by Dodd-Frank. Publicly traded U.S. companies must disclose top executives' salaries, the value of newly granted stock and options and an assortment of miscellaneous perks like personal security guards or corporate jets.

I'll call this entire approach Traditional Pay, though there's nothing traditional about it for those of us who take the train or subway to work and will never receive pay packages with nine figures.

Using Traditional Pay, Equilar identified the 100 highest-paid chief executives at public companies in 2023. The median pay for these executives — the midpoint, where half of the compensation packages are lower and half are higher — was more than \$2 million.

And thanks to Dodd-Frank, we also know that the median pay of employees at these companies was around \$100,000, and the median chief executive-to-worker pay ratio was about 300 to one.

Let's translate that. It means that for an average employee at one of these companies to earn as much as the chief executive, she would have to transcend the human life span and live for 300 years. And consider this: The American worker's average annual wage in 2023 was only \$65,470, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. At that wage, it would take 443 years to earn as much as the middle-of-the-road chief executive on this list.

Top of the Heap

What about the chief executive at the very top? For 2023, that would be Mr. Winkelried of TPG, whose compensation was \$186,994,098. The median pay of TPG employees was high, too: \$294,997. Even so, it would take them 683 years to earn what Mr. Winkelried made in one year. And for people with average American paychecks? More than 3,000 years.

Pay ratios on this scale reflect levels of income inequality that were widely viewed as abhorrent 50 years ago. Last year, I pointed out that the American social structure was flatter and chief executive-worker pay ratios were lower in the 1970s and 1980s. I noted last week that income inequality was an important cause of Social Security's financial problems because higher earners were increasingly protected from taxation by the income cap for the Social Security payroll tax.

Through the 1970s, one study found, the chief executive-worker pay ratio for big companies was less than 20 to one. In the 1980s, Peter F. Drucker, the economist and *Wall Street Journal* columnist, cited research showing it felt "about right" when chief executives received 10 to 12 times what workers earned. He said pay ratios as high as 20 to one might be all right for workplace morale and social cohesion, though that was stretching it.

But paying the chief executive hundreds of times more than workers earned? That was out of the question then, though it is now standard practice for many big publicly traded companies. (Disclosure: Here at The New York Times, the pay ratio is 54 to one, the company says.)

Using Traditional Pay metrics, the sec-



NICOLAS ORTEGA

Who Was Granted the Most Last Year

The top 10 U.S. chief executives by compensation granted in 2023. "Pay ratio" refers to C.E.O. total relative to the median worker's pay.

C.E.O.	Company	Total	Pay ratio
Jon Winkelried	TPG	\$199 million	683:1
Harvey Schwartz	The Carlyle Group	\$187 mil.	813:1
Hock Tan	Broadcom	\$162 mil.	510:1
Nilesh Arora	Palo Alto Networks	\$151 mil.	735:1
Sue Nahi	Coty	\$149 mil.	3,709:1
Stephen Schwarzman	Blackstone	\$120 mil.	489:1
Christopher Winfrey	Charter Communications	\$89 mil.	1,635:1
Ariel Emanuel	Endeavor Group	\$84 mil.	1,184:1
Adam Foughgi	AppLovin	\$83 mil.	795:1
David Risher	Lyft	\$78 mil.	519:1

Source: Equilar

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Who Earned the Most Last Year

The top 10 U.S. chief executives by "compensation actually paid" in 2023, an accounting measure that includes changes in the value of current and potential stock holdings.

C.E.O.	Company	Total
Elon Musk	Tesla	\$1.4 billion
Alexander Karp	Palantir	\$1.1 bil.
Hock Tan	Broadcom	\$768 million
Brian Armstrong	Coinbase	\$681 mil.
Saira Catz	Oracle	\$304 mil.
Brian Chesky	Airbnb	\$303 mil.
Jon Winkelried	TPG	\$295 mil.
Jeffrey Green	The Trade Desk	\$292 mil.
Arash Foughgi	AppLovin	\$271 mil.
Nilesh Arora	Palo Alto Networks	\$260 mil.

Source: Equilar

THE NEW YORK TIMES

ond-most highly paid chief executive in 2023 was Mr. Schwartz of the Carlyle Group. He earned \$186,994,098 — 813 times what the median Carlyle employee received. Right below him on the list was Mr. Tan of Broadcom. He got \$161,825,161. The pay ratio at Broadcom was 510 to one.

The highest-ranked woman on the list was Sue Nahi of Coty, the beauty products company. She was in fifth place, with a total compensation of \$149,429,486. The median worker at Coty earned \$39,643. That combination produced the highest pay ratio in the Traditional Pay list: 3,709 to one, meaning that Coty employees would need to work for more than 3,709 years to earn what she received in just one year.

A New Approach

Twelve years after the enactment of Dodd-Frank, the Securities and Exchange Commission approved additional rules for assessing chief executive pay. Virtually all publicly traded companies have been subject to these "compensation actually paid" rules this year.

The new approach is supposed to help shareholders determine whether an executive's compensation is aligned with their company's stock market return. It emphasizes the annual changes in value of an executive's current and potential stock holdings, in contrast with the traditional approach, which provides a snapshot of the estimated value of a pay package when it is granted.

It's too early to judge the new calculation. Though it provides new tidbits, it has drawbacks. The way it's computed is complex. In their disclosure statements, companies have quietly complained about it.

After Mr. Musk, the next chief executive on what I'll call the New Accounting list is Alexander Karp, the chief executive of Palantir Technologies, with nearly \$1.1 billion. But take that gaudy number with many grains of salt.

A footnote in the Palantir compensation disclosure made me laugh, which was noteworthy because these compensation disclosures usually make me frown.

Referring to Mr. Karp's apparently gargantuan payday, it said, "The term 'compensation actually paid' or 'CAP' does not reflect the amount of compensation actually paid, earned or received by him during the applicable year."

In reality, Palantir said, the numbers reported for Mr. Karp and a handful of other Palantir executives "are driven primarily by changes in our stock price," which rose

more than 100 percent in 2023, producing big gains for shareholders and so, "following S.E.C. disclosure rules, the fiscal year 2023 CAP disclosed below has increased." But the previous year, 2022, was a miserable one for the whole stock market. Palantir shares fell sharply, as did the value of Mr. Karp's compensation, using the New Accounting approach. For 2022, the company said, he lost more than \$1.7 billion.

These staggering, fluctuating sums would be perplexing in isolation. Still, they serve a purpose, I think. Big changes in this measure are a sign that a chief executive received enormous pay packages involving company stock in the past. For example, The Times reported that for 2020, Mr. Karp received \$1.1 billion in Traditional Pay, the most for any chief executive that year.

Similar to Mr. Brodsky, who reported that in 2023, Mr. Tan's compensation with the New Accounting was \$767,654,487, almost five times his already rich compensation on the Traditional Pay list. That happened because the share price rose and Mr. Tan, the chief of his company since 2008, had amassed a great deal of stock, options and the like.

In an interview, Roy Saliba, the managing director at ISS-Corporate, a provider of data and analytics to corporations, said, "The compensation actually paid numbers really get amplified for executives who have been at a firm for a long time and have accumulated holdings for a number of years."

For investors untroubled by income inequality and its social consequences, it might be fine for chief executives to make expanding fortunes as long as stock prices rise. And prices have risen for the overall market since 2010.

The median pay for chief executives of S&P 500 companies rose 63 percent from 2010 through 2023, based on data provided by ISS-Corporate. At the same time, the S&P 500 returned 462 percent, including dividends, according to FactSet.

If you focus on stock performances like that, the level of pay for chief executives may seem inconsequential. Say-on-pay votes give shareholders a chance to signal disapproval of pay packages, but 92 percent of the time this year, investors at S&P 500 companies have said "yes" on chief executive pay, according to ISS-Corporate data.

Yet I suspect that the stock market would perform well even if chief executives merely earned millions, instead of hundreds of millions, and rank-and-file workers got a bigger slice of the pie. That's not the way the world has been going, not for many years. But it doesn't have to be that way.



An A.I.-Generated News Site Prized Clicks Over the Truth

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Microsoft had no comment on MSN's featuring the misleading story with Mr. Fanning's photo or his defamation case, but the company said it had terminated its licensing agreement with BNN.

During the two years that BNN was active, it had the veneer of a legitimate news service, claiming a worldwide roster of "seasoned" journalists and 10 million monthly visitors, surpassing the Chicago Tribune's self-reported audience. Prominent news organizations like The Washington Post, Politico and The Guardian linked to BNN's stories. Google News often surfaced them, too.

A closer look, however, would have revealed that individual journalists at BNN published lengthy stories as often as multiple times a minute, writing in generic prose familiar to anyone who has tinkered with the A.I. chatbot ChatGPT. BNN's "About Us" page featured an image of four children looking at a computer, some bearing the gnarled fingers that are a telltale sign of an A.I.-generated image.

How easily the site and its mistakes entered the ecosystem for legitimate news highlights a growing concern: A.I.-generated content is spreading, and often poisoning, the online information supply.

Many traditional news organizations are already fighting for traffic and advertising dollars. For years, they competed for clicks against pink slime journalism — so-called because of its similarity to liquefied beef, an unappetizing, low-cost food additive.

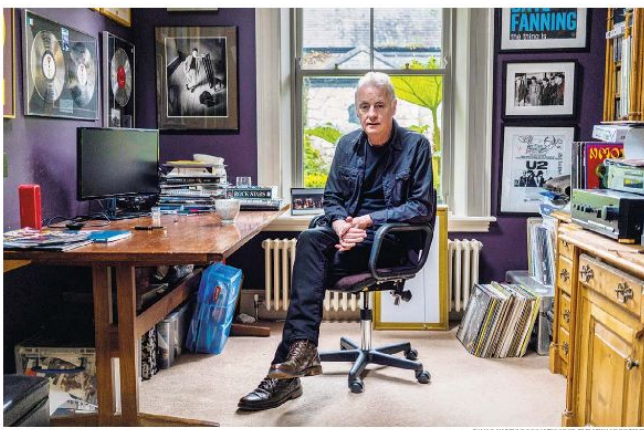
Low-paid freelancers and algorithms have churned out much of the faux-news content, prize speed and volume over accuracy. Now, experts say, A.I. could turbocharge the threat, easily ripping off the work of journalists and enabling error-ridden counterfeits to circulate even more widely — as has already happened with travel guidebooks, celebrity biographies and obituaries.

The result is a machine-powered ouroboros that could squeeze out sustainable, trustworthy journalism. Even though A.I.-generated stories are often poorly constructed, they can still outrank their source material on search engines and social plat-



GURBAKSH CHAHAL, FOUNDER OF BNN BREAKING, BELOW, BNN'S SITE.

Left, Gurbaksh Chahal, the founder of BNN Breaking. Below, BNN's site. Bottom, Dave Fanning, a talk-show host, filed a defamation lawsuit against BNN Breaking and Microsoft, which featured the site's work on MSN.com.



DAVE FANNING, A TALK-SHOW HOST, FILED A DEFAMATION LAWSUIT AGAINST BNN BREAKING AND MICROSOFT, WHICH FEATURED THE SITE'S WORK ON MSN.COM.

forms, which often use A.I. to help position content. The artificially elevated stories can then divert advertising spending, which is increasingly assigned by automated auctions without human oversight.

NewsGuard, a company that monitors online misinformation, identified more than 800 websites that use A.I. to produce unreliable news content. The websites, which seem to operate with little to no human supervision, often have generic names — such as iBusiness Day and Ireland Top News — that are modeled after actual news outlets. They crank out material in more than a dozen languages, much of which is not clearly disclosed as being artificially generated but could easily be mistaken as being created by human writers.

The quality of the stories examined by NewsGuard is often poor, the company said, and they frequently include false claims about political leaders, celebrity death hoaxes and other fabricated events.

Real Identities, Used by A.I.

"You should be utterly ashamed of yourself," one person wrote in an email to Kasturi Chakraborty, a journalist based in India whose byline was on BNN's story with Mr. Fanning's photo.

Ms. Chakraborty worked for BNN Breaking for six months, with dozens of other journalists, mainly freelancers with limited experience, based in countries like Pakistan, Egypt and Nigeria, where the salary of about \$1,000 a month was attractive. They worked remotely, communicating via WhatsApp and on Google Hangouts.

Former employees said they thought they were joining a legitimate news operation; one had mistaken it for BNN Bloomberg, a Canadian business news channel. BNN's website insisted that "accuracy is nonnegotiable" and that "every piece of information underwent rigorous checks, ensuring our news remains an undeniable source of truth."

But this was not a traditional journalism outlet. While the journalists could occasionally report and write original articles, they were asked to primarily use a generative A.I. tool to compose stories, said Ms. Chakraborty and Hemin Bakir, a journalist based in Iraq who worked for BNN for almost a year. They said they had uploaded articles from other news outlets to the generative A.I. tool to create paraphrased versions for BNN to publish.

Mr. Bakir, who now works at a broadcast network called Rudaw, said that he had been skeptical of this approach but that BNN's founder, a serial entrepreneur named Gurbaksh Chahal, had described it as "a revolution in the journalism industry."

Mr. Chahal's evangelism carried weight with his employees because of his wealth and seemingly impressive track record, they said. Born in India and raised in Northern California, Mr. Chahal made millions in the online advertising business in the early 2000s and wrote a how-to book about his rags-to-riches story that landed him an interview with Oprah Winfrey. A business trend chaser, he created a cryptocurrency (briefly promoted by Paris Hilton) and manufactured Covid tests during the pandemic.

But he also had a criminal past. In 2013, he attacked his girlfriend at the time, and was accused of hitting and kicking her more than 100 times, generating significant media attention because it was recorded by a video camera he had installed in the bedroom of his San Francisco penthouse. The 30-minute recording was deemed inadmissible by a judge, however, because the police had seized it without a warrant. Mr. Chahal pleaded guilty to battery, was sentenced to community service and lost his role as chief executive at RadiumOne, an online marketing company.

After an arrest involving another domestic violence episode with a different partner in 2016, he served six months in jail.

Mr. Chahal, now 41, eventually relocated to Hong Kong, where he started BNN Breaking in 2022. On LinkedIn, he described himself as the founder of ePhiphany A.I., a large language learning model that he said was superior to ChatGPT; this was the tool that BNN used to generate its stories, according to former employees.

Mr. Chahal claimed he had created ePhiphany, but it was so similar to ChatGPT and other A.I. chatbots that employees assumed he had licensed another company's software.

He did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this article. One person who did talk to The Times for this article received a threat from Mr. Chahal for doing so.

At first, employees were asked to put articles from other news sites into the tool so that it could paraphrase them, and then to manually "validate" the results by checking them for errors, Mr. Bakir said. A.I.-generated stories that were checked by a person were given a generic byline of BNN Newsroom or BNN Reporter. But eventually, the tool was churning out hundreds, even thousands, of stories a day — far more than the team could "validate."

Mr. Chahal told Mr. Bakir to focus on checking stories that had a significant number of readers, such as those republished by MSN.com.

Employees did not want their bylines on stories generated purely by A.I., but Mr. Chahal insisted on this. Soon, the tool randomly assigned their names to stories.

This crossed a line for some BNN employees, according to screenshots of WhatsApp conversations reviewed by The Times, in which they told Mr. Chahal that they were receiving complaints about stories they didn't realize had been published under their names.

"It tarnished our reputations," Ms. Chakraborty said.

Mr. Chahal did not seem sympathetic. According to three journalists who worked at BNN and screenshots of WhatsApp conversations reviewed by The Times, Mr. Chahal regularly directed profanities at employees and called them idiots and morons. When employees said purely A.I.-generated news, such as the Fanning story, should be published under the generic "BNN Newsroom" byline, Mr. Chahal was dismissive.

"When I do this, I won't have a need for any of you," he wrote on WhatsApp.

RETIRING | MARTHA C. WHITE

Mr. Bakir replied to Mr. Chahal that assigning journalists' bylines to A.I.-generated stories was putting their integrity and careers in "jeopardy."

"You are fired," Mr. Chahal responded, and removed him from the WhatsApp group.

Countless Mistakes

Over the past year, BNN racked up numerous complaints about getting facts wrong, fabricating quotations from experts and stealing content and photos from other news sites without credit or compensation.

One disinformation researcher reviewed more than 1,000 BNN stories and concluded that a quarter of them had been lifted from five sites, including Reuters, The Associated Press and the BBC. Another researcher found evidence that BNN had placed its logo on images that it did not own or license.

The Times identified multiple inaccuracies and context-free statements in BNN stories that seemed to extend beyond simple human error. There were sources who were misattributed or absent, descriptions of specific events without references to where or when they occurred, and a collage of gun imagery illustrating a story about microwaves. One story, about journalists tackling disinformation at a literature festival, invented a panelist and incorrectly included another.

After BNN suggested that Dungeness crabs, which are from the West Coast, were native to Maryland, an official with the state's Department of Natural Resources chastised BNN on X, calling on Google to "delist these stupid A.I. outfits that aggregate news and get things wildly incorrect."

After a lawyer complained on LinkedIn that a story on BNN had invented quotations from him, BNN removed him from the story. BNN also changed the date on the story to one before the publication date on an opinion column that the lawyer believed was the source of the quotation.

The story with the photo of Mr. Fanning, which Ms. Chakraborty said had been generated by A.I. with her name randomly assigned to it, was published because news about the trial of an Irish broadcaster accused of sexual misconduct was trending. The broadcaster was named in the original article because he had a super injunction — a gap order that forbids news media to name a person in its coverage — so the A.I. presumably paired the text with a generic photo of a "prominent Irish broadcaster."

Mr. Fanning's lawyers at Megher Solicitors, an Irish firm that specializes in defamation cases, reached out to BNN and never received a response, though the story was deleted from BNN's and MSN's sites. In January, Mr. Fanning filed a defamation case against BNN and Microsoft in the High Court of Ireland. BNN responded by publishing a story that month about Mr. Fanning that accused him of "desperate tactics in money-hungry lawsuit."

This was a strategy that Mr. Chahal favored, according to former BNN employees. He used his news service to exercise grudges, publishing slanted stories about a politician from San Francisco he disliked, about Wikipedia's fact-checking and about Elon Musk after accounts belonging to Mr. Chahal, his wife and his companies were suspended on X.

A Strong Motivator

The appeal of using A.I. for news is clear: money.

The increasing popularity of programmatic advertising — which uses algorithms to automatically place ads across the internet — allows A.I.-powered news sites to generate revenue by mass-producing content. In one case, content, said Sander van der Linden, a social psychology professor and fake-news expert at the University of Cambridge.

Experts are nervous about how A.I.-fueled news could overwhelm accurate reporting with a deluge of junk content distorted by machine-powered repetition. A particular worry is that A.I. aggregators could chip away even further at the viability of local journalism, siphoning away its revenue and damaging its credibility by contaminating the information ecosystem.

Many audiences already struggle to discern machine-generated material from reports produced by human journalists, Mr. van der Linden said.

"It's going to have a negative impact on trusted news," he said.

Local news outlets say A.I. operations like BNN are leeches: stealing intellectual property by plagiarizing journalists' work, then monetizing it by gaming search algorithms to raise their profile among advertisers.

"We're no longer getting any slice of the advertising cake, which used to support our journalism, but are left with a few crumbs," said Anton van Zyl, the owner of the Limpopo Mirror in South Africa, whose articles, it seemed, had been rewritten by BNN.

In March, Google rolled out an update to "reduce unoriginal content in search results," targeting sites with "spammy" content, whether produced by "automation, humans or a combination," according to a corporate blog post. BNN's stories stopped showing up in search results soon after.

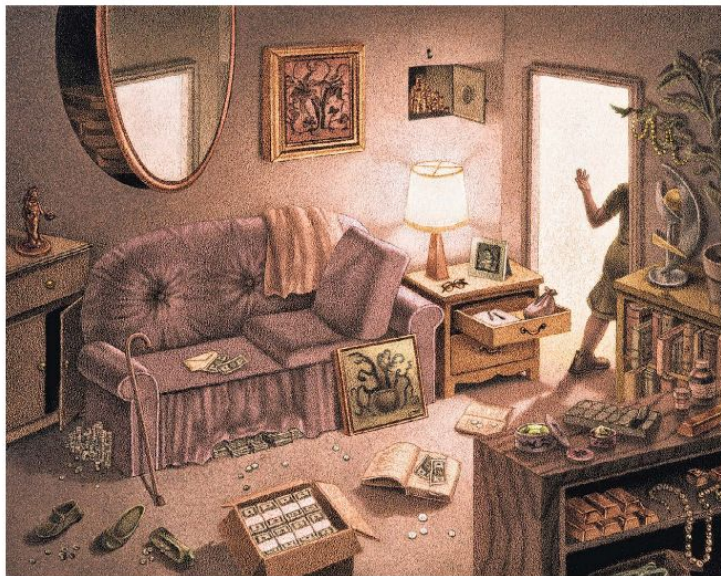
Before ending its deal with BNN Breaking, Microsoft had licensed content from the site for MSN.com, as it does with reputable news organizations such as Bloomberg and The Wall Street Journal, republishing their articles and splitting the advertising revenue.

CNN recently reported that Microsoft-hired editors who once curated the articles featured on MSN.com have increasingly been replaced by A.I. Microsoft confirmed that it used a combination of automated systems and human review to curate content on MSN.

BNN stopped publishing stories in early April and deleted its content. Visitors to the site now find BNN.GPT, an A.I. chatbot that, when asked, says it was built using open-source models.

But Mr. Chahal wasn't abandoning the news business. Within a week or so of BNN Breaking's shutting down, the same operation moved to a new website called ThinFeed. ThinFeed's About Us page said the site had a set of values that BNN Breaking's had, promising "a media landscape free of distortions."

On Tuesday, after a reporter informed Mr. Chahal that this article would soon be published, ThinFeed shut down as well, only to move to yet another web address by Thursday.



Stashing Cash at Home Is Sure to Create Headaches

No matter if it's under the mattress or in a shoe box, money stuffed away is money in danger of loss.

AFTER THEIR FATHER died in 2021, Susan Camp and her brother cleaned out his home — and inadvertently threw out \$5,000 in cash he had wrapped in aluminum foil and stashed in the freezer. (Luckily, they later retrieved it.)

And she was surprised, but not shocked, to also discover \$6,000 in a box that once held a bottle of cologne. "Dad traveled, and he always wanted cash on him," she said.

Adrienne Volpe's grandmother kept her extra cash in her library.

"My grandmother had pressed thousands of dollars in single bills inside books," Ms. Volpe said. "We thought we were going to find fall leaves" between the pages, she said. They had to open every book in the house to find the cash she had hidden — around \$10,000, it turned out, in denominations as small as \$20.

I might not be under the mattress, but for people who stumble across a small fortune after an elderly relative dies or moves to a nursing home, uncovering such unexpected wealth — technically part of a person's estate — can bring complications and even conflict.

Often times, members of older generations perceive keeping cash, gold or other valuables at home as safer than keeping them in a bank, experts say. "I think this is more common for the baby boomer generation and older," said Mark Criner III, senior strategist for Baird Trust in Scottsdale, Ariz. "When you get to that generation, there was a real mistrust of financial institutions," he said, referring to people old enough to remember the Great Depression and the bank failures of the 1930s.

Mr. Criner said that if family members noticed this behavior, communication was important. "When that's being recognized, it's important to start the dialogue," he said.

What Could Go Wrong?

While throwing cash in the trash is a very real risk of keeping money at home, it is far from the only one, advisers say. Valuables kept in the home can be stolen, destroyed by a disaster like a fire, or surreptitiously appropriated by a family member.

"Things have a way of disappearing from the home, especially when you have existing family drama or a dispute," said Alvin Lo, chief wealth strategist at Wilmington Trust, a subsidiary of M&T Bank.

This potential for tension among survivors can arise even if no misappropriation takes place, experts say.

"Often times, even if there's a well-intentioned adult child who lives close by and assets are found, there's a lot of skepticism that may arise between siblings," said Abbey Flaum, principal and family wealth strategist at Homrich Berg, a wealth management firm in Atlanta.

People who keep cash at home lose the considerable wealth generation that can take place over decades if that money were invested.

"The lost interest — it probably would have been double, just by having it in the bank all these years versus having it in the bottom of a closet," said Patrick Simasko, an estate lawyer in Mount Clemens, Mich., who recalled finding close to half a million

dollars in cash and gold in the home of an older client who had hired him to execute her estate.

There are also potential pitfalls when it comes to distributing those assets.

"It's just messy, it's unofficial and it can lead to accounting nightmares," Mr. Criner said.

Since cash has no ownership records, "it's very unclear from a property rights perspective who it belongs to," Ms. Lo said.

Without a paper trail establishing ownership or a detailed will, determining inheritances can be difficult. "I've seen it when you have second marriages, where this can be a problem," Ms. Lo said, particularly since hidden valuables are unlikely to be accounted for in a will or estate plan.

Experts also say that such unaccounted-for valuables can cause a headache for affluent families, particularly those whose estates are near the threshold of either the federal estate tax, or state taxes on estates or inheritances.

"It's on the borderline, those assets might push the estate up to a taxable estate," said Neil Carbone, trusts and estates lawyer and partner at the law firm of Farrell Fritz. (For 2024, the federal estate-tax exemption is roughly \$13.6 million, meaning

'It's just messy, it's unofficial and it can lead to accounting nightmares.'

MARK CRINER III
SENIOR TRUST STRATEGIST
FOR BAIRD TRUST IN
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.

that estates valued below that level are not subject to taxes; some states have estate taxes or inheritance taxes with lower thresholds.)

Mr. Carbone said he advised clients who inherit valuable but illiquid items, such as artwork, to have them appraised. Establishing the item's value at the time when the owner died and the inheritor assumed ownership can be important, particularly if the item in question became considerably more valuable over the years.

The Internal Revenue Service has any number of ways to track down potentially taxable wealth, Mr. Carbone said. Auditors might evaluate a homeowner's insurance policy to look for riders to insure valuable items, conduct a look-back at previous gift tax returns to establish a paper trail of ownership, or trace purchases of precious metals.

The other challenge with inheriting non-cash valuables is finding a buyer. "That's the same thing if you're investing in baseball cards or Hummel figurines or stamps," Mr. Simasko said. "If you're investing in a nontraditional type of investment — not stocks, bonds or mutual funds — you have to find a buyer for them." This process can take considerable time if the items are especially esoteric, Mr. Simasko added, recalling a client whose wealth was tied up primarily in a collection of antique guitars.

Echoes of the Depression

Professionals in wealth management and estate planning say they can hear echoes of tendencies most often among people with ties to the Great Depression. But memory-

robbing medical conditions such as dementia and Alzheimer's can trigger a reversion to decades-old behaviors, such as cash-hoarding. They may also cause paranoia, which can prompt people to hide valuables and try to block relatives from interfering in their financial affairs on their behalf.

"People who are experiencing this mental disorientation become the least trusting of the people who are the most close to them, and who are in the best position to advocate for them," Mr. Criner said.

Ms. Flaum said, "It can be really difficult. We've done lots of planning for clients who could tell Mom or Dad was starting to slip a little bit." She said she recommended that clients in this situation obtain a financial power of attorney and consider establishing a revocable trust, a financial instrument where assets can be held as people age and that allows beneficiaries to avoid probate after death.

"A revocable trust is a really good way to plan for management of assets in the event of incapacity," she said. "You can build in provisions regarding how incapacity may be determined for managing those trust assets."

Hiding wealth at home has also tended to persist over the years among certain groups of people.

"Particularly, minority communities were very mistrustful of or didn't have access to financial institutions, which led to the proverbial cash under the mattress," Mr. Criner said. "That's borne of minorities' lack of access to these institutions for decades, and even when there was access, there was a lot of abuse. They weren't always treated fairly or dealt with honestly."

These memories linger, Mr. Criner said, adding that, as a Black man, he has heard these attitudes expressed even within his own family. "That sense of distrust goes down from one generation to the next," he said. "I've heard my dad speak of this, I've heard my granddad speak of it."

Ms. Lo of Wilmington Trust said she had had similar personal experiences. "A lot of this is very cultural, too," she said. "I'm Asian American, and this happens all the time in my community."

Over time, experts predict that people's keeping cash at home will diminish as the collective memory of the Great Depression fades, and the use of digital banking continues to increase.

"People tend to do more and more of electronic payments for things," Mr. Carbone said.

While this is good news from a financial-planning perspective, people who have seen this dynamic play out say it would also spare survivors the painful emotions these discoveries can cause.

Finding, for instance, hundred-dollar bills secreted amid items that would normally be donated or discarded is stressful for surviving loved ones because it necessitates a much longer, painstaking process of removing personal effects from a home. "The families are grieving, and it's very hard for them," said Ms. Volpe, who is a real estate broker in Hyde Park, N.Y.

Despite a decades-long career in real estate, Ms. Volpe said she hadn't expected to discover the scenario within her own family. She credited her mother with deducing that more money had been stashed in her grandmother's books than met the eye.

"Thank God my mother thinks like that," she said, admitting, "I would have thrown all those books in the garbage."

Furniture C.E.O.'s Risky, Full-Tilt \$70 Billion Dream



Gary Friedman wants to turn RH into America's first true luxury brand. Can he prove his doubters wrong?

By DAVID SEGAL

Gary Friedman hates meetings. A 66-year-old with apparently limitless energy and a perpetual tan, Mr. Friedman is the chief executive of RH, one of the country's largest high-end furniture sellers, and he never holds meetings. Instead, he convenes "adventures."

To the untrained eye, these look and sound a lot like meetings. But there is a difference. Adventures can last 10 hours, or more.

That's a typical stretch for Mr. Friedman's adventures with his architecture and design team, a group of about 20 executives overseeing one of the priciest expansions in the history of American retail. The company is doubling the number of stores, called "galleries" in RH speak, with 35 new ones in the works. Many will cost \$20 million or more.

RH sold \$3 billion worth of products last year, but Mr. Friedman's goal is not just to move \$10,000 sectional sofas, most of them in earth tones and a style that could be called California Rich. He wants to forge a brand that is so ubiquitous — RH restor — RH hotels, RH clothing — that its impact is global.

"I don't really talk about our vision for the company to Wall Street because they might lock me up," Mr. Friedman said one recent afternoon, sitting in an RH restaurant not far from headquarters in a suburb of San Francisco. "But our vision is to create an endless reflection of hope, inspiration and love that will ignite the human spirit and change the world."

If this sounds a tad grandiose for a guy peddling sideboards and coffee tables, you haven't spent time with Gary Friedman. He's not a conventional businessman. He is more like the highly demanding head of a home-furnishings-based cult, complete with its own Bible (those 350-page glossy catalogs that turn up in your mailbox), terminology ("adventures," "galleries," "RH rules") and catechism ("This is not our job, this is our life," reads one of the RH rules). Total commitment is required of underlings. Anything less can bring scolding rebukes.

Mr. Friedman became the chief executive of what was then called Restoration Hardware in 2001, when it was a nearly bankrupt seller of midpriced furniture and American-themed tech-chicks, like Slinky and Moon Pies. By driving the brand to "climb the luxury ladder," as he puts it, he made it a place where aspirational shoppers could look for furniture a bit outside their budgets. During the pandemic-era renovation craze, the company was worth \$15.5 billion.

But RH is now suffering through a grinding downturn, its market value off 70 percent since its 2021 peak. Nearly every player in the furniture business is slumping, largely because the great engine of sales — new home purchases — has stalled. While competitors pull back, or lean into online sales, Mr. Friedman is in the midst of a risky, full-tilt building spree. Along with those immense and stately stores, he's galloping into the real estate business, planning furnished apartments and houses in places like Aspen and Napa.

The point for Mr. Friedman, an inveterate

optimist, is to prepare for the boom that he believes will ensue when interest rates go down. He also wants to broaden RH's appeal beyond the upwardly mobile who are now its core customers and pitch the brand to the ultrarich. Hence more RH restaurants, with main courses that include such decadence-signaling dishes as a \$125 grilled Wagyu rib-eye steak.

And as if to prove that his ambitions are truly Napoleonic, the company is now invading Europe. Last year it unveiled its first store in Britain, a renovated 400-year-old, Downtown Abbey-like manse in Oxfordshire, with restaurants, a tea salon, a wine lounge and what appears to be a taxidermy unicorn. Up next are stores in Madrid, Milan, London and Paris.

"Gary is a brilliant guy, but his ambitions have run away with him," said Pamela Danziger, the founder of Unity Marketing, a market research firm. "To open in England, France and all these other places — I think he's just put way too much in front of him. Because he's got problems now in the U.S. market, and that is where he needs to put his horsepower."

Mr. Friedman relishes nothing quite so much as the suggestion that he's overreaching. He made this point, and many others, in our interview, which turned into a nine-hour adventure. A largely uninterrupted monologue, it started at lunch in one RH restaurant, ended over dinner at another and covered the story of his life, which began in San Francisco, where he was raised by a widowed mother who struggled with mental illness.

Today, his net worth is \$1.5 billion, according to a Forbes estimate. Last year, he bought a \$26.7 million oceanfront house in Malibu, Calif., and a few months later bought a second house on the same beach for \$28.5 million. His marriage to an Australian singer was celebrated with 272 guests over four days last summer on the Mediterranean island of Ibiza.

Like his idol, Ralph Lauren, he's the walking, talking embodiment of his brand, which in his case means dressing like one of his sofas, in muted tones and pricey fabrics. He has an improbably smooth face and dramatically upswep hair that is graying at the edges. He's partial to Brunello Cucinelli clothing and wears a wristlet engraved with "Believe" — Italian smart casual meets New Age.

Mr. Friedman's journey from a childhood of food stamps to stratospheric wealth has left him with a finely tuned understanding of the dynamics of striving. It also left him with a bit of a chip on his shoulder. His shareholder letters could be called "Notes From an Underdog," filled as they are with triumphant musings about the joys of ignoring his doubters.

"We avoided bankruptcy while being accused of larceny," he wrote in a letter last year. "Soon the world will be within our reach."

The Total Pampering Solution

Few companies are better at exploiting the American obsession with affluence than RH. It sells the kind of sleek, oversized furniture seen on television shows like "Success-



Gary Friedman, above, the chief executive of RH, at the company's store in the former Bethlehem Steel building in San Francisco, above left. A showroom there, top, is a daydreamer's fantasy of a billionaire's home.



sion" and does it through a singular kind of experiential shopping. With their soaring ceilings and Zen ambience, RH showrooms are a daydreamer's fantasy of a billionaire's home.

Maybe you're not a hedge fund professional, the décor says, but you can buy a hedge fund professional's drapes.

"Gary found a niche that nobody had exploited in the home furniture space," said Warren Shoulberg, a former editor of Home Furnishings News, a trade publication. "The wannabe rich."

The twist, retail marketing experts say, is that RH is not actually a luxury brand. In the industry argot, it's premium, which means it's more expensive than rivals like Crate & Barrel and West Elm but less than the custom-made offerings sold in designer

showrooms where only interior decorators can buy. Those showrooms are filled with handmade furniture, lighting and rugs from Italy, France and domestic hubs like North Carolina. They cost more, last longer and hold more of their resale value. By contrast, RH furniture is largely mass-produced in countries such as China, Vietnam and Indonesia.

"Most people in the design industry look at RH as fancier West Elm," said Jason Campbell, an interior designer in Manhattan. "But it's still pretty expensive. I looked for a sectional sofa for a client recently and was shocked to see one from RH for \$14,000. You could buy something similar at a designer showroom for a smidgen more, and it wouldn't be made in China."

This is the RH strategy: sell a premium



PHOTOGRAPH BY GALLERIES OF THE NEW YORK TIMES



product in a setting so dazzling that it seems worth near-luxury prices.

The company has zero presence on social media for roughly the same reason that a hip bar doesn't have a door sign. ("There's no school for cool") is one of RH's official principles.) Still, unbidden and unpaid endorsements are regularly provided by celebrities, including Kerry Washington and Kendall Jenner, who have raved in interviews about the Cloud Sofa, an RH staple that currently starts at about \$4,800.

RH is constantly looking for novel ways to build mystique. The company's website does not post photos of the rooms in its first hotel, in Manhattan's meatpacking district, where rooms start at \$2,200 a night. And the only way to book a stay is to inquire via email. On a recent tour, a manager showed off the minibars, which feature crudités, an assortment of sliced meat and a fresh baguette that is replaced every two hours.

Far pricier RH productions are in the works. Its plans in Aspen include branded hotels and RH Residences, the company's first foray into fully furnished stand-alone houses.

"We would sell those homes, but we would also manage those homes," Mr. Friedman said. RH would help rent the houses when buyers weren't using them, and pocket half the rental income.

This is where the true scale of Mr. Friedman's drive comes into focus. He's eyeing the multibillion-dollar market in luxury turnkey homes and condominiums around the world. RH need grab only a tiny slice of that and its value will soar, he said, to \$70 billion or more.

Analysts are skeptical. "It's extremely unlikely that RH will ever get a material

share of this market," Seth Basham of Wedbush Securities said. "Gary's a big dreamer."

RH has taken on a significant amount of debt, leaving it with little margin for error, Mr. Basham added. Three years ago, the company took out a \$2 billion loan and used it to buy back its own shares. "We're making a bet on ourselves and our future," Mr. Friedman said.

If sales fall and spending continues, Mr. Basham said, the company's future could start looking dicey. But Mr. Friedman has never shied away from risk, and he can't stop barreling into all kinds of new ventures. It's an impulse that has yielded some memorable flops.

Like RH Contemporary Art. In 2013, the company leased a 25,000-square-foot space in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan and recruited a roster of artists. Artnet called it "one of the more curious incursions into the art sphere" when it closed about two years later.

"Tough business model," Mr. Friedman said in our interview. "You've got this great thing, but you can only sell one of them."

'Love Us or Leave Us'

Mr. Friedman takes a marathoner's approach to work, and he expects colleagues to match his stamina.

"He'll meet me at 1 a.m. at one of our factories in Vietnam," said Nicholas Condos, whose furniture company, Harbour, has sold more than a dozen collections through RH. "And he'll want to work until 5 a.m. No one is willing to say, 'Can we go home?'"

Veterans of the company say they quickly adopt a new sense of what hard-core dedi-

Top right, expensive restaurants like this one in the RH San Francisco building are a growing part of the company's brand. Despite the opulence of the showrooms, above and below right, retail marketing experts say RH is a "premium" brand, not a "luxury" one; RH furniture is largely mass-produced in countries like China, Vietnam and Indonesia.



cation means. Eri Chaya, who is RH's chief creative and merchandising officer, figured this out at her job interview with Mr. Friedman in 2006. It lasted three hours and included this surprising question: What are you willing to fight and die for?

"I had a feeling when I first met him," Ms. Chaya said, "that this is a human like no other."

For years, the annual leadership meeting included a ceremony wherein executives signed a contract affirming such sentiments as "I will continuously destroy my own reality to create tomorrow's future for myself and my teammates," then described ways they might have fallen short.

That ceremony has been replaced by the Daily Values Adventure. It starts at 10 a.m. every day and is shaped by topic sentences such as "Share a time when your ego got in the way of finding a better way."

Among some executives, Mr. Friedman's nickname is "The Sun" — a person who gives off a warm glow on good days and burns you on bad ones. The company's workplace culture earned a D-minus from

RH's first store in Britain is a Downton Abbey-like manse in Oxfordshire.

Comparably, which collects anonymous ratings from current employees. Just 22 percent of respondents said they would recommend the company to a friend; 67 percent said they would not, placing it in the bottom 10 percent of companies of similar size.

Mr. Friedman is unbothered by this kind of feedback. The maxims he wrote for the company include "Love us or leave us." Plenty of people, he noted, stick around for years, and others who have quit later returned, having found life elsewhere a little dull.

When underlings have come up short, he has been known to lash out, a tendency he claims to dislike and candidly acknowledges.

"Generally, I don't yell at people — I yell at the problem," he said. "If you step in front of the problem and defend the problem, you might feel attacked."

A Dedicated Stock Boy

By his own account, Mr. Friedman is an unlikely arbiter of high-end home furniture taste because he grew up without furniture.

Mr. Friedman's father was a longtime merchant marine and barber who died of a heart attack when Mr. Friedman was 5. His mother, now deceased, struggled with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Mr. Friedman said, and was often unable to work. He said the pair had lived in more than a dozen tiny apartments by the time he was 16.

"Our prized possession was a little black-and-white TV with big bunny ears," he said. "It's the only thing that always went with us."

At 18, he enrolled at Santa Rosa Junior College and flailed badly enough in his first year that a counselor told him that he was wasting taxpayer money. He dropped out and became a full-timer at a Gap store where he was so duntful and eager as a stock boy that colleagues called him "Gap Guy." On days off, he often drove an hour and a half to the corporate headquarters in San Bruno, Calif., to fold shirts and sweep the floor at a small showroom called Store One.

He was there one day in 1983 when Mickey Drexler, who was the Gap's president, gave an impromptu speech in the lunchroom. Mr. Drexler asked the roughly 200 assembled employees a question, and Mr. Friedman blurted out the answer.

"For the life of me, I can't remember what he asked, but the spirit moved me," Mr.

Friedman said. "And Mickey said: 'That's right. That's exactly right.'"

Mr. Drexler asked for this chipper young man's name and job title, and the next day his secretary called to invite Mr. Friedman to a C-suite meeting. Mr. Friedman arrived at headquarters 45 minutes early wearing a freshly steamed white shirt. In a wood-paneled room filled with the company's top executives, Mr. Drexler gave his new charge an assignment.

"I wanted an objective person's experience with real customers," recalled Mr. Drexler, who today is chief executive of Alex Mill, a fashion brand started by his son. "So I said, 'I want you to be the feedback person on these executive meetings.' He had good energy, I felt the energy and I liked him."

Mr. Friedman became, at 25, the youngest regional manager at the Gap and was later recruited by Williams-Sonoma as a senior vice president for stores and operations.

He soared at Williams-Sonoma. During his years as president of Pottery Barn, a Williams-Sonoma subsidiary, the company grew from a \$50-million-a-year operation focused on tableware and kitchen accessories to a more than \$1-billion-a-year seller of home furniture.

But 13 years into his run, Mr. Friedman, then 43, was passed over for the job of chief executive. "It broke my heart," he said. In a matter of days, he joined Restoration Hardware as chief executive, and helped raise a badly needed infusion of \$15 million from investors, including nearly \$5 million of his own money. At the time, Restoration Hardware was a publicly traded company that was flirting with bankruptcy. Soon, Mr. Friedman was phasing out the vintage staples and phasing in the upscale daybeds.

"He always had a very clear point of view," said Bonnie Orofino, who joined Restoration Hardware the year before Mr. Friedman and stayed on until 2016 as chief merchandising officer. "We spent a lot of time talking about 'the white space' — something above Pottery Barn but below professional designers."

For years, the company tottered close to financial peril and went private in 2008. Four years later, it went public again, an event that overlapped with a public relations disaster. In August 2012, Mr. Friedman stepped down as chief executive after an internal investigation found that he'd had an inappropriate relationship with a 26-year-old female employee.

In Mr. Friedman's telling, he didn't do anything wrong. "I was single, I met somebody at work, God forbid," he said. "A lot of people meet at work and fall in love." The woman, he said, left the company after they started dating.

Mr. Friedman would not name this woman, nor would any of his current or former colleagues. Her version of these events is not public. She told a friend, "It was a 10-month hiatus. Mr. Friedman returned to his job."

In the 2010s, the company pivoted from regular stores to extravagantly renovated landmarks — the onetime Museum of Natural History in Boston, a 60-room Palladian-style villa in Indianapolis — without a cash register in sight. It was a decisive step toward becoming a lifestyle retailer than just a retailer. Investors spotted a winner. In 2019, shares were trading at \$150, and by August 2021 they had climbed to \$750, as Covid incited a home renovation craze.

But like many retailers, RH had supply chain issues, and it raised prices too aggressively, the company said in an earnings call. Shares fell to around \$214 in the last year. The Europe plans were already in motion, though, and Mr. Friedman has not backed off them.

At RH headquarters, there's a full-scale model of the rooftop restaurant for an RH store set to open sometime in 2025 in Paris, near the Champs-Élysées. This version is made with Styrofoam tables and lots of place-holding silverware, glasses and chairs. Immense photographs of the city are plastered on walls, designed to reproduce the view that diners will see. It's basically a rough draft you can sit in.

"You don't get a second chance to make a first impression in Paris," Mr. Friedman said.

RH hopes to prosper in the same thin air breathed by Chanel, Hermès and Gucci, a realm that seems downright hostile to American brands. Other than Tiffany and Ralph Lauren, few home succeed in the cradle of luxury retail. And RH emerged from the least refined of settings. It has roots in the U.S. mall, where it offered decorative accessories and affordable nostalgia. Mr. Friedman is pretty sure those storied European brands are looking down on the company.

"We are not from their neighborhood," he's fond of saying, "nor invited to their parties." If the past is any indication, he's not waiting for an invitation. He'll throw a shindig of his own.



Reclaiming A Bookstore That a Fire Stole

Lucy Yu's Chinatown literary hub was gutted. She was determined to rebuild. It took seven grueling months.

By JORDYN HOLMAN
Photographs by HIROKO MASUIKE

Lucy Yu wasn't sure if she had smoke in her lungs or was having an anxiety attack. She needed fresh air.

Five days earlier, on the Fourth of July, she had raced out of her bookstore in Manhattan's Chinatown as it filled with smoke. A fire had broken out in an upstairs apartment, threatening to destroy all she had built.

Now Ms. Yu was back, and had to face it. She had assembled a team of friends to pack up the books that weren't damaged beyond repair and put them in storage. By the last bag, she had pain in her chest.

She walked outside and sat down on a stoop next door, as her friends comforted her and brought her water.

Her once-vibrant store, Yu & Me Books, needed a gut renovation to remove mold and smoke residue. The ceiling was caving in, the furniture she had built was damaged, and the speaker system she had installed was shot. A single bulb hung, emitting light; she and her friends had to use flashlights in the basement. They had salvaged a few thousand books, but more than 1,400 were ruined.

The bookstore was Ms. Yu's first attempt at entrepreneurship, and she felt she had failed. She opened her store with about \$45,000 in December 2021 as the neighborhood was rebounding from the pandemic shutdowns and reeling from a spate of anti-Asian attacks. It quickly became a literary hub that hosted first-time authors and held weekend bar nights, when bibliophiles sipped hard seltzers and wine. The store was profitable within four months.

All of that was up in the air now. Fire officials, seeing the damage, told her that it might take a year to reopen.

"It was the first time I cried — I just completely lost it," Ms. Yu, then 28, said a few weeks after the fire in the first of a series of interviews. "It was such a roller coaster of emotions because I lost something that I poured everything into, which is something that I think at the time I didn't even have the space or bandwidth to grieve."

But Ms. Yu didn't have the luxury to dwell on these feelings. New books came out every week, meaning each day was one when an author could choose another shop to host a talk or a shopper could defect to Amazon or Barnes & Noble. Without her brick-and-mortar location, and only a minuscule e-commerce operation, she had to get creative. It required soliciting financial lifelines and testing out new store concepts. It became her life.

It would take her 208 days — a little more than half the expected time — to restore her shop. In the process, she would find that elements of the bookstore wouldn't be exactly the same as they were before and that neither was she. Opening her store a second time meant reinventing not only the business, but also herself.

She stood up from the stoop and got to work.

2,400 Donors in One Day

In the days after last year's fire, Ms. Yu had totaled her losses and expenses: She was out about \$60,000 worth of inventory. The ceiling's collapse destroyed the heating, cooling and ventilation system, so that needed replacing, too.

Initially, she estimated she'd need \$80,000 to rebuild, which didn't include paying her nine employees, something she had resolved to do. A friend told her to be realistic and nearly double her estimate. She filed a claim with her insurance company but knew she'd need funds sooner.

Ms. Yu thought about the crowdfunding site GoFundMe but was hesitant. A few years earlier, she had used the platform to raise about \$16,000 to start Yu & Me. What



Top right, Lucy Yu in her Manhattan bookstore, Yu & Me Books, top left, on Mulberry Street weeks after a fire destroyed it last year. Right, opening a pop-up store at the Market Line Food Hall, about a mile away from the original location, was one way Ms. Yu was able to keep the business afloat during renovations. Below, there was a consistent flow of customers when the store reopened on a dark and rainy Sunday in January.



would people think when she said she needed their help again?

Her friend and colleague Kazumi Fish reminded her that Yu & Me had come to mean something to others as well.

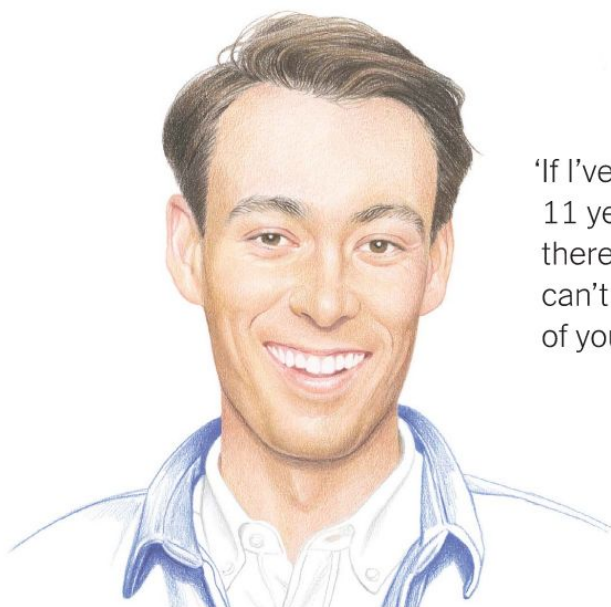
Within a day, more than 2,400 people donated a total of \$231,152 to Ms. Yu's new GoFundMe campaign. (The campaign eventually raised \$369,555.)

Donations came from the authors Celeste Ng and Vanessa Chan (each gave \$5,000) and the dating app Coffee Meets Bagel (it poured in \$2,000). Local bookstores donated, too. As did scores of people who gave just \$10.

Ms. Yu stuck to her revised \$150,000 budget, and set the extra money aside for future emergencies.

Before any rebuilding, she needed city approval for the work, such as the installation of plumbing and electricity. She worked with her landlord's architect to seek permits quickly, and hired a contractor who explained the next steps.

After long days spent doing store inspections and talking to other entrepreneurs in Chinatown who had dealt with fires, she would return to her one-bedroom Brooklyn



'If I've learned anything in my 11 years at Canva it is that there are some things you just can't outsource — and the soul of your brand is one of them.'

The Moment I Realized You Can't Outsource Your Essence

ZACH KITSCHKE CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, CANVA

TO EXPAND THE BRAND OF ONE OF THE FASTEST-GROWING START-UPS IN HISTORY, I HAD TO REMEMBER CANVA'S ORIGINS, WHEN IT WAS JUST A FEW PEOPLE WORKING AROUND A DINING TABLE.

My first job interview with Melanie Perkins and Cliff Obrecht, who founded Canva, could not have been more of a flunk.

Canva wasn't really a thing yet. It had no product, no brand, and was months away from launch. Mel had recently started the company — which consisted of her and two co-founders and a very small team — out of a small space in Sydney's Surry Hills. I, too, was finding my way. I had just lost my job when the tech blog I was working for went belly up. With bills to pay, I was desperate for any kind of work, and a mutual connection asked Mel to meet with me. She was polite. I was awkward. There wasn't the immediate job offer I was hoping for!

On my way home, I kept playing back the conversation. She'd described this incredible future world, in which everyone — not just trained designers — had the tools to create beautiful designs. I imagined how people all over the world could communicate their ideas more powerfully. A world that enabled more people to express their inherent creativity. I was convinced: These three would change the design universe as we knew it. I wanted to be part of it.

So when I got home, I wrote Mel and Cliff an email. It was a list of all the things I thought I could help them with: driving public relations, building a social media strategy, writing content. I was adamant about showing them that I understood their vision, believed in it and wanted to help. Not sure if it was pity,

but fortunately Cliff asked if I'd like to come in for a day's contract work, and soon I was Canva's Employee No. 5.

My journey began modestly. My first day's project was to write a media release for our funding announcement. That went well, and so then there was another challenge, and another and another. I loved Canva's roll-up-your-sleeves attitude, that any problem was a shared one to be solved. I've now been with Canva for 11 years. As we've scaled, I've run P.R., H.R., Product and even established our first international office.

I saw Canva grow from five people to nearly 5,000 employees worldwide, operating in 190 countries and with 170 million monthly active users. As with most employees of start-ups, I became quite adept at what we call just-in-time learning — a healthy mix of being a quick study, voracious reader, podcast listener and, most importantly, not being afraid to ask for help from advisers and mentors — all of which allowed me to embrace any role that came my way.

I was able to take on different challenges because Canva, the company, works a great deal like Canva, the product. The company's roots are in empowerment, and that notion goes far beyond the product. It's a business culture that enables regular people — like me — to push themselves to do things they didn't realize they could. And we did so many remarkable things. We grew from that tiny crew to one of the fastest-growing start-ups in the world.

Knowing when to pivot and when to hold has played a critical role in our success. For example, a few years back we did what big

companies do: We decided to hire a brand agency to conduct a rebrand of Canva. The goal was to invest more in marketing and to figure out who we were and how we showed up in a more mature and cohesive way. In this process, we were choosing between a couple of firms, both of which, on paper, were amazing. They had both done powerful work for leading household brands. They showed their gorgeous work in thoughtful ways. We could have easily picked either one, gotten some nice work out of it, and maybe would have won a few awards.

But digging into the proposals, alarm bells started to ring in my head. This was going to cost astronomical amounts of money (that as a start-up, we didn't have!), and a group of experts was going to go away and come back to us with a beautiful brand. It just didn't feel right. How could people who didn't know who we were, or what we were really about, deduce our identity based on a few focus groups. The thing about Canva was, you had to live it to really get it.

There were some clear tangibles, but much of Canva's essence just couldn't pop through a creative brief. For us, it's the soul of a company that — at its heart — is rooted in a vision to empower people to share their passions with the world in vivid, brilliant design. That, at the end of the day, is your brand: who you are and how you show up for your team, your investors, your community. So, we set out to answer those questions ourselves.

Over the course of several months, we'd ask ourselves all sorts of deep questions. We'd run brainstorming and workshops, poring over other brands — their photography, their typefaces, how they showed up in ads or creative — as we debated who we were, and who we were not.

The result was cemented in Canva's three key brand values: We are human, we are empowering, we are inspiring. Now everything we do, whether it's how we show up at an event, the way we engage with our community on social media, or how we bring Canva to life on a billboard, is driven by this shared sense of identity.

ILLUSTRATION BY TULLIO KROEMER

MARK MAKERS ON THE MOMENT

A new series from **NEW YORK TIMES ADVERTISING** examining the pivotal moments that move brands — and culture — forward.



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LIFESTYLE | RELATIONSHIPS | SOCIETY

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024

SundayStyles

The New York Times



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The gold medal winner Katie Ledecky will compete in this summer's Paris Olympics. Her memoir, "Just Add Water," comes out on Tuesday.

Kicking, Calmly

Setting world records hasn't kept Katie Ledecky from staying humble.
BY ANDREW TRUNSKY
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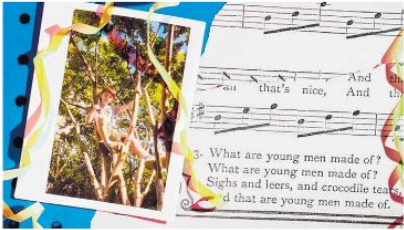


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'BoyMom' Tackles Stereotypes

Ruth Whippman's memoir looks at parenting amid 'impossible masculinity.'

By CASEY SCHWARTZ

When the British American writer Ruth Whippman decided to thaw one final embryo, she was 42 years old. She and her husband had two sons, Solly, then 6, and Zephy, 3. Their remaining embryos all had XY chromosomes, too.

As her pregnancy became visible, most people assumed she was trying for a girl. When she told them she was having a boy, people treated her "as this object of pity," Ms. Whippman said in a recent interview from her home in Berkeley, Calif. "There was this real sense that boys were somehow disappointing." Even her mail carrier expressed her sympathy.

It was 2017. Ms. Whippman, a self-described liberal feminist, was watching the #MeToo movement explode. She felt as though men had become the enemy, which

made bringing another one into the world a different kind of challenge from what she already faced with two rambunctious boys.

But she was conflicted. "While the feminist part of me yelled, 'Smash the patriarchy!' the mother part of me wanted to wrap the patriarchy up in its blanket and read it a story," she writes in her new book, "BoyMom," out last week.

The title borrows from the social media phenomenon #BoyMom, a hashtag that has become a full-blown trend and has as many

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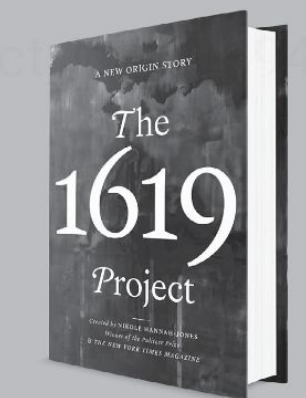
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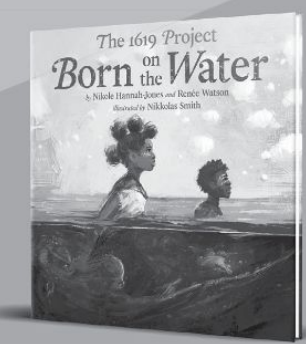
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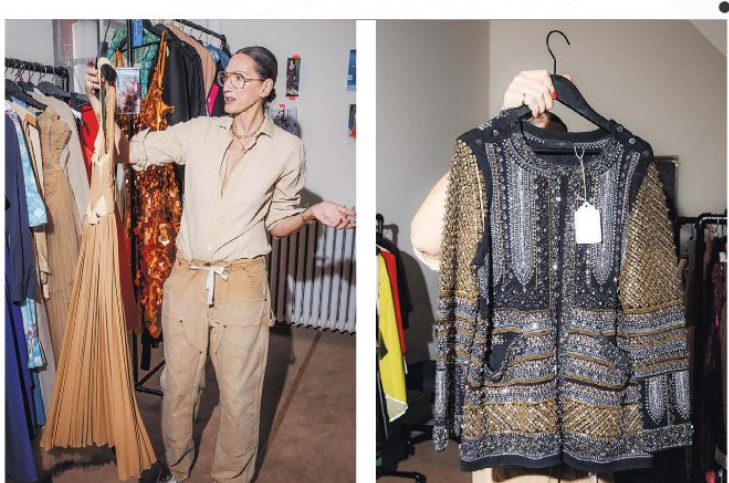
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Above left, Jenna Lyons at her stoop sale; and, clockwise from above right, some of the items that were for sale at the event, in SoHo.



She Hoped That No One Haggled

A 'Real Housewives' personality held a stoop sale that also had a cover charge.

By ANNA KODÉ

On the third floor of a building in SoHo, Jenna Lyons sat frantically scrubbing a pair of Lanvin shoes.

"This has been a long time coming," said the 35-year-old former J. Crew president and "Real Housewives of New York City" star. "Every time I would buy something, I would realize that there was no place for it."

So she did what many New Yorkers in this situation would do: Just a stoop sale.

"When I moved to Brooklyn, that was the first time I'd ever seen a stoop sale," said Ms. Lyons, who is originally from California. "I thought it was so cute. People would just sit outside and watch people come by and haggle. I hope people don't haggle me today."

The event on Tuesday ended up being a much larger, more stressful production than a typical New York stoop sale—and it didn't take place on a stoop. Ms. Lyons had to institute a cover charge to help manage the crowd, and a "Real Housewives" film crew was present asking visitors to sign waivers.

At first, Ms. Lyons said she pushed back against the filming. "I was like 'please no, I just want to have a sale.'"

Up until a few minutes before it started, Ms. Lyons was pricing items with her team buzzing around, putting up printed images of her wearing some of the items.

"It's L-O-U-I should know that," she said, writing out a tag in red Sharpie for a pair of Christian Louboutin shoes.

Meanwhile, the line outside continued to grow, wrapping around the block; over 300 people attended in the end, a representative for Ms. Lyons wrote in an email. (Ms. Lyons's neighbor, the artist Joan Jonas, got early access, looking through the racks be-

fore the crowds entered.)

"I love that she's like masculine-feminine but makes it sexy," said Zanni Baas, a 32-year-old jewelry designer who waited in line with her newly adopted black Chihuahua named Gomez.

It's the golden age of the celebrity closet sale, and Ms. Lyons's event is just the latest in a recent series of high-profile wardrobe purges. In May, Ivy Getty, the oil heiress, sold several of her worn (and some unworn) articles of clothing at a showroom in Brooklyn. The actress Chloë Sevigny opened up her closet to shoppers last spring, which also resulted in hordes of hopeful buyers lining up. And last summer, Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon held a closet sale in Los Angeles.

Ms. Lyons, who has over 800,000 followers on Instagram, announced her sale on the platform with a post that received over 1,000 comments and nearly 30,000 likes. She then posted again to announce extended hours, the \$15 cover charge that would be applied toward purchases and that half of the proceeds would be donated to Planned Parenthood.

Some commenters were angry: "A cover charge?? For a street sale??" one user posted. But others expressed excitement, inquiring about her clothing size.

Ms. Lyons later responded with a video of herself posted to her Instagram story. "First of all, 50 percent of the proceeds are going to charity and the other 50 percent are paying all the people who are working on this and going to fund my teeth, which I had to pay for out of pocket," she said. In the past, Ms. Lyons has been vocal about her genetic disorder, incontinentia pigmenti, and that she's had to get false teeth as a result.

Hundreds of apparel items were arranged inside, with prices ranging from free to hundreds of dollars. Among the articles were a Céline tunic for \$400, a pink Miu Miu jacket for \$250, Jimmy Choo shoes for \$20, a

Simone Rocha dress for \$650 and a Gucci sweater for \$45.

There was a rack dedicated to blazers, of which there were over two dozen, and, naturally, there were plenty of J. Crew pieces—including a one-of-a-kind jacket made with recycled bullion and crystals priced at \$100. "Honestly, the pricing in here makes zero sense," Ms. Lyons joked.

Wearing Carhartt pants and white Prada shoes, she pointed out the items in the sale that were attached to big moments in her life. A sequined top she sported to meet Kate Middleton, a J. Crew Collection piece she wore to Michelle Obama's 50th birthday party, a Marc Jacobs skirt she donned on her wedding night and the first Marc Jacobs handbag she owned. "It was the first thing I bought with the very first bonus I got."

Ms. Lyons seemed fairly calm letting go of so many sentimental items, but there was one she removed from the sale racks at the last minute: a hot pink Schiaparelli skirt she wore to her first Met Gala.

Many people in line were fans of Ms. Lyons' pre-"Real Housewives" fame, including Karen Revis, a 62-year-old artist, and Monica Hunt, a 50-year-old baker. They had watched Ms. Lyons' other reality show, "Stylish With Jenna Lyons." When asked what she hoped to find at the sale, Ms. Revis said, "Her." She continued, jokingly, "If you hear kicking and screaming inside, that's us!"

Sara Ruble and Janna Hagey, both 30, met while being among the first people in line. Ms. Hagey, who works in marketing, arrived hours before the sale opened at 2 p.m. even though it was a work day. ("I work remote," she explained.) She'd just gotten engaged, so she was looking for something to wear on her wedding day.

Once inside, Ms. Ruble, a nurse, said that she got a hug from Ms. Lyons, in addition to Tory Burch sweats, a J. Crew skirt, Nike tennis shoes, a clutch and more. Ms. Hagey's haul included a Balenciaga bag, a Saint Laurent button-up and Manolo Blahniks.

"It was also so cool because I got a new friend out of it," Ms. Ruble said, referring to Ms. Hagey. "Best day."

For Ms. Lyons, apart from clearing up space (mentally and physically), there was another reason for having the sale.

"My mom passed away last year, and she cleaned out her house, and it was actually really nice for me and my brother," she said. "I was like, no one wants to deal with this. Who knows, I could die tomorrow!"



More than 300 people attended the sale, according to a representative for Ms. Lyons.

CORRECTION

A picture caption with an article last Sunday about the wedding of Eric's Lagunas and Jonathan Stewart misidentified the church where the ceremony took place. As the article correctly noted, the ceremony was at Trinity Church Wall Street in New York, not Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (where the couple met in 2015).

Before the Sports Begin, a Style Competition Starts



Shanghai, where the city's jutting skyline served as both a backdrop and a starting point for the equally towering boots that went down the runway. They were stacked on 18-centimeter soles and made in the shape of skyscrapers, their height allowing for elongated floor-sweeping trench coats. And that was just the start of the meme-baiting, which continued through trench and puffer coat bags (slung over the shoulder) and more duck-billed sneakers.

For a brand that has made a signature out of combining show and social commentary, the statement felt less like food for thought than fodder for social media. It was also a

distraction from the power player pussy-bow day silks, fit for an ironic Margaret Thatcher, and the even smarter evening gowns made in upcycled materials.

See, for example, one strapless white pink made from Tyvek, a strapless sheath crafted in gold foil, and a cotton-candy look cocoon dress adorned with what looked like feathers (but turned out to be strips of pink plastic garbage bags). In a country where luxury is a subject of increasing tension, it was a canny representation of mood.

Castles and Tartans

As the artistic director of Dior women's wear, Maria Grazia Chiuri, said before her show, held in the elaborate gardens of Drummond Castle in Perthshire, Scotland: "I think it is very important to explain that fashion is not only a brand; that fashion is a territory where we are speaking about many different aspects that are political, economical, cultural."

Hence her decision to devote her cruise collections to both highlighting the global history of Dior and marrying it to local artistry. This time, the focus was on a 1955 collection that Christian Dior showed at Gleneagles, as well as on the history of Mary, Queen of Scots, and her passion for embroidery and its semiology. Thrown in the work of the Scottish specialists Harris Tweed; Johnstons of Elgin, the knitter company; and an independent brand called The Kilt founded by 30-something Samantha McCoach in 2014 to make kilts contemporary, and you get clan Dior.

The result positions Dior as a tastemaker, bestowing its seal of approval onto others, and gives the collections a reason for existing in a world that can often seem crammed with too much stuff. Ms. Chiuri's interpretation of local aesthetics can be eye-rollingly banal — Scotland! Tartan! Bagpipes! Argyles! — but it also reflects the curiosity of an outsider.

Sometimes that combination works very well, as it did with the softened New Look silhouettes made from purple and black tartan shawls and the chain mail evening gowns; sometimes less well, as in the faux-punk photo-collage pastiches of old Dior-in-Edinburgh shorts and the cocktail frocks and corsets embroidered with words such as "bossy," "hysterical" and "nag." (Ms. Chiuri can't quite abandon her yen for a feminist slogan.)

One shawl with a map of Scotland was so literal that you expected a Google map dot pointing to the show's location. But the sheer commitment of 89 such looks ultimately has a sincerity that is undeniable and more interesting than what often appears in her regular runway shows.

It makes cross-border collaboration look awfully good.



Clockwise from top left: Looks from Christian Dior, Balenciaga, Chanel, Hermès and Louis Vuitton.

Brands prepare to be ambassadors for the Paris Olympics.

WHEN IS A FASHION SHOW not just a fashion show? When is it a vehicle for cultural diplomacy?

At least this appears to be the case with the cruise destination extravaganzas that have taken place recently. These events increasingly serve to position the big five brands that hold them less as mere fashion houses and more as national ambassadors to the world: billion-euro avatars of influence on unofficial state visits.

Back when this interstitial season was invented to bridge the gap between the fall and spring runway shows, cruise collections seemed to contain clothes that were more wearable or practical. Now, at least in the hands of the mega-brands, the clothes (or at least their wearability) are almost beside the point. The point is the spectacle, access and power they represent — of all kinds, including that of celebrity and social media. Indeed, the front-row stars are as much an attention-grabbing part of the shows as the shows themselves.

In a world of fashion micro-trends, that may be the biggest one of all.

This was true this season, as the shows of Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Dior and Balenciaga served as calling cards for the Paris Olympics, which is being touted as the next "fashion" Olympics ever.

It is no coincidence that Louis Vuitton and Dior are owned by LVMH, which is a top-line sponsor of the Paris Games. Nor is the fact that Bernard Arnault, the mastermind of LVMH, has explicitly stated that he sees his mega brands not as selling luxury, but selling "culture." And it is worth noting that this was the first time Balenciaga had shown in China and, for Hermès, the first new collection show held outside of France.

"Hermès has always had a strong connection with New York," said the brand's designer Nadège Vanhee, before her New York debut, held on Pier 36 and complete with hanging yellow traffic lights and a Gallic cocktail bar.

"It's the same spirited woman: taking in the sounds and energy of the city," Ms. Vanhee went on, though her clothes looked more fitting for someone taking the city on, not just in; the slick black and caramel leathers telegraphed an active, rather than passive, vibe. The brand's signature scarf

prints and fringe were still there, but the overall effect was more haute night crawler than equestrian, down to the leather paper-bag caps. And more alluring for it.

Fashion, as much as anything, has been part of France's patrimony and identity in the world. These shows simply expand the territory.

The Influence Travels

It started with Chanel in early May, just after the Olympic flame arrived at that port city.

On the rooftop of the Le Corbusier-designed MAMOP, in front of Kristen Stewart, Tessa Thompson, and Lily-Rose Depp (among others), the designer Virginie Viard offered up a parade of Chanel-style athleisure: long-line bouclé jackets over bike shorts, tweed hodie skirt suits and little cocktail frocks with double C-branded plaquettes. There was even a pair of evening sweats.

If the combination of sports and brand semiology was awkward rather than inspiring, at least the icy takes on tank top dressing were cool. And the setting was spectacular, even viewed remotely, via livestream, which is how this critic watched since New York Times reporters do not accept free trips (most of the media that attends, like the celebrities and some Very Important Clients, do so as "guests" of the house). Indeed, it was more memorable than the clothes — perhaps a harbinger of the fact that a few weeks after the show Ms. Viard announced she would be leaving the brand.

Next up was Vuitton, where the designer Nicolas Ghesquière continued his pursuit of time-traveling architectural grandeur in the multi-alum Hypostyle Room of Antoni Gaudí's Park Güell in Barcelona and in front of Sophie Turner, Cynthia Erivo and the Haim sisters.

There, under a ceiling of mosaic domes, he sent out a parade of wardrobe building blocks with just as much structure. The triangular 1980s jackets with jutting shoulders, and precisely angled gaucho hats were weirdly galactic, while the puffballs of evening tiffanias had go-go-decade references in their swirls.

Then came Balenciaga, at the Jean Nouvel-designed Museum of Art Pudong in



LEFT: BY MIKE NORTON; RIGHT: DIOR, BALENCIAGA, CHANEL, HERMÈS, LUIS VUITTON. STYLING: DIOR, BALENCIAGA, CHANEL, HERMÈS, LUIS VUITTON. STYLING: DIOR, BALENCIAGA, CHANEL, HERMÈS, LUIS VUITTON. STYLING: DIOR, BALENCIAGA, CHANEL, HERMÈS, LUIS VUITTON.

To Set a Soothing Mood, They Let the Darkness In

Can you create a calmer interior with deeper hues? Some decorators say yes.

By LIA PICARD

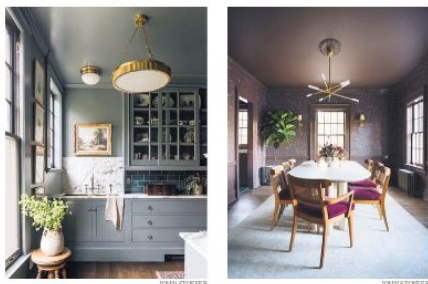
When Emily Peterson purchased her seaside cottage in Cape Neddick, Maine, she knew its coastal hues had to go. "The second we walked through this house, I had this vision that I wanted it to be dark," said Ms. Peterson, who bought the 1770s home nearly two years ago. "It's been here for so many years, and I just wanted to bring life back to it."

In this case, that meant going back to its historical roots with moodier colors.

So Ms. Peterson, who shares the cottage with her husband and two young children, painted over the butter yellow and powder-blue walls with dark greens and deep blues. Bright, vibrant spaces have enjoyed their time in the sun — after all, last summer's barbecue moment even extended to hammocks — but there's growing interest in a dark interior aesthetic. On TikTok, videos highlighting this style often rack up thousands of likes. And on the home-decorating website Houzz, there's been a surge in searches related to dark and moody decor — for example, "moody bedroom" searches are up 142 percent.

"The popularity of dark and moody decor is likely a reaction to the bright whites and light grays that have dominated interiors in recent years," said Mitchell Parker, Houzz's senior editor. "Many homeowners are looking for something different."

That was the case for Ms. Peterson, a 33-year-old artist whose previous home had light gray walls. Now, each room in her cottage has its own deep shade: Blackish-green walls — painted using Andron by Sherwin-Williams — in the living room set a



JAMES STOFFER



EMILY PETERSON

backdrop for a green velvet couch and a gallery wall of vintage oil paintings.

Against a dark wall, the colors of the furniture and art pop and can command more attention than they might in a bright room. "I want my house to feel kind of like a museum," Ms. Peterson said. Her son's bedroom is color-drenched; the walls, ceiling and trim are painted using Smokehouse, a warm brown with gray notes, by Sherwin-Williams, drawing attention to its nautical theme.

The new color scheme has had a calming effect on Ms. Peterson. "I feel cozy," she said. "It's a warm hug every time that you sit in these rooms."

Dark interiors are deeply rooted in history. In the Victorian era, forest green, dark blue and other rich tones reigned supreme. This was, in large part, a result of technological advancements at the time. Rail transportation and the invention of the resal-

able paint can in the late 1800s made paint more accessible, said Kate Reggev, a historical architect and project manager at Zubatkin Owner Representation, a project management firm in New York.

"Paint also became much staler with new color options, thanks to the development of synthetic pigments," she added.

Before the mid-1800s, paint was made with natural pigments that were muted and faded, so limewash — a mixture of burned lime and water — was preferred over paint. It doesn't surprise Ms. Reggev that dark interiors continue to find their way into people's homes. "I think the staying power of moody, dark interiors is the comforting, enveloping environment they create," she said.

In warm and humid Bluffton, S.C., Jessica Hawks, a business coach, felt that her builder-grade home lacked personality. A D.I.Y.-er, Ms. Hawks painted her bedroom with

From left: Jean Stoffer, an interior designer and TV personality, used a gray-blue hue for her pantry; for a home she remodeled, she used a brown with a burgundy tint; and a blackish-green paint in Emily Peterson's living room serves as a backdrop for a green velvet couch.

"It's a warm hug every time that you sit in these rooms," a homeowner said of her dark walls.

London Clay by Farrow & Ball, a brown so deep it almost has a burgundy tint. She also added wainscoting and furnished the room with a four-poster bed and eclectic vintage items.

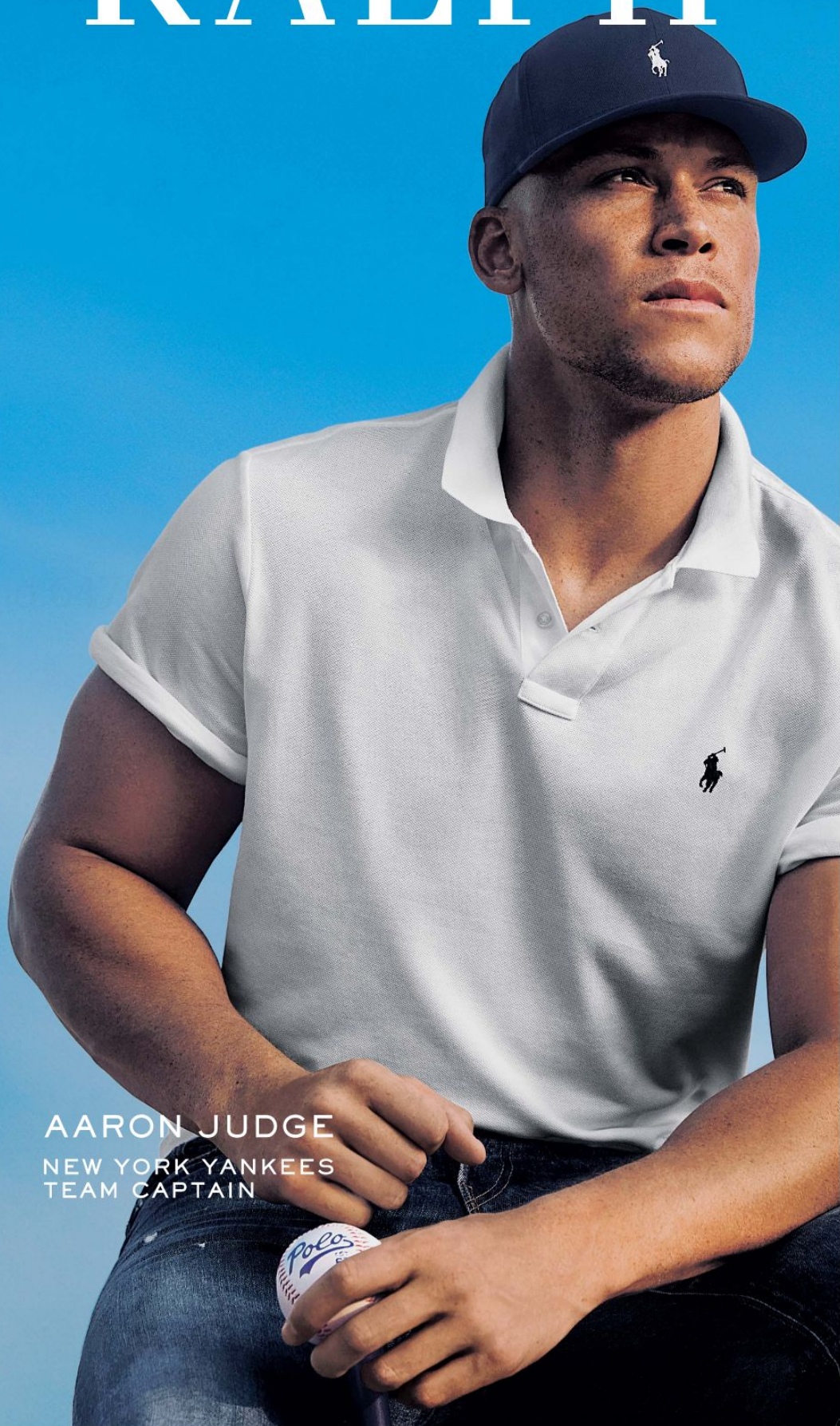
"Even though I live near the beach, I wanted to pull the feeling of places in Europe, like the Louvre or cathedrals, into my own home," Ms. Hawks, 27, said.

While bedrooms are popular contenders for deep colors, some opt to paint secondary, less-visited rooms in saturated shades — and, in turn, those rooms become destinations. Jean Stoffer, an interior designer and TV personality, took this approach to the butter pantry in her Greek Revival home in Grand Rapids, Mich. The walls and ceilings are painted a custom gray-blue. "When we have parties, people are in there talking all the time," Ms. Stoffer said. "They just love being in that room."

Some may hesitate to go dark in a room out of fear that it will make the space feel small, but it usually has the opposite effect. "If you color-drench and do the ceilings and everything, your eye has nowhere to stop," Ms. Peterson said. "It just actually feels bigger."

When deciding how dark to paint a room, Laura Jenkins, an interior designer, works with its lighting. "If you have a beautiful room with natural light that streams in, I love making those rooms bright and lighter, playing into the light," said Ms. Jenkins, who lives in Atlanta. "If you already have a dark room, lean into the dark and let it be what it wants to be."

RALPH



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THE NEW FRAGRANCE

MODERN LOVE

I Saw My Smile Lines. He Saw My Smile.

A home project opens the eyes of a woman who was ignoring a bias that she saw in others.

By ANN GARVIN

In April, I published an essay in *Madison Magazine* about a meet-up where I asked my date, who was my age, 62, how online dating was going for him. Right to my face, with an open smile, he said that for someone so successful and fit (as he apparently saw himself), he was surprised he wasn't dating younger women.

Without saying a word, I stood up, gave him a quick smile and walked away. Later I realized there were all kinds of things I wished I had said. Mostly I wanted to point my finger and call him out as a stone-cold ageist. Which eventually I did by writing that essay.

After it was published, I learned that people on social media had big feelings about love and dating after a certain age. It was thrilling to feel like I had tapped into something, a moment in culture, but it was also disappointing to see how many of the reactions were from people who were worried that I had not found my person. There was a tone of sad-eyed, head-tilted-to-the-side, "Don't give up hope!" — as if I were battling a disease called singleness instead of a cultural disdain for women over 40.

One reader suggested my "picker" was broken and reminded me that I can't have everything in one person. Another said I would find my partner as soon as I stopped looking.

"Your soul mate is out there," one woman wrote. "I just know it."

Didn't they see that I was complaining about sexist ageism, not the fact that I didn't have a partner?

While my phone chirped loudly with messages from friends and strangers as I tried to keep up with comments and interactions, my longtime friend, Jim, a carpenter, was in my house building out a closet. Occasionally, he would call out, and I would run upstairs to help balance a shelf while he secured it into place.

"Boy, you're busy," he said. "I've never seen anyone who works as hard as you do." I scoffed and said: "You must be joking. Have you met yourself? You are a machine."

Then I would return to my buzzing phone. I had known Jim, who is six years my senior, for 15 years. Our children went to school together. We car-pooled to sports events and grumbled about coaches. When my basement flooded or my old windows got stuck shut, he would come over with a bucket or a hammer. For my part, I would try to help by making jokes and keeping my fingers away from things that pinched. Occasionally, we got lunch.

During the first closet renovation Jim did for me last fall, when I was writing the essay, I watched him deftly haul every manner of building supplies in and out of my bedroom. When directed, I held a board in place while he, with the precision of a man who has built too many houses to count, kicked the board perfectly into place. I made fun of his unorthodox carpentry tool, the toe of his boot, and went back to writing.

When my closet was finished, I populated it with hangers, baskets and too many long-sleeve T-shirts for one single chilly woman to own. I counted my shoes, got rid of two pairs, looked at Jim and realized I didn't want him to go.

This led to a new project, a revamping of



BRIAN KISA

an under-the-eaves space. Jim and I worked together to measure and paint. He showed me how to use a table saw. I noticed he favored one of his legs and asked if he had hurt himself.

"Bone spurs," he said.

I gave him the number of my friend, an orthopedic surgeon.

I bragged about my new closets to friends, and when they asked if Jim could be hired, I told them what he told me: He is retired and works only when he wants to, and mostly he doesn't want to.

When Jim asked me if I had seen the Christmas lights at the community gardens near his house, I said no, but they sounded nice. During closet No. 2, after a Friday of Jim working hard and me hardly working (that's a Jimism), we walked through the gardens oohing and ahing at the bright spectacle against the night sky, wondering who climbed the ladders and wrapped the string lights in the branches overhead and who would take them down.

The next time we got together, we went ice skating. I hadn't skated in more than a decade and was sure I would wipe us both out. Jim, a father of a former high school hockey player, tightened my skate for me. After our first shaky lap, he said: "Look at you. You're a natural."

I knew what I looked like: a woman in a red plaid Elmer Fudd hat with no business being anywhere near ice without a crash helmet. Smiling, Jim skimmed ahead, executed a tight turn and said: "I'll take your picture. Skate toward me."

He wasn't flinching, and there was no secondary agenda in his encouragement. We were two people who knew each other well, enjoying ourselves, and I felt how I always feel around Jim: cared for.

"Look at that smile," he said as he held up his phone.

When he helped me pull my skates off at

the end of the night, I noticed his thick hair and how, when he laughed, he looked like an Irish elf but better looking than most elves.

Don't kid yourself. I felt what was happening. I was eyeing up Jim, and not in the way a woman does when she wants new closets. No, not that way at all.

I told myself to move slowly, to be sure. I didn't want to ruin our long friendship by turning it into something it wasn't. That was true, but something else was truer.

Despite my deep understanding of the nonsense of sexist ageism (and what would become my viral protest against it), I hesitated. What if I ruined the friendship, made everything awkward between us because Jim thought of me as my date had? A woman of a certain age, the very age the world isn't interested in, sexually or otherwise.

Let me be clear: When it came to ageism, Jim was not the problem. I was.

I have squinted at my smile lines and thought, smile less? Wondered if I should consider a neck lift. And, worse, I believed that romance had to start with romance and that a romantic relationship had to begin with a meet-cute, a quick spark.

It had been a long time since I had felt this way about someone, despite dating quite a lot in the years since my marriage ended in 2010. Was it possible I had so many precon-

ceived notions of age, romance and sex that I was blind to my own story?

Could it be that I had internalized all that ageism I had taken such a public stand against? I could point a finger at my date, but what about myself? Jim had been there for me for 15 years. Only now did I consider that he might find me interesting and attractive, crow's feet and all.

In January, he and I drove the two and a half hours to Chicago to see "Hamilton." In the car, Jim told me he loved the blues and how important music was to him.

"What kind of music do you like?" he asked and waited for me to tell him. He listened carefully and suggested we go to a concert together.

"We should," I said.

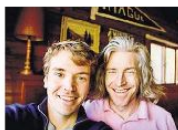
In the theater, settled into our seats, I snapped a selfie of us and took a moment to inspect it. There he was with his kind eyes. Our temples were touching, and we were grinning from ear to ear.

I had captured joy, a shining moment that had zero to do with how old either of us was.

Sometimes, an essay for strangers has a message for its author. That night, I silenced the chatter and inched in close to Jim. And while the lights dimmed and the orchestra began, we smiled in the darkness and waited for the real show to begin.

Don't kid yourself. I felt what was happening. I was eyeing up Jim, and not in the way a woman does when she wants new closets.

Tiny Love Stories Two Matts Walk Into a Bar



We met at a gay bar called Woody's. The name says it all: cheap beers, suspect bathrooms. Amid the grime, Matt's face was kind and honest. A smile that could never hurt me. I asked: "Is it 'Best Legs' night?" He said: "I don't know." Maybe we didn't meet in a romantic place, but life isn't always romantic; there are mortgage payments and Covid and grocery shopping and toilet cleaning. Yet 19 years later, we have seen the world together, had cocktails at the Ritz. His kiss still makes me happy I went out that night. **MATTHEW HAGUE**

For more readers' stories and to submit your own: nytimes.com/tinylovestories

THIRD WHEEL | GINA CHERELUS

Rekindling Love Can Take a Whole Lot of Work

Getting back with an ex may mean dealing with undesired scrutiny and doubters.

LAST YEAR, BEN AFFLECK made headlines for appearing to be in a bad mood. After opening a car door for his wife, Jennifer Lopez, he shut it with what viewers decided was more force than strictly necessary.

Many claimed he also appeared to be sulking while seated next to his wife at the 2023 Grammy Awards. (He later said his expression had more to do with an unplanned bit by the event's host, Trevor Noah.)

Then there was Mr. Affleck's unaccompanied appearance at the Netflix roast of Tom Brady in early May, followed the next day by Ms. Lopez's arriving without her husband at the Met Gala.

For many, Ms. Lopez's abrupt cancellation of her summer tour last week (very possibly a result of poor ticket sales) was the final bit of proof fans needed to conclude that the couple's marriage was on the rocks.

Rumors of issues between Ms. Lopez and Mr. Affleck, whose breakup-to-makeup story may be one of the most closely watched celebrity relationships in Hollywood history, began about a year after their surprise wedding in 2022. (The couple called off a first engagement 20 years ago.) But who's to say the pair's scheduled hiatus wasn't made it difficult to attend events together? Perhaps Mr. Affleck's seeming bad mood was unrelated to his wife when he shut that car door?

The frenzied speculation has only increased the already overbearing attention the couple receive. Just last weekend, they were surrounded by a group of paparazzi snapping pictures as they left his son's



Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck in February. They were married in 2022. Their first engagement was called off 20 years ago.

basketball game in Santa Monica. This time, they seemed happy together, even exchanging a cheek kiss.

New love is delicate in the best of circumstances, but especially when it is rekindled. And when you're two A-list celebrities, the scrutiny that you're under becomes even harsher. Right now, only the couple know if they really are headed toward divorce, but the world will be watching for even the smallest of hints as to which way the winds are blowing.

For the average person, that scrutiny and

pressure is still felt, albeit on a smaller scale. It can come from loved ones who are worried that you might be making a mistake or from the parasocial spectators on your feed who are thirsty for breakup gossip to sip on.

According to Lisa Marie Bobby, a psychologist and relationship counselor, it is extremely common for people to get back together after working on themselves and to have a second chapter that's more positive than the first. But during the breakup process, it's also common to speak nega-

tively about the relationship to friends and family, which can color their perception of your partner, so she recommends resisting the temptation to tell all the intimate details and instead talk to a professional.

"There is often a lot of anger, hurt, resentment, and when we are in that emotional space, we tend to become binary in our thinking," she said. "And when we're in that space, that is the narrative we are telling other people."

Of course, when a relationship is toxic or even abusive, her guidance is the opposite. Loved ones can help someone find the strength to leave instead of cycling in and out of the same relationship.

"They often benefit from letting in the feedback or commentary from people who really love them and care about them," Dr. Bobby said.

If you are dealing with skepticism over your rekindled romance, Dr. Bobby recommends doing some "P.R. for your relationship" and talking to friends and family members who may have developed a negative impression of an ex and reassuring them that you've both worked on the previous issues.

Any reunion between two exes, no matter how beautiful or passionate, occurs on shaky ground. What if it doesn't work and ends up being a waste of time? Is this a pursuit of destined love or an act of settling? Can the trust be rebuilt, or will old toxic cycles persist? Dr. Bobby said one of the main reasons people are anxious in this way is that they haven't worked through the issues from the previous relationship.

"There is a lot of power in doing some very deep work," she said. "If you're going to try again in a relationship, both people need to have a clear understanding of what went wrong the first time around."

A full-page photograph of a man with dark hair and a slight smile, looking towards the camera. He is wearing a light blue, long-sleeved button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and dark grey or black trousers. He is standing in front of a rough, light-colored stone wall. The lighting is warm and directional, coming from the upper left, casting a soft shadow of the man onto the wall behind him. The overall mood is sophisticated and relaxed.

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Middle Age Isn't Easy, but There's No Turning Back

Chloë Sevigny talks about the kinds of roles she wants, and the perfume she now has.

By JESSICATESTA
Before the air around Chloë Sevigny can be spritzed with her rose-scented perfume, it must first be cleared. Ms. Sevigny gasped when she learned that some people interpreted a remark she recently made on Instagram as passive-aggressive.

"Always nice to be included," she had written beneath a Variety magazine cover that she shared with Kim Kardashian. They had been paired for an "actors on actors" conversation, which Variety released online on Wednesday.

"Because I just come off as snarky?" Ms. Sevigny laughed. "The inside scoop is I wasn't supposed to be there." She had replaced another actress who was sick with Covid. And she was grateful to be included.

"I would like to have bigger parts in bigger movies," said Ms. Sevigny, who wants to be perceived as a "character actor." This

year she starred as the midcentury socialite C.Z. Guest on "Feud: Capote vs. the Swans," a series on FX and Hulu. She just finished filming another series, playing Kitty Mendez, who was killed by her sons in 1989. The day after our interview, she was set to fly to San Francisco for rehearsals on a Luca Guadagnino film, co-starring Julia Roberts and Ayo Edebiri.

An actress considers the challenges of facing 50, while trying to embrace the unwelcome changes.

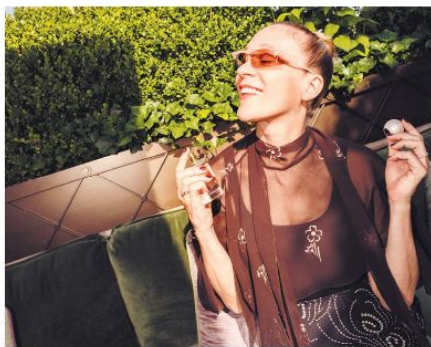
When we met, Ms. Sevigny, 49, was sitting in front of a mirror and having her hair wrapped into a tight bun. She wore a striped robe and generously scented Crocs by Simone Rocha. She was preparing for a cocktail party being thrown that evening on the roof of Fouquet's New York for her fragrance, Little Flower, made by the indie perfumer Régime des Fleurs.

Ms. Sevigny was living in a sparsely decorated suite, scattered with her 4-year-old son's toys, while the family's apartment was being expanded. She and her husband, the gallerist Sinisa Mackovic, had purchased the unit next door from an older couple torn between having more space in the country and more access to care in the city. Ms. Sevigny said. The couple's dilemma made her wonder what she would do at their age.

Ms. Sevigny has been trying to embrace middle age — because that is what people do now — but finds it difficult.

"I think aging is really one of the worst things of all time," she said. "Maybe it's easier when you're over the hump and just an elegant older lady. Middle age is really tricky."

Ms. Sevigny will turn 50 in November. Yet for most of her life, she has been associated with what is now and next in New York City, having been declared an "It girl" at 19.



Chloë Sevigny at the party for her fragrance, Little Flower.

Social Q's | PHILIP GALANES

Risk in Reaching Out

My father, who died seven years ago, was estranged from his brother for over 40 years. (I don't know why.) So, I haven't seen my uncle in decades. On a whim, when I was writing Christmas cards this year, I sent one to my uncle. On Valentine's Day, I came home to find a dozen red roses and a box of candy on my doorstep with a note that read: "Your Christmas card meant the world to us!" It was signed, with love, from my uncle and aunt. I wasn't sure what to do next, so I sent another note, sharing the details of my life — and eventually I received another dozen roses on my doorstep. My sister is appalled that I reached out to our uncle. Our father would not approve, she said, and it might upset our mother. So what should I do now?

NIECE

My mother was extremely charismatic (and equally temperamental): She built bridges to others with ease and often burned them down just as quickly. So I spent much of my youth monitoring her grudges and feeling protective of her. Do not follow my lead! You are a person first and your father's daughter second.

I admire whatever loving whim it was that led you to send a Christmas note to your uncle. It

questions occurs regularly, why not pull together the salient details and keep them at the ready to text to anyone who asks?

Tensions at the Property Line

We have been cordial with our next-door neighbor for years. He began to build a structure in his yard without permits recently and received a stop-work order from the city. He may believe that we reported him to code enforcement, but we didn't. Still, that night, he began shouting expletives about my husband and blaring music from open windows at odd hours. This is way out of character for him. We've never heard a peep from him before this, and I'm freaking out. How can we approach this issue safely?

NEIGHBOR

Your neighbor's behavior would frighten me, too. Do not go next door to speak with him. But I wouldn't call the police yet, either. That may only escalate his grievance without communicating what may be the most pertinent fact: You didn't report him. (Not that his harassment would be appropriate even if you had.)

I would start with a letter, informing him that you had nothing to do with the stop-work order and demand that he stop his unneighborly behavior at once. If he doesn't, I see no alternative but to call the police.

Mom Is Gossiped Out

I video chat with my 40-year-old daughter frequently. Lately, I've noticed that while she is speaking, she sticks her finger in her nose, then wipes it clean and licks it. (Sorry to be so gross!) She has good social skills and is neat and tidy, but this new habit stinks me out. I am afraid to mention it; she may be offended. Should I send her a carton of tissues?

MOTHER

My condolences on your video chats. Still, many of us do gross things every day. Tell your daughter what you have observed in a straightforward way. Do not characterize the behavior as disgusting or judge it in any way that is apt to increase her embarrassment: Just the facts, ma'am. With luck, she will stop once she is made aware of what she is doing.

For help with your awkward situation, send a question to SocialQ@nytimes.com, Philip Galanes on Facebook or @SocialQPhilip on X.



clearly meant a great deal to him and your aunt. What could be wrong with that? It certainly doesn't strike me that you love your father less because you were kind to someone with whom he quarreled.

As for your next steps, they are up to you. Keep writing notes to your uncle, give him a call, invite him to lunch. You may do whatever you like — or nothing at all. You have created a lovely patch of kindness here. So trust your good instincts. (Steer clear of the animosity. It is not your responsibility to broker peace among people who do not want it or to investigate the merits of cold cases.)

Is This the Airport Shuttle?

My spouse and I (early 30s) live in the suburbs of a major city. We love entertaining family and friends from out of town. The issue: airport pickups. The public transportation option can be daunting with required transfers. But there are always cabs or ride shares that cost about \$60. We pick up older guests or those traveling with young kids. Recently, though, others our age who live in cities have asked us endless questions about train schedules and other information they could find easily online. Are they fishing for pickups?

HOST

Speculating about the ulterior motives of houseguests before they even arrive does not seem to match the great generosity of your hosting impulse. It's also a stretch to suggest that asking a few annoying questions is hinting for an airport pickup. You are not required to ferry guests to your home. But since this shower of



PHOTOGRAPHS BY YE FAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

'I think aging is really one of the worst things of all time.'

Last month, the pop star Charli XCX gathered a coterie of "It girls" — models, actors, internet personalities, Julia Fox — for the video for her song "360." At the end of the video, Ms. Sevigny emerges from a convertible, takes a drag from a cigarette and poses with a group of them, who were mostly about 20 years younger than her.

"I was told everyone was doing bratty versions of themselves," she said. "I was just trying not to look 1,000 years old."

And here is the narrative difficulty with Ms. Sevigny's promotion of a rose fragrance: The scent is often associated with grandmothers.

"We like to use the word 'fresh,'" said Ms. Sevigny, who wore rose fragrances by Comme des Garçons and Hermès for years before developing her own with her friend Alia Raza, the Régime des Fleurs founder, in 2019.

"It's not a moneymaker for me in any way. But I love Alia. I love these both female-owned businesses," she said, referring to Moda Operandi, the online retailer that hosted the party.

Moda Operandi began selling Little Flower in 2023 and said the perfume is its best-selling fragrance.

Years ago, Ms. Sevigny went to a baby shower for Moda Operandi's co-founder, Lauren Santo Domingo, and brought home one of the live canaries that decorated the space.

Ms. Santo Domingo remembers the bird. She also remembers being a teenager, commuting into New York City from Greenwich, Conn., on the same train as Ms. Sevigny, watching for which train car Ms. Sevigny would board at Duran, her home station.

"I don't think she knows I was stalking her," said Ms. Santo Domingo, whose company had stocked the rooftop terrace with floral cocktails, a whimsical purple cake (the baker also made the cake for Ms. Sevigny's wedding, which was dissected in minutiae) and guests including the actress Natasha Lyonne, the designer Bathsheva

Hay and a host of "Red Scare," Anna Khachiyan.

"I wish I could just go to every party and not have my picture taken," Ms. Sevigny had said that afternoon while getting dressed. She wore a Prada skirt and cape, accessorizing with slime-colored heels and peach-colored sunglasses. "But this is not the one."

Lately, she feels more visible than ever, particularly with the demands of modern promotional tours. The internet may have loved when Ms. Sevigny went on a rant about Los Angeles in a February video for Elle. But she takes beta blockers to calm herself before going on late-night TV.

"I feel so uncomfortable being myself on camera," she said.

You know who always seems comfortable being herself on camera?

"You're so good at being you," Ms. Sevigny said she told Ms. Kardashian during their Variety conversation, which the internet has already investigated for any tinge of shade. "Plenty of movie stars just play themselves over and over and over again."

THE UNSTOPPABLES

Her Modeling Career Was Never the Dream



CELIA SOLOMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lauren Hutton in her Lower Manhattan loft last month. On working, she says, "I do it because I think it's useful to wave the flag for full-grown women."

LAUREN HUTTON

Model and actress

AGE 80

RECENT AND UPCOMING PROJECTS
Covers of Harper's Bazaar and Vogue Germany; J. Crew 40th anniversary campaign; campaigns for David Jones, Coup lingerie and Saint Laurent.

I turned 80 in November. Sometimes I feel like I'm 33. Sometimes I'm 57. I've been writing a book — a memoir — writing almost every day and, doing it, I realized I've had an extremely lucky life. Obviously anyone who has success has luck, but there are three or four other things you need — intelligence, a certain amount of talent for the gig, a strong work ethic.

I've said this before, but modeling was never the dream. At the start, I had this childhood idea of seeing the world. I grew up, the early years, in Charleston, S.C. Later we moved to mid-Central Florida, and I was this wild creature, growing up in the swamps and running through palmetto groves, with a backyard full of snakes and alligators and turtles and wild boys who would tree me.

I already knew then I had to get out there and see the world. I had to. By now I've lost count of the amount of times I've been around the globe.

When I got into modeling, I was totally ignorant about the business — and about fashion when I came to New York. After six months in the city, the only gig I could get was as a house model for Dior — showroom modeling. The other model, who despised me for some reason, kept telling me: "Well, this is as far as you're ever going to go in this business. You're cross-eyed,

you've got that gap between your teeth, you're too short." And that was that.

But then she happened to be looking at some fashion magazine and mentioned that, while we were making \$50 a week, the people in the magazine made \$50 an hour! I swear, I saw a giant lightbulb that took up the whole mirror. I knew that if I could figure out how to do that, I'd be able to get to the Far East, to Africa.

So I went after it. I got myself in front of Diana Vreeland, and suddenly I was being used by Avedon and Penn and other photographers.



In 1974, Ms. Hutton starred in Karel Reisz's "The Gambler"

Now I've been in the business for 60 years. Why do I keep doing it? Except that I take care of a bunch of people, I almost don't need the money anymore. I do it because I think it's useful to wave the flag for full-grown women. I looked around and saw that there were no older women in ads or on magazines. There were all these guys getting old — actors, athletes who still had value — but no women. So I kept working.

As told to GUY TREBAY

LOUIS VUITTON

Beneath a Freestyler's Tranquil Surface

The seven-time Olympic gold medalist Katie Ledecky gets ready for the Paris Games.

By ANDREW TRUNSKY

BETHESDA, MD. — Long before Katie Ledecky was collecting gold medals and setting world records, she seemed nonchalant about making it across the pool.

In her first race, a 25-meter freestyle, she stopped along the lane line about 10 times, sometimes to clear her goggles, sometimes to clear her nose and sometimes just to look around. But when she saw her competitors cruising past, something sparked within her. She let go. With windmill-like arms, she plowed ahead, ultimately finishing second.

When her father, cameraman in hand, asked his daughter, just 6 at the time, how the race had gone, she said, “Great!” He asked her if she was “just trying to finish,” and she responded, “Just trying hard.” The conversation left Ms. Ledecky with a kind of motto she has kept in mind as she makes final preparations for this summer’s Paris Olympics: *Great. Hard. Just trying to finish.*

Many of her early swims took place at Palisades Swim & Tennis Club, a wooded, family-friendly setting in Cabin John, Md., near Washington. Her final meet at the club was in 2014, two years after she had won her first Olympic gold medal. “Palisades” is the first chapter of her new memoir, “Just Add Water,” which comes out on Tuesday and the club’s pool remains her most meaningful place to swim.

Ms. Ledecky, now 27, and I recently met for lunch in Bethesda, Md., where she grew up. The day before, at the White House, she had been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, making her the first swimmer to receive one. During the ceremony after noting that some consider 27 old for an Olympic swimmer, President Biden said: “Katie, age is just a number, kid.”

“It took me a minute to process that joke,” Ms. Ledecky said of the 81-year-old president’s remark.

She ordered a grilled chicken salad. She had already swum 5,600 meters (or 224 lengths) that morning and had another practice in a few hours. She estimated that she swims more than 65,000 yards — or about 37 miles — a week. That adds up to 1,900 miles a year, and it means ones of staring at the black line that runs along the bottom of a pool.

The work has not been for nothing. Ms. Ledecky has won 10 Olympic medals, seven of them gold, and 25 World Championship medals, 21 of them gold. She has 24 of the top 25 times in the 800-meter freestyle and 23 of the top 25 times in the 1,500.

For Ms. Ledecky, the hours spent staring at the black line below are far from boring. The repetition allows for creativity within bounds. She focuses on every detail of her stroke — how her hand enters the water, how she rotates, how she breathes — while tuning out the stressors of everyday life. And the practices are hardly robotic or solitary.

“I think some people don’t realize that we do stop on the wall, and we do get to chat with our teammates and listen to music,” she said. “I don’t feel like it’s too monotonous, just going back and forth, flipping at every wall and staring at a black line.”

At the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, Ms. Ledecky won the 800 freestyle and took silver in the 400-meter freestyle. She won the 1,500 freestyle, a new Olympic event for women that year, beating the runner-up by over four seconds.

A couple of hours before that race, she had finished fifth in the 200 freestyle; that was the only Olympic event in Ms. Ledecky’s career in which she did not win a medal.

“I don’t think I fully recognized how challenging that was in the moment,” she said, adding the 1,500 freestyle to her Olympic schedule. “I think I was just naïve to that and thought that I could just do it all.”

Ms. Ledecky also anchored the United States’ 4x200 freestyle relay in Tokyo. The Americans came in second, losing by 0.4 seconds to China, which set a new world record.

China’s relay win is less impressive than it originally seemed. In April, The New York Times reported that 23 top Chinese swimmers, including two on the winning relay squad, had tested positive for trimetazidine, a potent banned substance, seven months before the Tokyo Games.

After Chinese officials clandestinely cleared the athletes, the World Anti-Doping Agency, charged with policing illegal substances in sports, and World Aquatics, the international governing body for swimming, chose not to intervene. (An investigation by China, the Chinese antidoping agency, suggested that the swimmers had unknowingly eaten contaminated food.)

“None of it makes sense,” Ms. Ledecky said. “I think athletes deserve answers, true answers. I think there needs to be a true independent investigation. I know there are some independent investigations



ARND BRONKHORST FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

and reviews that WADA and World Aquatics are doing now, but from the looks of it, it doesn’t seem like it’s very independent, in my opinion.”

Does Ms. Ledecky think China’s world record is tainted?

“Well, I mean, we need answers,” she said. “Yeah. I think we all feel really distressed with the leadership here and just the way the global system has addressed this issue.”

She added: “It’s not because I need a medal or I want the gold medal. We are very proud of our silver medal relay that outperformed our expectations. We had great splits, and we came together as a team.”

Preparing for Paris

In the fall of 2021, Ms. Ledecky, a graduate of Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif., moved from that city to Gainesville, Fla., home of the University of Florida. Since then, she has been training alongside the Gators’ collegiate teams and other Olympians under Anthony Nesty, the Florida swimmer and dive coach and one of the head coaches for the U.S. Olympic team.

Mr. Nesty tweaked Ms. Ledecky’s stroke “to try to lengthen things out a little bit,” as she put it, and slightly increased her daily yardage. She trains with Bobby Finke, who won gold medals in the 800 and 1500 freestyles in Tokyo, and Kiernan Smith, who took bronze in the 400 freestyle there.

“Just trying to keep up with them changed my stroke naturally,” Ms. Ledecky said.

Mr. Nesty said that Ms. Ledecky, even at her elite level, is coachable and teachable, adding, “The day-to-day grind, she enjoys it more than competing.”

Ms. Ledecky also said that she is trying to improve her kick. “A lot of people watch my races and think that I don’t kick, but under the surface I am kicking,” she said. “At least I feel like I’m kicking.”

She added that she is not focusing on the 200 freestyle ahead of Paris. Mr. Nesty has



DOUG GALLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Katie Ledecky, 27, above, and at 15, below, after her surprise victory at the 2012 London Games. Last month, Ms. Ledecky became the first swimmer to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, bottom.

endorsed the shift away from it. “Athletes aren’t machines,” he said.

Ms. Ledecky is not the most talkative in practice, and Mr. Finke said she is one of the humblest people he has ever met. “I’ve never heard her mention that she has a world record, a gold medal or a world title,” he said.

Mr. Finke and Mr. Smith were excited when they heard that Ms. Ledecky would be training with them in Gainesville, but Mr. Finke confessed that he was slightly nervous too.

“I’ll be honest, I was very scared at first just because I’ve seen how she trains in practice and how fast she goes,” Mr. Finke said. “I won’t lie, she’s beaten me a pretty good amount of times.”

It is a fact that Ms. Ledecky is the greatest freestyler of all time, he stated. “People ask, ‘Who’s the most famous person you have in your phone?’ I’m like, it’s probably Katie, for me,” Mr. Finke said.

Katie Ledecky is among the world’s most accomplished athletes, but people seem to know little about Katie Ledecky, the human.

Part of it is that most Americans follow swimming for only a couple of weeks every four years. Part of it is that Ms. Ledecky is reserved and polite; she is not very active on social media, and she does not make outlandish comments.

“I can name on one hand the number of swimmers that nobody dislikes,” said Rowdy Gaines, the three-time Olympic gold medalist who is now a swimming analyst for NBC Sports. “There is nobody that dislikes Katie Ledecky.”

Unlike some other famous American swimmers in years past, Ms. Ledecky has not gotten into the kind of trouble that generates headlines. She said she has never smoked or had an alcoholic drink, noting that it’s tough to go out drinking if you have to get up for practice at 4 a.m.

“I didn’t really go to many parties, just because that’s not my scene,” she said of her time at Stanford. Her social life centered on dinner with friends or hanging out in the dorms with students who were not on the swim team.

“I remember there were some nights, we would do watercolors,” she said. “It sounds so lame, but it wasn’t. It was a lot of fun.”

Ms. Ledecky also does not have the kind of romantic life that would attract TMZ.

“I think none of that has been a deliberate choice of life. Oh, I can’t date right now because I’m training, or, I don’t want to, or I haven’t interest in you,” she said. “None of that. It’s just a natural thing, and whether it’s coming from me or from other people being intimidated, I don’t know. I’m a friendly person at heart!”

Outside Olympic years and world championship cycles, she has stayed out of the news by not weighing in on hot-button issues. When I asked if she keeps up with political news, she said yes, before quickly following up: “I don’t want to get into politics.”

“I think everyone has the ability to choose what they feel comfortable with and what they want to speak up about,” she said. “As a current athlete and somebody still competing, I have always tried to just keep my focus on the competition and not get too involved in anything that could become controversial.”

Her thoughts seemed to go back to the revelations about the Chinese swim team: “If you feel like there’s something that doesn’t sit right, if people aren’t competing fairly — if you don’t feel like the leaders of these organizations are necessarily doing what they need to be doing — then I think you’ve got to speak up about it and try to speak with some of the people that can implement change and try to work on things.”

‘Swim Like a Girl’

In her memoir, she dips a toe into potential controversy in the last chapter, “Swim Like a Girl.” She describes the sexism that not even she has escaped and quotes some of the unintentionally sexist comparisons made by some of her Olympic teammates.

“Her stroke is like a man’s stroke,” said Connor Jaeger, who won silver in the 1500 freestyle in 2016. “I mean that in a positive way.”

“She swims like a guy,” said Ryan Lochte,

the 12-time Olympic medalist. “Her stroke. Her mentality. She’s so strong in the water. I’ve never seen a female swimmer like that.”

In her book, Ms. Ledecky also recalls an Associated Press article from 2016 with the headline, “Michael Phelps ties for silver in 100 fly.” In tiny print underneath: “Ledecky sets world record in women’s 800 freestyle.”

Some men, however, have called out the double standard. During Ms. Ledecky’s dominating 400 freestyle at the Rio de Janeiro Games in 2016, Mr. Gaines, the NBC analyst, said it loud and clear to the millions glued to their TVs: “She doesn’t swim like a man. She swims like Katie Ledecky.”

Ms. Ledecky’s book is just as much an ode to her family, coaches and mentors as it is a memoir it may be light on drama, but it goes deep on a sport that many admire but few truly understand.

It’s clear that her mother, Mary Gen Ledecky, is an enormous role model. Not only was she a collegiate swimmer, but she was one of the first recipients of an athletic scholarship after Title IX. “Title IX, now a fundamental aspect of civil rights in the United States, changed my mother’s life forever,” Ms. Ledecky writes.

But these days Title IX is under scrutiny in the sport. In March, over a dozen female college athletes sued the N.C.A.A., alleging that their Title IX rights were violated in 2022 after Lia Thomas, a transgender woman, was allowed to compete at its championships. Ms. Thomas won the 500-yard freestyle and earned two All-America honors. The issue has thrust swimming into a contentious cultural discourse.

Ms. Ledecky said she preferred not to weigh in. But she added: “I think we’re lucky to live in a country where issues can be debated, whether it’s that issue or any other issue. It’s how I feel. I think it’s important to learn perspectives of others and gain an understanding of things and learn more about where everyone comes from.”

Out of the pool, Ms. Ledecky is part of a breakfast group and a “very casual” book club with some of her teammates and coaches. She listens to classic rock: the Beatles, Billy Joel and especially Bruce Springsteen. She is a fan of the Washington Nationals (she threw out the ceremonial first pitch at a game in 2016) and the New York Islanders (her uncle is a co-owner). She was raised Catholic and still goes to church, dabbles with piano and does chores around her new house in Gainesville.

But most of her time, as has been the case for most of her life, is taken up by the sport of — no, the joy of — swimming.

And while swimming, even distance swimming, is hardly monotonous, the longer races have a masochistic side to them. You have to go out fast, but not too fast, and hold on as the pain sets in.

“I realized I was good at it from a young age, but I also recognized that I touched the wall and walked away from my first distance race a lot happier and more into it than all my teammates that just did it for the first time, too,” Ms. Ledecky said.

As she began to set age-group records and climb the ranks of American swimmers, she was not looking very far ahead. When she met with her coach in the fall of 2011 to talk about her goals, the Olympics had not crossed her mind.

Nine months later, she won the 800 freestyle final at the U.S. Olympic Trials and was off to the London Games. It was like being “transported to a different world,” she said. When she made the Olympic final, she still was viewed by most as an afterthought. But she was undaunted, telling her mother before the race: “When I make the podium, even though your seats are really high, you’ll be able to move forward for the medal ceremony!” Her mom turned to her dad and wailed.

Hours later, Ms. Ledecky, then 15, had won her first gold medal.

“I dove in and got out front, and just stayed there,” she said.

It’s a description that applies to nearly all her races. And it’s a testament to her swiftness that has guided her from Palisades to Paris — and, she hopes, to the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028, and beyond.

Great. Hard. Just trying to finish.



KEVIN MAZUR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Memoir 'BoyMom' Tackles Stereotypes

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

interpretations as a Rorschach test.

Online, #BoyMom can be a badge of honor or awarded for simply surviving the amped-up high jinks of tumbling boy-tots; or it can be a tragedy, centering on the inevitable "breakup" that must occur between mothers and son; or it can be a sendup of itself, a parody of the "toxic boy mom" who is dangerously, proudly enmeshed with her son.

Ms. Whippleman's book is not primarily about these memes. Part memoir, part reportage, it hopes to give parents, including fathers, information on raising boys today.

Ms. Whippleman, 50, is hardly the first to write about boys as if they need an operating manual. Michael Thompson's "It's a Boy!" and "How to Raise a Boy" by Michael Reichert have become classics, sometimes pressed into the hands of new parents of sons alongside bottles and onesies.

But the birth of her third son, Abe, had sent Ms. Whippleman's two older boys into even more of a frenzy: Solly turned sullen; Zephy invented a persona he called Dino Slash, kicking and biting without warning.

Ms. Whippleman turned to parenting books for guidance. "I went through one phase where everything was falling apart and I probably read two of those books a week," she said. But much of the advice felt pat, not answering her biggest questions.

Hearing redemptive boy-quotes still tossed around, like "Boys can't sit still," she bristled. Girls, it seemed, were cheered forward with slogans like "The Future is Female," suggesting no bounds on their potential. "We've been doing all this great work breaking down stereotypes for girls and talking about gender fluidity, trans kids, changing gender identity," she said, knowing that her point of view was influenced by being in the politically progressive enclave of Berkeley. "But the one category that is just so resistant to change is cis boys, and the norms and expectations for them."

So she set out to find answers by reporting on what she calls "impossible masculinity."

Unique Sympathy for Boys

The greatest surprise Ms. Whippleman said she found in her research was how much evidence there is for the relative fragility of boys compared with girls. In study after study, she found reasons to worry about boys and men: Premature boys are less likely to survive than premature girls; and boys are more likely to be diagnosed with neurodevelopmental disorder like autism and A.D.H.D., and later schizophrenia.

In addition, she found that early adverse circumstances, like poverty or maternal depression, have more negative long-term effects on boys than they do on girls. According to a study from the Brookings Institution, boys born into poverty are less likely to get out of it later in life than girls born in the same conditions.

She came away convinced, largely by the work of the psychologist and researcher Alan Shore, that boy babies need more care than girls, like holding, rocking and soothing, a notion she details in the book, which many readers might find startling, if not downright wrongheaded.

In a review of "BoyMom" for The New Yorker, the writer Jessica Winter dismisses it entirely. "She insists that 'boys need more parenting than girls, not less' — and, rather stunningly, she finds two experts who say much the same," Ms. Winter writes. Asked to comment, Ms. Whippleman said: "I had no preconceived notion of infant neuroscience," she said. "But I found there was a huge body of literature to back that up."

Ms. Whippleman said she did have a hard time reconciling her new understanding of boys' fragility with her disdain for another oft-repeated maxim: that "boys will be boys." The implication that boy biology is so distinct and nonnegotiable that one must simply survive it often seemed to Ms. Whippleman like an excuse not to parent, or a shrugging off of bad behavior.

Lise Eliot, a professor of neuroscience at Rosalind Franklin University and the author of "Pink Brain, Blue Brain," noted that there are quantifiable differences between boys and girls: For example, boys' brains are bigger, on average, than girls' and grow at a faster rate; and girls go through puberty before boys.

But there is no consensus on the question of nurture versus nature when it comes to boys and girls and to what extent each matters, she said. Some researchers like Dr. Eliot believe that these biological differences are overstated. "I think our expectations for boys keep getting lower as we blame everything on their supposed brain immaturity and prenatal testosterone," she added.

Dr. Eliot argues that parents' expectations of how girls and boys should behave are so ingrained, the fantasies of each gender beginning well before birth, that we can't help but mold our children in these directions. "Brain sex differences have been overhyped," she said. "Nature exerts a tilt, but I think we are using that as a crutch. If we want boys to become like girls, we have to treat them more like girls."

Richard Reeves, formerly a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, now the founding president of the American Institute for Boys and Men, a think tank devoted to policy issues, said that when it comes to academics, especially English and literacy skills, "the broad story is that boys are falling a long way behind girls."

Mr. Reeves depicts a generation of floundering boys in the public school system, noting that, among the top 10 percent of grade-point averages, two-thirds belong to girls and, among the bottom 10 percent, two-thirds belong to boys. Mr. Reeves notes that the G.P.A. gap has been growing. And: "In K-12 schools, 23 percent of boys have been diagnosed with developmental disability," he said. "At a certain point you have to wonder if it's the system, rather than the boys."

"In 2020, the decline in college enrollment was seven times greater for male than for female students," Mr. Reeves writes, noting that this is a finding with major implications for economic mobility.

Mr. Reeves has also looked at how gender and race intersect in education. "While race remains a powerful factor in educational



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH PALMER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. SOURCE IMAGES BY TONY CHAN, SARAH SHERRIN, GUY LAWRENCE, SARAH PALMER

achievement, gender weighs heavily on outcomes too," he wrote in an email. "While white girls are outpacing all boys at school, Black boys are at a disadvantage, including compared to Black girls."

And the problems boys are struggling with become exacerbated with age. According to Mr. Reeves's research, men are more likely to die from so-called deaths of despair, including suicide and drug overdose. Last month, Melinda French Gates announced that, though the majority of her grants — each worth \$20 million — will go to help women and families, one will go to support Mr. Reeves's policy work on boys and men.

Stuck Inside the 'Man Box'

"Dudes, dudes, are you OK?" Or do I have to come make a pillow rule?" said a teacher at

the Allen-Stevenson School on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, on a recent Tuesday morning. She had come to quell a brief flurry of pillow-related mischief among a group of third graders sprawled on the classroom floor, their preferred positions for reading hour.

The school is one of New York's most prestigious all-boys options, available to those who can pay \$80,000 in tuition (or are fortunate enough to earn financial aid). And however antiquated single-sex education may sound to some, it is as popular as ever, if not more so, according to Emily Glickman, president of Abacus Guide Educational Consulting, who has helped parents navigate the K-12 application process in New York City for 25 years.

Here on East 78th Street, "boy-ology" is a buzzword in the schools' lexicon, referring

to the collection of strategies on how, specifically, to best "meet boys where they are." These include chairs that wiggle, flexible seating arrangements, Velcro strips on desks to help with sensory input, fidget sticks and body breaks.

"Have you heard of the Man Box?" Samara Spielberg, head of the Spanish department at Allen-Stevenson, asked me, standing in front of a large L.G.T.B.Q. flag the boys made with individually collaged squares. "The Man Box is what society tells boys and men they can be and should be. Boys don't cry. Boys don't show their emotions. And anything that's outside the Man Box, you're penalized socially."

Dr. Cecil Webster, the Boston psychiatrist, has his own version of the Man Box, but he calls it the Man Bucket. He said he thinks about it often in his consulting room, sitting across from boys and men. For many of the men Dr. Webster sees in therapy, he said, "it's often their first experience having emotional intimacy with another man." It's a startling assertion to make of an adult, but friendships between boys, researchers have found, often thin out in adolescence as boys make their way toward adulthood.

"Boy friendships are so vitally important, and often there's something that can happen where that might feel heroic, like, 'People are going to think I'm gay, or I'm soft,'" Dr. Webster said. "Which then leads to a lot of sacrifice of emotional intimacy that we really need as men."

Nobe Way, a professor of developmental psychology at N.Y.U., has seen these patterns over decades of research, describing them in her book "Deep Secrets: Boys' Friendships and the Crisis of Connection." However dated they may seem, they somehow persist: Dr. Way expands upon these themes in her coming book, "Rebels With a Cause," arguing that we are all trapped in "boy culture," a toxic value system based on stereotypes of masculinity, one that has lost sight of true human connection.

In fact, this is one of Ms. Whippleman's lamentations: the awkward, stilted interactions she has observed among her sons and their friends. Their conversations seemed so often to stumble into silence or revolve around video games. To her, they seemed so unlike the deep friendships she had growing up.

Ms. Whippleman's sons are now 13, 10 and 6. Two out of the three are now prescribed stimulants (national trends show that boys are roughly twice as likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder than girls). The level of frenzy in Ms. Whippleman's household has calmed a bit, enough that she is admittedly "happier."

"The whole conversation around boys is toxic from all sides," Ms. Whippleman said. "I want to give my boys and all boys different options for how to be in the world."

The photographer Sarah Palmer culled images from her personal collection for this article, with tender moments between her and her boys, as well as her friends and their sons.

'The whole conversation around boys is toxic from all sides.'

RUTH WHIPPLEMAN
AUTHOR OF 'BOY MOM'

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INTO HOPE AND STARTED A MOVEMENT

In 2021, the rise of violence against the Asian community made even the simple act of taking public transportation unsafe. So, Maddy started a fund to pay for cab rides for those in the Asian community that needed it most, including women, the elderly, and the LGBTQ+ community. With over \$100,000 raised in just two days, she started a movement based on love that lives on today.

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OUT & ABOUT

Being recognized was 'confirmation that the work I make is much bigger than me.'

LA TOYA RUBY FRAZIER
AN HONOREE



The artist
Refik Anadol.

A Brilliant Palette Filled With Artists

By MELISSA GUERRERO
Photographs by REBECCA SMEYNE

Around this time last June, an orange dystopian sky loomed over the Museum of Modern Art's Party in the Garden as wildfire smoke from Canada made its way to New York City.

While this year's event wasn't exempt from air-quality alerts (a health advisory was issued on Tuesday), a mildly humid day in the high 70s seemed like a more tempered environment for the nearly 1,500 artists, curators, art patrons and supporters of MoMA to gather for the museum's biggest annual fund-raising event.

"I enjoy seeing all the people — it's a celebration, and it's different every year," said the artist Joan Jonas, one of the honored guests.

Other artists honored alongside Ms. Jonas included the digital artist Refik Anadol and the photographer and activist LaToya Ruby Frazier, who have also recently graced the museum's gallery walls. Ronnie Heyman, the former president of the museum's board of trustees, was also honored.



The artist
Refik Anadol.



The broadcast
journalist
Gayle King.



The colorful
setting for the
MoMA dinner.



The
filmmaker
Andrew
Jarecki.



The
artist
Rashid
Johnson.



Climate activists
protesting during
a performance.



Seydam Lansing,
right, a MoMA P.S.I.
beard member,
with a furry plus one.

MoMA's Party in the Garden raised more than \$5.5 million this year.



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Vows

SHERI COLE and BETH MOORE

Best Friends Forever, and Now Married Too

By KERA BOLONIK

In 2000, Sheri Kathleen Cole and Ellen Elizabeth Moore took one of the greatest steps toward commitment in the modern era: They bought a home together.

The act of purchasing a small rowhouse in the Southwest Center City section of Philadelphia felt like a natural progression in a friendship that began in 1992, when the two met at the University of Cincinnati while pursuing master's degrees in women's studies.

The glue that initially bonded them? Duran Duran. Ms. Cole, 54, who described fandom as "basically obligatory" when she was in high school, hadn't listened to the band much since. That is, until she met Ms. Moore, also 54 and a lifelong "Duranite," as die-hard fans are called.

Ms. Cole's interests focused on the way images of girls and women created by men affect women's sense of self — and Duran Duran's videos offered plenty of material. "Beth and I spent hours picking apart their videos" and analyzing what she described as "pornographic images of women" (Nevertheless, she remains a fan). Their fervent discussions inspired Ms. Cole to write her master's thesis on the subject.

And so Ms. Cole was hooked — not just on the new-wave's music, again, but on spending every moment with her new friend as they devoured endless episodes of ABC's "Supermarket Sweep," MTV's "The Real World" and "so much Graeter's ice cream," referring to a beloved Ohio treat.

The two recognized in each other a kindred spirit. "We talk about all the same things," Ms. Moore said. "We were in each other's pockets all the time."

But Ms. Cole was worried that their might be a whirlwind friendship, especially as Ms. Moore, who was one year ahead in the program, was finishing her master's just as Ms. Cole was diving in. Ms. Moore, who grew up in Vineland, N.J., had plans to move in with a college friend in Ocean City, N.J., after graduation to live near her mother. "I didn't know what else to do with my life," she said.

For Ms. Cole, however, "that second year of graduate school was really hard for me because I didn't have my best friend around." Though they spoke on the phone every night, she wondered whether Ms. Moore would grow tired of her.

Those anxieties were allayed when it came time for Ms. Cole to defend her thesis in the spring of 1994. There, sitting in the crowd among her advisers, was Ms. Moore, who had traveled back to Cincinnati to support her. "I thought, 'Maybe she likes me as much as I like her,'" Ms. Cole said. And then Ms. Moore invited her to move in with her in New Jersey. "I was taken aback by the invitation — not because she didn't want to live with Ms. Moore, but because Ms. Cole, who had grown up in Kettering, Ohio, had never considered leaving. 'People don't leave Ohio,'" she said. "You got married and you stay in the area."

Ms. Moore joked that there was another part of Ms. Cole who fantasized about becoming the next Andrea Dworkin, the feminist writer and anti-pornography activist, and that she was the two choices she gave herself. "I showed Sheri a middle ground," she added.

Ms. Cole described that middle ground as sharing a home with her best friend, and having fun together. She said it was Ms. Moore who inspired her to "double down on pop culture and the stuff that can bring you joy, but also that you can be critical of."

As Ms. Cole considered that third choice, she reminded herself how often she told people, "There is one time in your life where you put everything you own in a car and go somewhere and rebuild your life." So once graduation came that May, Ms. Cole followed her own advice, loaded up her belongings and made way for South Jersey, where the two women rented a place in Collingswood, five miles east of the Center City section of Philadelphia.



PHOTOGRAPH BY GUSTAV VON BECKHOFER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



Top, Beth Moore, left, and Sheri Cole flanking a fanatical friend at their June 1 wedding celebration at Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia, and, above, taking a walk up the aisle.

The next year, in 1995, Ms. Moore was hired as a recruiter for the school district of Philadelphia, where she now works as a human resources systems administrator. Ms. Cole is the executive director of the Wardrobe, an organization that provides people in need with business attire, a position she has held for nearly 25 years.

When they bought their home in 2000, it was the first official step in being recognized as a unit. The women are already known by everyone in their lives as "Beth-and-Sheri." "It's like one word," Beth-and-Sheri," said Lisa Mayne, a college friend of Ms. Moore's. They do everything together, from travel to attending Broadway shows and arena concerts.

They show up as a pair at work events and friend-and-family gatherings. And like many Philadelphians, Ms. Moore and Ms. Cole are avid fans of the Phillies and the Eagles, often watching games fully decked out in team gear.

Ms. Moore and Ms. Cole are not lesbians, though they say they've enjoyed their lives as a gay, straight, transgender and cisgender — has long assumed they are. But their self-described "tragically codependent" relationship more closely resembled the iconic cinematic friendship between Romy and Michele from "Romy and Michele's High School Reunion" than, say, Betty and Tina on "The L Word."

While both women have had boyfriends in the past, neither is interested in dating or romantic relationships. Both women identify as asexual. They have always had separate bedrooms. And they are fully devoted to each other.

They sometimes say they're in a "Boston marriage," a 19th-century term used to describe a household with two women who lived together independently of men or male support. Boston marriage has often been used as a euphemism for lesbian couples, which presumed that all women who live together were romantically and sexually involved. Like Ms. Cole and Ms. Moore, that wasn't true in all these situations, but they definitely were living on their own terms and shattering heteronormative conventions.

The women's commitment to each other as life partners has deepened over the years as practical matters have arisen — like the time Ms. Moore realized that the health insurance she had through work was far better, and less expensive than Ms. Cole's. So they took the administrative steps to register as domestic partners, allowing Ms. Moore to put Ms. Cole on her plan.

As they grew older, and cared for their aging parents, the friends began to consider whether they should take a bigger step. "Covid brought the issue of health care into focus," Ms. Cole said.

ON THIS DAY

When June 1, 2024

Where Philadelphia

The Day After The next day, the women hosted a reception on the roof deck of their duplex apartment in Philadelphia, welcoming nearly 100 guests — family and friends from high school, college and work. They offered cupcakes with rainbow sprinkles, as well as Philly delicacies like hoagies, Philadelphia pretzels and Tastykakes.

New Traditions The women had custom commemorative rings made, one in rose gold, the other in white gold, with a band of purple amethyst and a rainbow of gems (diamond, citrine, emerald, ruby, blue sapphire, pink sapphire) encircling a watermelon tourmaline stone.

A commitment to each other that has deepened over the years.

The women considered what sickness and death might look like for them without legal protection. They worried about not having the right to advocate for each other in times of crisis. There is "no one else who will care as much about my legacy," Ms. Cole said.

When the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015, they were presented with another option. But in the years immediately after the ruling, Ms. Cole and Ms. Moore hesitated, fearing that as non-gay people they would be infringing on gay people's hard-won rights. "That was for other people who had fought and suffered for their love, and that wasn't quite us. We were 'just friends,'" Ms. Moore said. She was starting to realize, however, that "there is no 'just about friends'."

Over the past year, with the encouragement of friends, family and colleagues, the women came to appreciate that they had a place on the queer spectrum — the A in L.G.B.T.Q.I.A. — and that they needed protection. And as they bought a new home in 2022, their financial adviser and mortgage broker also suggested they marry. "Legally the only thing that will solidify our status is something called 'marriage.' And that's problematic," Ms. Cole said. "But it's what we have."

Which raised the question: What is the purpose of marriage?

"It used to be a legal entanglement that passed you on from your father to your husband," Ms. Cole said. This has evolved, of course, all the more so with these friends. "What matters to us is friendship, kindness and support," she said. "That is what we are to one another, and that is — or should be — the core definition of a 'marriage' and 'partnership.'"

As with their domestic partnership, their pragmatic reasoning led the women to approach marriage like paper work and take it to City Hall. Their friends and family caught wind of their plans, however, and wanted to celebrate the women's 32 years of friendship and partnership, and bear witness to their exchange of vows — much to their delight and surprise.

On June 1, Ms. Cole and Ms. Moore were married in a whimsical 45-minute ceremony in a box at Citizens Bank Park just before the first pitch of the Phillies versus St. Louis Cardinals game. (The Phillies won.) Ms. Moore wore jeans, a Phillies Hawaiian shirt and rainbow-Pride Tevas; Ms. Cole had on a black dress under a Phillies team jersey, and Toms slippers with rainbow-Pride elastic. Both brides wore Phillies baseball caps with veils attached to the back.

Standing before 25 of their nearest and dearest (and, later, jokingly, the Phillies mascot, the Phillie Phanatic), the brides spoke about their devotion to each other: "You are my soul mate, and the person I want to grow old with, even if we don't share a bed," Ms. Moore said in her vows. "You're my favorite person, which is why, 'at every table, I'll save you a seat,'" she added, quoting Taylor Swift in the song "Lover."

Friends' daughters tossed popcorn instead of flowers. In place of a song, Ms. Moore's niece read an excerpt from "For Good" from the musical "Wicked"; other friends read the E.E. Cummings poem, "I carry your heart with me (I carry it in)." Then there was the self-administered exchange of vows, legal in Pennsylvania.

Ms. Cole declared to Ms. Moore, "It's easier to be fearless when I see you taking the step with me. Thank you for telling me once that I deserved a life filled with joy because you know what? And then she motioned her arm around to Ms. Moore and the crowd of family — kin and chosen — who had gathered to celebrate them. "THIS... this life doesn't suck."

Jamila Wynter, Phillip Jones

A Mayor's Proposal Is Accepted at the White House

Within 10 minutes of his first date with Dr. Jamila Scarlett Wynter in 2018, Phillip Damon Jones announced his intention to move back to Newport News, Va., to run for mayor in four years.

"Where's Newport News?" she asked as they applied to jobs on the rooftop of Felipe's Taperia in Cambridge, Mass., late on a Saturday afternoon during Memorial Day weekend.

Mr. Jones, 34, then a captain training newly commissioned officers in war fighting tactics at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia, grew up in Hampton Roads, Va., and later moved to neighboring Newport News with his parents, who had served as U.S. Air Force pilots.

"I wanted to give back," he said. "I wanted the entire city to reach its full potential." A month earlier, when they

matched on the Hinge dating app, Dr. Wynter, 33, had no clue that Mr. Jones even lived in Virginia. "We were equally yoked," said Dr. Wynter, who grew up in Atlanta and Montego Bay, Jamaica, and liked the mix of photos he had posted — in a military uniform with his medals, hiking and in a tuxedo.

As they began texting, he explained that he had switched the app's location to the Boston area from Virginia while he stayed with a friend in Cambridge, and visited Harvard, where he was headed that August. He forgot to switch it back.

"She is a beautiful woman, super smart," said Mr. Jones, who has a bachelor's degree in history with merit from the United States Naval Academy and a joint master's degree in public policy from Harvard's Kennedy School and an M.B.A. from its business school. Dr. Wynter was then a first-

year resident in internal medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, and received a medical degree from Brown. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in medical anthropology from Yale and is now a gastroenterologist at the Riverside Medical Group in Newport News.

After Mr. Jones told her he was about to start a summer engineering-technology internship in China, she was resigned to wait until the fall semester to see him. He saw it differently. "I needed to stay top of mind," he said.

Two weeks later, he flew 450 miles for their first date in Cambridge. He arrived 15 minutes early.

"He seemed a little bit nervous," said Dr. Wynter, who was on call that weekend. "He was a cutie-pie and well-mannered." They spent three hours at the restaurant, but Dr. Wynter was called to work the night shift.

WEDDINGS



"She took my breath away," said Mr. Jones, fascinated that she spent her free time volunteering at a community health center for the underserved in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. Before her shift began, they went to his friend's place in Cambridge, where Mr. Jones warmed up some Korean dumplings. They met the next afternoon at

Joe's on Newbury Street for brunch in Boston, strolled around a bit, and then went to her apartment where they had their first kiss before he left.

"I thought he could be the one," she said, and saw him again a couple of weeks later while staying with friends in Washington. He took her to a shooting range (her "first and last time") and the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

Their relationship took off when he moved to Cambridge, where he shared a house with three roommates. After a small gathering for his birthday in September, they made their relationship official.

In 2020, as Covid hit, she had a gastroenterology fellowship at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York and was an emergency medical worker, while he completed classes at Harvard remotely and moved into his parents' home in Newport News.

In March 2022, he officially jumped into the mayoral race, with three other candidates.

Dr. Wynter, who became an unofficial campaign manager, knocked on doors and rode down Main Street with him during the

July Fourth parade.

He won by a landslide, with 40.5 percent of the vote, and became the youngest elected mayor in Newport News.

On Dec. 16, 2022, while he was among a dozen newly elected mayors visiting the White House, she accompanied him. At the House liaison had secretly helped arrange his proposal that day, her birthday, and instructed them to wait on the balcony in the office of the second gentleman, Doug Emhoff, for an interview.

"I'm taking pictures of the Washington Monument," she said, and as she turned around, he was down on one knee.

On May 13, 2023, they signed a legal marriage certificate at Newport News City Hall. After Dr. Wynter's fellowship in New York ended in June 2023, she relocated to Newport News, where Mr. Jones bought a home and the couple now live.

On May 25, the couple exchanged vows before 160 guests at sunset outside on a cliff at Ocean Cliff Hotel in Negril, Jamaica. The Rev. Dr. Darryl Jones, an Assemblies of God minister and the groom's father, led the ceremony. ROSALIE R. RADMOSKY

Vows

FIELD NOTES

When Your Wedding Singer Is a Headliner

Some couples are booking celebrities to give surprise performances on their big day.

By STEPHANIE CAIN

Wendy Mazur said her “jaw hit the floor” when she saw her favorite pop singer, Goldfrank, walk out with his guitar during her first dance with Jerry Bedwell at their wedding in April 2022.

The couple considered the ballad “Upside Down” their song and had made it the theme of their reception at City Winery in Nashville. Their guest book, for example, was a custom puzzle of the “Upside Down” cover art.

Mr. Bedwell, 55, who works in information technology, surprised Ms. Mazur, 47, by hiring the musician to perform the love song live.

“I still get teary-eyed thinking about what Jerry did for me, making Goldfrank part of our wedding day,” said Ms. Mazur, a technology consultant and freelance writer. “What a loving surprise he gave me!”

Instead of opting for a simple recording for the first dance or a playlist for the after-party, some couples are splurging on surprise performers — Broadway stars, singer-songwriters, Grammy-winning acts — for their weddings, treating friends and family members to unexpected, meaningful experiences.

Celebrity performances at weddings have recently made headlines: In April, Ankur Jain, the chief executive of Bolt Rewards, a loyalty rewards company, arranged to have the singer Robin Thicke and the electric violinist Lindsey Stirling for his wedding in Cairo to Enika Hammond, a wrestler with World Wrestling Entertainment.

For Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant’s recent pre-wedding celebration in Jammargar, India, Rihanna took the stage, as well as the Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan. Mariah Carey sang her top hits for the fashion retail executive Umar Kamani and the model Nada Adelle at their wedding reception in Antibes, France, in May.

“A surprise headliner is not something the majority of guests have ever experienced before, even if they have been to dozens of weddings,” said Tracy Taylor Ward, an event planner in New York who most recently worked with Flo Rida for a wedding performance. “It’s incredibly memorable and fun.”



Booking a headliner isn't cheap, costing thousands of dollars to \$3 million, Ms. Ward said. A top name like Rihanna or Lady Gaga could fetch up to \$5 million, said Josh Friedman, the owner of Elan Artists, an entertainment services company in New York that books performers for weddings, among other events.

More couples have requested well-known musical acts over the last decade, Mr. Friedman said, with a greater spike after the Covid-19 pandemic. Popular requests, he said, include John Mayer, John Legend, Flo Rida, Maroon 5, Zac Brown Band and Andrea Bocelli.

Marshall Weinstein, who runs the event production agency SET Artist Management, worked with Ms. Ward to surprise his wife, Ariel Moses, with a performance by one of her favorite artists, Mr. Cheeks, at

Wendy Mazur and Jerry Bedwell dancing to the ballad “Upside Down” performed live by Goldfrank at their Nashville wedding in April 2022.

their wedding reception in February 2016 at Gotham Hall in New York.

He thought it would be a playful “throw-back moment” to have Mr. Cheeks rap his 2001 hit, “Lights, Camera, Action.”

“The look on her face was priceless; that’s why I did it,” Mr. Weinstein said of Ms. Moses, a publicist. “I would do it a thousand times over again.”

The cost for Mr. Weinstein for Mr. Cheeks’s one-song performance: around \$10,000.

Mr. Friedman divides headliners into two categories: low background music for a ceremony, dinner or first dance, and upbeat party tunes for a reception or after-party. He has coordinated a variety of acts: John Mayer to perform “Daughters” for a father-daughter dance; Lady Gaga to sing jazz renditions of her hits during dinner; and Pitbull to kick off late-night, high-energy dancing.

He recommended that couples think not only about their favorite musicians, but also consider what would fit the crowd and the destination. He suggested Shaggy for island weddings and Mr. Bocelli for weddings in Italy. If couples want a dance party, he recommends Ne-Yo or Flo Rida, who both have cross-generational hits. For couples with smaller budgets, he might consider hiring a tenor from the Los Angeles Opera or a Broadway star — just not Idina Menzel, he said. (The range for bigger stars is \$150,000 to \$250,000.)

Eddie Kay, 41, who works in computer engineering, and Alex Zhou, 32, who recently earned her Ph.D. in economics, hired the singer Katherine Ho to perform in English and Mandarin for their wedding in Saratoga, Calif., in April. Ms. Ho is known for her Mandarin cover of Coldplay’s “Yellow” in the film “Crazy Rich Asians,” and Mr. Kay felt that the performance would be welcomed by their Chinese family members in attendance.

Evan Ross Katz, 35, a writer and podcaster, and Billy Jacobson, 30, an engineer, wanted someone “iconic” for their Maynuptials in New York. So the couple booked Mandy Moore, who performed her 2000 love song “I Wanna Be With You,” as well as her top hit, “Candy.”

When hiring a music star, couples need to factor in expenses like travel, accommodations, meals, production equipment and even green room requests, which can add to the overall cost, said Jordan Kahn, who

owns a namesake music company in Dallas. A headliner’s tour schedule, the wedding location and the number of songs performed can all increase the price as well, he said. Couples may also have to cover the costs for security teams, managers, assistants and other members of the entourage.

A cottage industry has emerged as vendors seek to help couples navigate the process. Music companies that supply D.J.s and wedding bands, like Mr. Kahn’s company and Elan Artists, often serve as the liaisons between talent managers and couples to secure talent and produce the final show.

Rachel Dalton, the president of a namesake production company in New York, helps couples negotiate and finalize contracts with talent using her background as an entertainment lawyer. Her team also personally escorts the performer to and from the venue and ensures that every technical requirement is met. Her production team worked with such names as Chris Stapleton, Alicia Keys and the Rolling Stones.

“Everything must be the artist’s agreement so the couple is protected,” Ms. Dalton said. “It’s a real investment and must be treated as such.”

When David Levy, 29, the royalties manager for a music company, booked Derek Sanders of Mayday Parade to perform three songs during his Brooklyn wedding in May with Megan Carter, 29, a pharmacist, he also hired a sound engineer and a D.J. to meet equipment needs and make sure that the day-of logistics ran smoothly.

Mr. Sanders sang “Miserable at Best,” one of Ms. Carter’s favorite songs, for the couple’s first dance, followed by two other hits, “I Swear This Time I Mean It” and “Your Song.”

“Derek didn’t just sing and leave; he hung around and took photos with our guests,” Mr. Levy said.

Many musicians enjoy performing at weddings and will often include a meet-and-greet with guests as part of the performance package. “This is not a corporate event for a faceless company, nor is it a concert,” said Jay Siegan, who books 200 wedding a year with headliners like Celine Dion, the Killers and the Wu-Tang Clan through his company, Jay Siegan Presents, based in Santa Barbara, Calif.

“This is the singular most important event of someone’s life,” he said.

WEDDINGS

Ally Moreo,
Matthew Gutierrez

Football, Breakfasts and Then a First Date

Alexandra Paige Moreo and Matthew Alexander Gutierrez went on their first date in April 2017, when they were sophomores at Syracuse University. But they had already been on many “unofficial dates,” as they now refer to them, while working together for the student newspaper.

They both covered sports for The Daily Orange, where Mr. Gutierrez was a reporter and editor, and Ms. Moreo a photographer and photo editor. On long drives to games, they got to know each other, first as colleagues and friends. Somewhere along the way, Ms. Moreo grew more interested.

“I definitely thought he was handsome,” said Ms. Moreo, 27, who goes by Ally. “He has these radiant blue eyes.”

On reporting trips, there was often a third person in the car with them. “I think every single third person knew I was into Matthew,” Ms. Moreo said. However, “I don’t think Matthew knew I was into Matthew.”

When a mutual friend told Mr. Gutierrez how Ms. Moreo felt, he started texting her more often. After covering morning practices for the Syracuse football team, they began to get breakfast together, chatting before classes. They had their first official date at Pastabistros, a restaurant in Syracuse. “It was just a very flowing date conversation,” said Mr. Gutierrez, also 27. “There was no awkwardness or anyone trying to impress anyone.”

Toward the end of the semester, they became a couple. For the Fourth of July, he visited her — and her large extended family — in Hampton Bays, N.Y. Though meeting her family was overwhelming at first, Mr. Gutierrez quickly connected with them. “Right away I could just see how tight-knit the family was,” he said.

That weekend, on the beach under the stars, they talked late into the night. “I think it was those conversations that really solidified to me that this was my person,” Ms. Moreo said.

In 2019, they graduated from Syracuse with bachelor’s degrees — his in journalism and finance, hers in photojournalism. Ms. Moreo is now a program manager for the National Geographic Society’s Photo Camp, working remotely from Brooklyn and traveling to camps. Mr. Gutierrez is a freelance writer and journalist who has written for The New York Times, The Atlantic and The Washington Post, among other news media outlets.

On a trip in April 2021, Ms. Moreo knew she wanted to marry Mr. Gutierrez. For about three months, they drove down the East Coast, through the South and to national parks in the West, in a 2010 camper van.

“That was a very tight van, and we made it work,” Mr. Gutierrez said. Ms. Moreo recalled a muggy, mosquito-filled night on Jekyll Island, Ga. “We were still having a lot of fun,” she said. In the



summer of 2022, they moved in together in the Park Slope, Brooklyn.

That December, Ms. Moreo was helping to clean her grandmother’s house in Queens when she found a box of old photos that belonged to her grandfather, taken in Italy when he served in the U.S. Army. She asked her grandmother about the people in the photos, and she brought out letters from them, some dating to the 1960s. At the time, Ms. Moreo was in between jobs and looking for an adventure. She took the letters’ return address and started planning a trip to Italy to find her family.

Mr. Gutierrez went with her, seeing a special opportunity in the trip. In January 2023, on their first day in Rome, he told Ms. Moreo that they had a tour planned at the Spanish Steps — but there was no tour. At the steps, he got down on one knee and asked her to marry him. She was surprised, and said: “Of course.”

Later on the trip, they went to the address from the letters and knocked on the door, to no avail. But there happened to be a man walking by with a dog, and she asked if he knew her family. He called up his friend, whose last name is Moreo, who came to meet them. She showed him the photos, and they realized they were related. They spent two days staying with her newfound family in Bari, sharing meals and stories.

The couple were married May 25 in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park by Jim Moreo, the bride’s father, who received a one-day New York State officiant license. Before 16 guests, they held a short ceremony under a tree, followed by an early dinner at Ottava, an Italian restaurant in Park Slope.

In their years together, they have navigated school, graduation, jobs, distance, Covid and more. “There was never an upcoming stage of our life that we feared, because our life was constantly moving and changing,” Ms. Moreo said. “It was just kind of like: Life is coming at us and we’ll take it together.” That became their mantra.

ANNA GRACE LEE

Katie Brownlie,
Brian Nagy

After a Dancing Mishap, a Long Wait to Get in Sync

Kathryn Marie Brownlie wasn’t thrilled when, in November 2018, one of her two younger sisters, Meghan, grabbed her phone and told Brian Stephen Nagy via text that yes, she would go on a date with him. Though Mr. Nagy seemed like a nice enough guy, she wasn’t sure she was ready to date the man who had once accidentally given her a concussion.

Ms. Brownlie, 27, and Mr. Nagy, 28, have known each other since before either could tie their shoes. Both grew up in Hillsborough Township, N.J., where their fathers, Mark Brownlie and Stephen Nagy, were volunteer firefighters and friends. Their mothers, Shelley Brownlie and Diane Nagy, volunteered as ladies’ auxiliary board members, putting on socials and fund-raisers for the fire company.

“We would go to birthday parties and other events there,” said Ms. Brownlie, who goes by Katie. When she was 5 or 6, “Brian was dancing with me on a patio, and I took a little spill and hit my head.” Ever since, parental lore has held that Mr. Nagy was somehow responsible for the accident that caused her concussion.

But no hard feelings cropped up. The senior Brownlies and Nags, all still involved with the fire company, never stopped hanging out. “I remember going over to Katie’s house to watch Giants games when I was 12 or 13,” Mr. Nagy said. “Her dad would throw mini parties in the cul-de-sac.” By the time they were teenagers, he said, “she didn’t give me the time of day.”

Once both had entered Hillsborough High School, “we were just in our own circles, without much overlap,” Ms. Brownlie said. At a post-college encounter at the fire company on Nov. 17, 2018, when Ms. Brownlie was living at home with her parents and Mr. Nagy had moved in with roommates in Morristown, N.J., he took a stab at shifting the dynamic.

Ms. Brownlie was finishing a master’s degree in education at Rutgers, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology. Mr. Nagy, who has a bachelor’s degree in education from the College of New Jersey and a master’s in education from Clemson University, was teaching at West Morris Mendham High School. He now teaches history at Chatham High School.

“I think probably my whole life I thought Katie was cute,” he said. “But she was always doing her own thing.”

At the fire company, where families and friends had gathered to celebrate Shelley Brownlie’s 50th birthday, Mr. Nagy figured it couldn’t hurt to ask her daughter how her student teaching was going. Ms. Brownlie was indifferent as ever. “I think I was just like, ‘eh, whatever,’” she said.

But a week later, his roommates persuaded him to ask her on a date. “We made a bet that if I



didn’t text her, I’d have to run a 5K,” he said. “I’m not a big runner. So the text was sent.” As it whooshed from his screen, he threw the phone across the room. It sat on a sofa cushion for a half-hour.

Meghan Brownlie had been quick to say yes for her sister. “She was just like, ‘Katie, just go and use it as a practice date. What’s the worst that can happen?’” Ms. Brownlie said. In early December 2018, Mr. Nagy picked Ms. Brownlie up to go bowling. He won all three games they played, but he felt that the date was the conversational equivalent of a gutter ball. “I remember going back to my house and my buddies asking how did it go. I said, ‘She didn’t seem very interested.’”

She was, though. “I think I’m just a nervous person,” she said. “It thought he was handsome and a gentleman. I had a good time.” She texted him her thanks and said she’d like to see him again. Over lunch in Princeton, N.J., a week later, they reminisced about firehouse gatherings and discussed their careers. Ms. Brownlie teaches fourth grade at John Marshall Elementary in Edison, N.J.

By January, they were seeing each other regularly. On Jan. 26, 2019, after a booty outing to the Farmer’s Frog in Morristown, Mr. Nagy was feeling more in love than ever, and a little bold. “I said, ‘Do we want to make this official?’” She did.

In the spring of 2021, they moved to an apartment in Bedminster. On Dec. 2, 2022, during a walk through the Morrisstown Green to check out the annual holiday display, he dropped to one knee and proposed.

On June 1, at the Rock Island Lake Club in Sparta, N.J., 179 guests gathered for their wedding. The Rev. Stephen Eckert, pastor at the South Branch Reformed Church in Hillsborough, led a short ceremony. Later, the father of the bride made his way to the microphone for a toast. “It felt funny saying welcome to the family to Brian,” he said. “Because he’s been a part of the family for 30 years.” TAMMY LAGORCE

How modern boyhood has become a lesson in loneliness.
BY RUTH WHIPMAN | PAGE 10



This graduation season, we must remind kids that their destiny is not shaped in high school.
BY MEGAN K. STACK | PAGE 11

Did the Trump verdict change voters' minds? We asked 11 of them.
PAGE 12

IDEAS | CONVERSATION | ANALYSIS

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024

Sunday Opinion

The New York Times



Can We Finally Have
An Honest Conversation
About Covid?

The lab leak theory, explained.

BY ALINA CHAN | PAGE 6

Fauci, Congress and the
fragility of trust.

BY ZEYNEP TUFEKCI | PAGE 6

NICOLE HARZ



CHANEL

COLLECTION MÉTIERS D'ART 2023/24

Columns & Commentary

Itemized: The news in objects.

NICHOLAS KRISTOF



DEB WINKLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

This spring, the Federal Trade Commission filed a lawsuit to block Tapestry — the parent company behind the luxury brands Coach and Michael Kors, among others — from acquiring Capri, another multinational fashion company. The \$8.5 billion merger would bring together Coach, Kate Spade, Michael Kors and Versace. The F.T.C. cited concerns that the deal would have suppressed competition and inflated the prices of luxury accessories, including handbags.

Footnotes: Make a Splash



JANIS HOLLAND

It's swimming season. As the weather warms, many are heading to a beach, lake or pool to cool off and enjoy some time in the water. Swimming is one of the healthiest forms of exercise — proven to lower blood pressure and improve bone density — but research has shown that the benefits of swimming extend beyond physical health, to emotional and mental health as well. So what are you waiting for? Get in the water! Don't know how to swim? There's never been a better time to learn. Here are a few things to read, watch and listen to about the art and science of swimming.

WATCH
'Black Stroke'

This 2024 short documentary follows three Black people as they break racial stereotypes and learn to swim. The film reflects on the history of racist policies that kept people of color out of public pools and off beaches and what can be done to improve equality of access.

READ
'Why We Swim'

In her 2020 book, the journalist Bonnie Tsui explores the science and history behind why humans — though not natural swimmers — have such a strong and mysterious draw to water.

WATCH
'Nyad'

This 2023 biopic dramatizes the remarkable true story of the swimmer Diana Nyad's attempt, at age 64, to become the first person to swim unassisted from Cuba to Florida.

LISTEN
'SwimOut'

This podcast, hosted by two distance swimmers in Britain, offers a range of stories and features related to outdoor swimming. Recent episodes have covered topics like swimming through grief and how to develop a community of swimmers.



Why Biden Is Right to Curb Immigration

Many of us liberals now find ourselves in an awkward spot on immigration.

For years we have denounced draconian steps by Republicans to bar desperate migrants. But President Biden has now introduced his own tough steps to reduce asylum seekers, not so different from President Donald Trump's approach.

The new measures may be overturned by the courts, but in the meantime many on the left are whacking Biden. Senator Alex Padilla, a California Democrat, twisted the knife by suggesting that Biden was borrowing from Trump's playbook: "By reviving Trump's asylum ban, President Biden has undermined American values."

I'm conflicted, finding myself caught between pro-refugee instincts and a practical recognition that the system wasn't working: There was a torrent of illegal crossings, and the law provided a loophole that allowed people to claim asylum and stay indefinitely whether or not they warranted it.

I exist only because an Oregon family in 1952 sponsored my dad as a refugee from Eastern Europe. But I've reluctantly come to the view that Biden is doing the right thing with his clampdown. Let me explain.

Liberals, me included, were pushed to the left by Trump's policies on immigration, from the so-called Muslim ban to separation of children from families — conducted so cavalierly that sometimes family members sometimes cannot be located. More than three years after Trump left the White House, about 1,200 immigrant children still have not been reunited with their families, to our shame as a nation.

That said, I don't think the solution is to swing the doors open.

His executive order may be political, but that doesn't mean it's wrong.

Too often, we Americans approach immigration as a binary issue. We're in favor, or we're against. In fact, immigration should be seen as a dial we adjust.

However much we believe in immigration, we're not going to welcome all one billion children globally who are estimated to suffer some kind of severe deprivation.

Immigration overall offers important benefits to the country, and employers and affluent people are particular winners: Immigrants reduce labor costs for people hiring gardeners or caregivers. But poor Americans can find themselves at immigrant competition that puts downward pressure on their wages, although economists disagree on the magnitude of that impact.

I'm influenced by a terrific book by my Times colleague David Leonhardt, "Ours Was the Shining Future," which examines many studies on the impact of immigration on wages. Leonhardt concluded that immigration wasn't the primary reason for income stagnation among low-education workers, but that it was a significant secondary factor.

I think of a neighbor of mine, a surly seventh-grade dropout who in the 1970s was earning more than \$20 an hour (around \$150 an hour today). That job disappeared, and he later ended up in part-time and minimum wage positions and lost his home. He was hurt by globalization, technology and the decline of unions, but he was also outcompeted by immigrants.

At a time when so many working-class Americans are already falling behind, and then self-medicating and dying from drugs, alcohol and suicide, shouldn't we be careful about inflicting even more pain on them through immigration policy?

Relatively recent immigrants may also be hurt by newer immigrants — which may help explain why Pew found that three-quarters of American Latinos believe that the increasing number of people seeking to enter the country via the southern border is a "major problem" or a "crisis."

Some working-class voters feel betrayed by Democrats who pushed to open borders, and there may be an element of xenophobia or racism in this anger — but also an element of truth. The United States makes it difficult for foreign doctors to practice in America, protecting physicians from competition. But the United States makes it relatively easy for low-skilled immigrants to work here and push down wages of our most vulnerable workers.

Politics is of course a central reason Biden has acted on this issue, but that doesn't mean he's necessarily wrong. Plus, frustration at immigration makes it more likely that Trump will win the White House, and the Trump Republicans will dominate Congress and the Supreme Court. That's something the left should consider a disaster worth trying hard to avert.

One way or another, an angry public will force change on immigration. Ideally, this would come about through a comprehensive legislative fix to our broken system, but Trump and Republicans have blocked that path this year. Given the choices, I trust Biden more than Trump to adopt tougher policies that are still sane and that don't demonize refugees.

Are we, the people of an immigrant nation, pulling up the ladder after we have boarded? Yes, to some degree. But the reality is that we can't absorb everyone who wants in, and it's better that the ladder be raised in an orderly way by reasonable people.

Columns & Commentary

MAUREEN DOWD

The Verdict Is In on the Supreme Court

WASHINGTON

After Donald Trump was found guilty of 34 felony counts in a Manhattan court, conservatives — from Marjorie Taylor Greene to George Santos to the Heritage Foundation — began posting upside-down American flags on X in solidarity with the “political prisoner,” as Trump absurdly styles himself. It was the same upside-down symbol that insurrectionists carried to the Capitol on Jan. 6 to proclaim they thought the election was stolen, and that was seen flying over Justice Samuel Alito’s house in suburban Virginia even as the Supreme Court was considering whether to hear a case about the 2020 presidential election.

Now that it’s being used to show support for a felonious ex-president, Alito will have an even harder time trying to pretend he’s oblivious about its meaning.

I don’t need a black robe to hand down a judgment on the Supreme Court: It’s corrupt, rotten and hurting America.

The once august court, which the public held in highest esteem, is now hopelessly corroded. It is in the hands of a cabal of religious and far-right zealots, including a couple of ethical scofflaws with MAGA wives.

Chief Justice John Roberts, who dreamed of being remembered as a great unifier of the court, is refusing to sit in Alito and Justice Clarence Thomas, who are thumbing their noses at the public and at their own oaths to dispense fair and impartial justice.

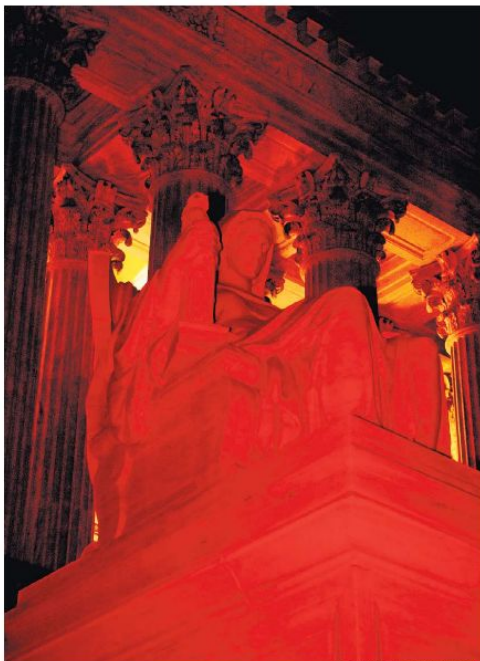
When Alito pushed a willing conservative majority into yanking away women’s right to control their own bodies, he was, in essence, blaming women: You get pregnant, you’ll have to live with it.

In this latest firestorm, he blamed one woman in particular: his wife, Martha-Ann. Somehow, in Alito’s world, women are to blame.

It was shocking when The New York Times’s Jodi Kantor reported that the upside-down flag cherished by “Stop the Steal” marchers was hanging outside Alito’s house. It was even more shocking when we learned that another flag carried by “Stop the Steal” rioters on Jan. 6, the “Appeal to Heaven” flag, was flying outside the Alitos’ vacation home in New Jersey as cases concerning the Jan. 6 assault and riot were pending at the court. This flag symbolizes support for Donald Trump and a desire to infuse the federal government with a lot more Christianity.

“In coming weeks, the justices will rule on two climactic cases involving the storming of the Capitol on Jan. 6, including whether Mr. Trump has immunity for his actions,” Kantor wrote. “Their decisions will shape how accountable he can be held for trying to overturn the last presidential election and his chances for re-election in the upcoming one.”

Alito’s conservative Christian, right-wing, deeply aggrieved views about the cul-



WILL MATSUOFA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ture wars are reflected in his speeches, decisions and now flags that are red flags.

He is refusing to recuse himself from the two cases about the attempted coup on Jan. 6. (One concerns the question of whether Trump is immune from prosecution for his role egging on rioters; the other involves a federal obstruction law used to charge the rioters.)

When leading Democratic lawmakers demanded Alito’s recusal, he wrote back, trying to make Martha-Ann Alito the fall gal. Alito has clearly heard enough criminal appeals to know you’ve got to point the finger at somebody else when you’re guilty.

“My wife is fond of flying flags,” he wrote

It’s corrupt, rotten and hurting America.

to the lawmakers. “I am not. She was solely responsible for having flagpoles put up at our residence and our vacation home and has flown a wide variety of flags over the years.”

He’s happy to take away the rights of millions of American women to control their bodies, but respects the right of his wife to control their incendiary flags. While he’s on the Supreme Court, he said, Martha-Ann

wields the gavel at home.

“I was not even aware of the upside-down flag until it was called to my attention,” he wrote. “As soon as I saw it, I asked my wife to take it down, but for several days, she refused.” He said there was absolutely nothing he could do to get that pesky seditious flag taken down sooner.

He was oblivious about the symbolism of the “Appeal to Heaven” Pine Tree Flag, he claimed.

Thomas is also awash in ethical snarls, some related to his wife, Ginni Thomas’s supporters also tried to defend her activism related to Jan. 6 by saying she is an independent spouse.

But it doesn’t wash. As Jane Mayer wrote in The New Yorker, Ginni Thomas is a lawyer and a prominent member of hard-right groups and “has declared that America is in existential danger because of the ‘deep state’ and the ‘fascist left,’ which includes ‘transsexual fascists.’”

In a Facebook post, Ginni Thomas linked to a news item about the Jan. 6 protest and wrote “LOVE MAGA people!!!!”

Mayer noted that it is getting harder to dismiss Ginni Thomas’s actions as harmless, given that the “Supreme Court appears likely to secure victories for her allies in a number of highly polarizing cases — on abortion, affirmative action, and gun rights.”

Senator Richard Blumenthal asked Roberts to make Thomas recuse herself from the case on Trump and the insurrection, but Thomas refused.

The Supreme Court has two decisions on abortion cases due any day.

“The Fall of Roe,” an insightful new book by the Times reporters Elizabeth Dias and Lisa Lerer, laid out the events and the strategy — and the failure of the Democrats to recognize the threat — that led to the fall of Roe. There was a determined group of religious zealots with a long-term master plan to pack the court with those possessing equally fervent beliefs.

These conservative Catholic and evangelical Christian operators believed they were fighting the biggest moral battle of the modern age, and forced America to debate on their terms,” Dias and Lerer wrote. “But despite their public appeals, they did not convince broad swaths of Americans of the righteousness of their cause. Instead, they remained a minority, and leveraged the structures of American democracy in their favor, building a framework strong enough to withstand not only the political system but also a society moving rapidly against them. They took power to remake the nation in their image. And they were far more organized than their opponents or the public ever knew.”

Now it’s up to Democrats to turn the tables and see if they can use this issue in the November election to save the country and women’s rights.

JAMELLE BOUIE

Republicans Have a New Way of Looking at Crime

In the wake of Donald Trump’s felony conviction, Republicans are furious.

“Democrats cheered as they convicted the leader of the opposing party on ridiculous charges,” said House Speaker Mike Johnson. “This was a purely political exercise, not a legal one.”

Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida agreed. “If the defendant were not Donald Trump, this case would never have been brought, the judge would have never issued similar rulings, and the jury would have returned a guilty verdict,” he wrote on the website X.

Kari Lake, an Arizona Republican running for the Senate, called the ruling “an outright mockery of the rule of law,” and Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, currently vying to join the Trump ticket, said it was “Un-freaking-believable.”

Other Republicans aren’t just mad; they want revenge.

Stephen Miller, a top adviser to the former president, raged against the verdict on Fox News. “Every facet of Republican Party politics and power has to be used right now to go to bed with Marxism and beat these Communists,” he said, blasting Democrats with his preferred terms of abuse for political opponents.

Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, who is also angling to ride with Trump as his running mate, slammed President Biden — who had nothing to do with the trial — as “a devoted man propped up by wicked and deranged people willing to destroy our country to remain in power.” It was time, Rubio concluded, rendering the message with fire emojis rather than actual words, to “fight fire with fire.”

And in National Review, John Yoo, the legal architect of the George W. Bush administration’s torture program, urged Republicans to retaliate against Democratic elected officials. “In order to prevent the case against Trump from assuming a permanent place in the American political system, Republicans will have to bring charges against Democratic officials, even presidents.” Yoo, a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote.

At no point, you’ll notice, do Republicans deny that Trump is a criminal. They’ve made no effort here to defend his honor or to say he’s innocent of the charges levied against him. They almost seem to accept, as

most Americans do, that the former president is guilty of fraud. But they don’t accept the verdict. They don’t accept the idea that Trump could be tried in a court of law on these charges. They reject the authority of the jury. For Republicans — no matter the law, no matter the evidence and no matter the testimony — the conviction is illegitimate. In their view, Trump is sovereign, and the law is not.

This gets to one of the real transformations in American politics since Trump came down that escalator to announce his campaign for president nine years ago this month. Trump ran as the embodiment of the legitimate people of the United States. He governed on behalf of those people — a narrow, exclusive people defined in racial, religious and ideological terms — deemed them “the people,” to whom the country rightfully

This is what happens when you say it’s the legal system that’s indefensible.

belongs. He tied his justice less to the Constitution than to this quasi-mystical connection. He was “the people” and “the people” were him, and he could do anything on their behalf, up to and including an effort to overturn the constitutional transfer of power. What is an election — what is the Constitution itself — when set against the people as embodied in Trump?

This vision of Trump as tribune of the “real America” has trickled down from Trump’s most devoted acolytes to the rest of the Republican Party and the conservative movement.

You see it in the Republican embrace of the Jan. 6 rioters, in the open skepticism of the results of the 2020 presidential election and the suggestion, coming from prominent figures on the political right, that there is no legitimate on- or off-charge of a Trump victory in the 2024 presidential contest.

This is more than idle talk, of course. It demands action. If institutions — courts, bureaucracies and the electoral system — won’t bend to the people, as personified by Trump, then they must be bent toward him. They must be cowed, brought to heel. And so we’ve seen, over the past week, strident at-

tacks on the legal system as illegitimate for its willingness to hold the former president to account, as well as legislation designed to circumvent it, should legal officials attempt to do so again.

The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Jim Jordan, wants to target prosecutors overseeing cases against Trump, while a group of House conservatives have pushed Speaker Johnson to hold a vote on a bill that would give current or former presidents the right to move any state case brought against them to federal court. A law like this would have allowed Trump to avoid a Manhattan jury and possibly even get a judge who owes his or her seat on the bench to Trump.

Separate from their attack on the legal system, Trump’s allies are also trying to undermine the infrastructure of elections throughout the country, challenging thousands of voter registrations in key swing states and hounding local officials who won’t arbitrarily drop voters from the rolls.

There are also the explicit plans to remake the federal administrative state in Trump’s image, so that it will operate as an extension of his will, regardless of what the law allows or what the Constitution permits.

“What we’re trying to do is identify the pockets of independence and seize them,” said Russell T. Vought, a Trump ally who ran the Office of Management and Budget under the former president and one of the figures involved in Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation’s blueprint for a second Trump administration.

Most of this effort to bend and break institutions in the name of Trump’s illiberal claim to personal authority is the opportunistic grasping of ideologues who see the former president as a vehicle for their aims. He will help them expel immigrants, destroy the welfare state and roll back the political and cultural settlements of the 1960s, the 1970s and beyond.

But among more ordinary supporters of Trump’s authoritarian designs, there is fear at work, too. Fear that the country has been lost. Fear that elections won’t be enough to win it back. And a belief, fueled by that fear, that democracy is an obstacle to putting the nation back on track.

Which is just to say, in another form, what we already know to be true: Trump can lose in November, but as long as millions of Americans feel this fear as deeply as they do, Trumpism will endure.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

Outside the Manhattan courthouse where Donald Trump’s trial took place.

OPINION

Three Writers on the Politics of the Guilty Verdict

FRANK BRUNI, a contributing Opinion writer, hosted a written online conversation with Josh Barro, who writes the newsletter *Very Serious*, and Olivia Nuzzi, the Washington correspondent for *New York* magazine, to hammer and hammer about the potential political fallout of the Trump conviction. This transcript has been edited and condensed.

Frank Bruni: Josh, Olivia, great to be with you. I want to start not with Donald Trump but with Joe Biden. What happens on Nov. 5 has as much to do with Biden's navigation of the coming months as with Trump's, and Biden is getting all sorts of conflicting advice.

What's the optimal balance between running against a "convicted felon" and focusing on the day-to-day concerns of less engaged voters? I think Biden needs to be careful about overdoing the felon part. Voters are well aware of Trump's status, transgressions and, er, character. Your thoughts?

Josh Barro: A defining feature of this campaign, as Nate Cohn has written on extensively for *The Times*, is that Biden's support has been holding up well among highly engaged voters and has fallen terribly over the last four years among less-engaged Americans. Much of Biden's slide in the polls is because of worsening views of him among people who did not vote in the 2020 election. So Biden's big challenge is that he really needs to reach people who aren't interested in politics and aren't likely to hear any given message he sends out.

Most of those less-engaged voters were probably not following the trial closely, or at all. It's important for those people to hear that Trump is a convicted felon. I'm not sure they need to hear it from Biden personally — it might be a message to be pushed in paid media, by the Biden campaign or by affiliated pressure groups.

Bruni: There's disengaged and then there's living off the grid. They really need a reminder that Trump is a felon?

Olivia Nuzzi: I'm with you, Frank. I don't know that I think the particulars of the trial are all that important to the narrative here. Whether you were manning cable coverage or whether you just absorbed the gist while scrolling through your news feeds, the implications about Trump's behavior are the same.

Bruni: How much confidence do you have in Biden and his aides to find and forge the most prudent path — not just in regard to Trump the felon but in regard to all else? Most of the prominent Democrats with whom I speak have been concerned to the point of panic about how inept they've found his campaign. Is a major campaign shake-up necessary?

Bruni: Biden's big political problem is the economic fundamentals: There has been serious inflation, and interest rates have gone up a lot, and people are unhappy about that. People see Biden trailing Trump by a little bit and assume that means Biden is talking about the economy wrong, and he needs a new message. It's not clear to me that there's anything wrong with the message. The problem is the economic situation that he needs to message about. And it's too late to do much to change inflation or interest rates before the election.

Nuzzi: The eternal problem for candidates running against Donald Trump is that he sort of photocopied everyone and all attention to grow bigger and stronger than the rest of the sun for everyone else around. He manages to define the terms of the conversation, and he lives in his own reality.

Bruni: Let's pull back from the politics of this all. A former president who is the presumptive Republican nominee and the leader so far in many 2024 polls is a convicted felon, and almost nobody considers that the last word on this election. How does that leave you feeling — not as a journalist but as an American — about America?

Barro: As a highly engaged voter, I don't personally feel that the verdict gave me new or important information about Donald Trump. I don't think it's a stretch to say that it's in furtherance of a scheme to pay off a porn star



ILLUSTRATION BY SHOBANA SCHULTZ; THE NEW YORK TIMES. SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNEDY/OUTLINE AND PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY AROCH/GETTY IMAGES; POOL PHOTO BY CURTIS MCGEE

Trump is blocking out the sun. What is Biden to do?

makes a Top 50 list of his most dastardly acts. It's just what he happened to be charged with and convicted of.

America is a great and prosperous country where people live well and follow their dreams. I try not to let political events get me down too much when I think about this place.

Bruni: Your statement about America is an important one. For a while now I've been banging the drum that one of our problems is an undue, wrought pessimism about the country. We've a long way to go toward our more perfect union, but there is still a tide of people who want to be here. That's no fluke.

Nuzzi: I think everything about Trump's alleged conduct and the trial is about as American as it gets. I grew up during George W. Bush's presidency, watching "The Apprentice," in a very pornography- and criminality-influenced culture. None of this feels out of place. A big lesson of the Trump presidency was that America's institutions are quite strong, and they are able to withstand even political leaders who test them. He's elected again, I hope four years from now to be marveling at the wisdom of our founders in the same way.

Bruni: My gut tells me that this June 27 de-

bate isn't going to happen. It was scheduled before the verdict, with terms that were largely set and favored by the Biden camp, and Trump's thrashing and wailing and claims of the entire universe being rigged against him — well, those don't fit neatly with showing up and debating. What do you two think?

Barro: I don't see how the debate could be canceled. Trump clearly wants to debate — he wants more than the two debates that have been agreed with the Biden campaign. Trump is not going to skip the debate simply because he doesn't like something about structure. And Biden cannot be seen to duck the debate that he's already agreed to — it would reinforce the idea that Biden is too old to do basic political tasks like debating.

Nuzzi: Frank, I know you're asking the questions here, but can you elaborate on how you think it could end up not happening?

Bruni: My larger point is that Trump doesn't operate by the normal laws of logic or political gravity; he makes up his own rules just as he makes up his own reality, and so expecting the unexpected feels somehow correct. He's not so much running a campaign as he is staging a sustained tantrum. I'm just wondering

what next form the tantrum takes.

Nuzzi: I could certainly see a scenario in which Robert F. Kennedy Jr. makes the stage and the Biden campaign throws a fit and says it agreed only to a one-on-one debate with Trump, and pulls out, and then CNN is left to decide if it wants to host a debate between Trump and Kennedy. Whatever happens for CNN, it does seem likely that Trump and Kennedy will be participating in debates on alternative platforms. If Biden sits those out, he may be able to replicate the success of his "hasenut strategy" in 2020, in which he was seen very little in the wild amid the pandemic. Or he may suffer for handing the other candidates an opportunity to define him negatively in his absence, and not being there would play into the perception that he's not quite there.

Bruni: Trump is scheduled to receive his sentence just days before the Republican convention begins. In terms of his prospects for victory in November, is he best served by getting in or by not getting prison time? By harshness or leniency?

Barro: The conviction and the sentence may not hurt Trump politically, but I'm a little baffled when people argue that they help him. Who are these supposed people who weren't going to vote for Trump, but decide to vote for him because they think he's being punished unfairly?

The Republican polling firm Echelon Insights did an interesting poll right after the verdict came out — it re-contacted respondents whom it had already surveyed about the election and asked them again how they intend to vote. Six percent of respondents said they were changing their vote because of the verdict — in most cases against Trump. Echelon had surveyed these people before, and so it knows that every respondent who said the verdict was causing them to switch to vote for Trump had already previously told Echelon they were voting for Trump.

Bruni: Hunter Biden's trial started last week, and Trump's conviction guarantees yet more Republican attention to it. Is Suspect Fox News will cover Hunter as he's Vladimir Putin being forced to answer for war crimes in Ukraine. Will the trial have any impact on the presidential contest?

Nuzzi: Trump tried very hard in 2020 to make Hunter Biden into a sort of proxy opponent. I always felt that besides being quite icky, he made strategic political mistakes in doing so, focusing on Hunter's admitted and well- and self-documented struggles with addiction. Most Americans know someone who has suffered with an addiction, or maybe died from an addiction. Trump's attempts to weaponize this part of Hunter's life against his father just didn't land.

Barro: The whole Hunter Biden situation is very sad, and if you're the sort of voter who's open to voting for either candidate, I probably ready to vote as usual. I don't think it's important for the campaign.

Bruni: In 2020, the Biden campaign rightly made a big deal of high-profile Republicans or erstwhile Republicans who were backing him. Who in that category who hasn't publicly endorsed Biden to this point would it be smartest to go after?

Barro: The sorts of voters who care about this thing are high-engagement voters, and Biden is already holding up well with them. The better surrogates for him are nonpoliticians like Mark Cuban, whom low-engagement voters are more likely to be interested in.

Nuzzi: Shoot for the moon, go after W. Why not?

Bruni: Lastly, while I suspect you'll both dodge this, I have to ask, and maybe you won't to live large and dangerous. Today, you're forced to bet a meaningful amount of money on who wins on Nov. 5. You choose...

Barro: Am I trying to hedge my position? I guess that means I should be on what I'd consider to be the negative outcome (Trump).

Nuzzi: Frank! I am not a betting woman.

Bruni: And I respect you for that, Olivia. And I thank you and Josh both. Your wisdom is valuable and appreciated.

COLUMNIST | LYDIA POLGREEN

India Keeps Its Glorious, Messy Tradition Alive

Back in January, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India looked all but unstoppable, he visited the small city of Ayodhya for the unofficial start of his campaign to win a third term. The location was freighted with symbolism. For decades, Hindu nationalists had sought to build a temple in Ayodhya, at a spot they believe to be the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. The only problem was that there was already a house of worship on the spot, a mosque built by a Mughal emperor in 1528. A Hindu mob had dismantled the mosque in 1992, setting off riots that killed 2,000 people, most of them Muslims. The ruins were a flashpoint for religious tensions in India for decades.

Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party promised to build the temple, and the lavish event at which Modi officially opened it was a showcase for that achievement. At the time it seemed like a strong election-year message for a politician who built his career on the twin planks of Hindu nationalism and building a muscular new India. Unlike

other politicians, the event implied, Modi made promises and kept them.

"It is the beginning of a new era," he declared.

Feeling supremely confident, Modi had boldly asked the Indian electorate for something akin to a blank check to remake the country — in elections that began in April and concluded on June 1. And why shouldn't he have been confident? India's economy was the fastest-growing in the world. India had overtaken China as the world's most populous country. World leaders sought Modi's support on issues ranging from the war in Ukraine to the climate crisis, cementing India's ascent in global affairs.

But the ever unpredictable electorate of the world's largest democracy responded to Modi's demand for still more power resolutely: No thanks.

In a stunning rebuke, election results released on Tuesday showed that India's voters have reduced the parliamentary share of

Modi's party by more than 60 seats, not enough for an outright majority, never mind the supermajority he had sought.

It struck me as particularly apt that despite all the fanfare about the glorious new temple in Ayodhya, Modi's party lost the city's parliamentary seat to a political opposition that had been all but left for dead. There appears to be a clear ceiling to the appeals to Hindu identity on its own. "We are very happy with the temple, but people were fed up with the B.J.P.," a local business leader, Rakesh Yadav, told Reuters. "People will not always fall for the caste or temple mosque politics. They also want to see development."

This is a big year for democracy, almost a referendum of sorts on the very idea. Dozens of countries are holding elections, representing roughly half of the world's population. But authoritarianism has been on the march. The latest report from Freedom House found that by many measures, global freedom has declined for the 18th straight year.

India, despite its status as the world's most populous democracy, has been a poster child for this decline under Modi: His government has taken aim at just about every form of freedom. He has attacked and grievously weakened the independence of India's once boisterous press. He has jailed critics and political opponents. He has sharpened religious animosity, referring, during this campaign, to Muslims, who make up 14 percent of India's population, as "infiltrators" who seek to steal wealth and power from the Hindu majority. It's an Indian edition of the nationalist, populist playbook playing out

The voters have spoken: They want to keep their democracy.

around the world.

That civily unified opposition managed to prevent Modi's party from winning an outright majority under these conditions took everyone, including me, by surprise. And it suggests that even when would-be authoritarians attempt to tilt the playing field, voters can and will stage their will, no matter the autocrat's preferences.

"The B.J.P. had positioned itself as a new hegemonic power," Yamin Aiyar, a scholar and an analyst of Indian democracy who has been a frequent target of Hindu nationalist rage, told me. "The beauty of an election is that politicians have to go to the people, and the people get an opportunity to express their anxieties and their preferences."

Express them they did. Looking back, the weakness of the B.J.P.'s re-election case is clear. Yes, India's economy was growing fast. But despite the flashy new infrastructure projects and deals to increase high-tech manufacturing, the country was not creating nearly enough jobs, and inflation remained stubbornly high, especially for food, which has the poorest hardest. Much of the wealth generated by growth has gone to India's richest tycoons, and inequality has soared.

The reality is that the real economy has been burning for years long time, and they have systematically sought to ignore it," Aiyar said.

India has managed to lift millions of people out of poverty since Modi came to power 10 years ago, but particularly in rural areas, where most voters live, that has meant social welfare rather than jobs.

There were other issues too — Modi's al-

OPINION

We're in for a Catastrophic Heat Wave

Jeff Goodell

The author of "The Heat Will Kill You First: Life and Death on a Scorched Planet."

ON A recent Thursday evening, a freakish windstorm called a *derecho* (Spanish for "straight ahead") hit Houston, a city of more than two million people that also happens to be the epicenter of the fossil fuel industry in America.

In a matter of minutes, winds of up to 100 miles per hour blew out office building windows, uprooted trees and toppled electric poles and transmission towers. Nearly a million households lost power — which meant that not only was there no light, but there was no air-conditioning. The damage from the storm was so extensive that, five days later, more than 100,000 homes and businesses were still marooned in heat and darkness.

Luckily, the day the *derecho* blew in, the temperature in Houston, a city infamous for its swampy summers, was in the low to mid-80s. Hot, to be sure, but for most healthy people, not life-threatening. Of the at least eight deaths reported as a result of the storm, none were from heat exposure.

But if this storm had arrived several days later, perhaps over the Memorial Day weekend, when the temperature in Houston hit 96 degrees, with a heat index as high as 115, it might have been a very different story. The Hurricane Katrina of extreme heat is how Mikhail Chester, director of the Metis Center for Infrastructure and Sustainable Enterprise at Arizona State University, once put it to me, echoing the memory of the catastrophic 2005 hurricane that struck Louisiana, devastated New Orleans and killed more than 1,300 people.

Most people who died in Louisiana during that hurricane died from drownings, injuries or heart problems. But Dr. Chester was using it as a metaphor for what can happen to a city unprepared for an extreme climate catastrophe. In New Orleans, the levee system was overwhelmed by torrential rains; eventually, 80 percent of the city was underwater.

What if, instead, the electricity goes out for several days during a blistering heat wave in a city that depends on air-conditioning?

In Dr. Chester's scenario, a compounding crisis of extreme heat and power failure in a major city like Houston could lead to cascading failures, exposing vulnerabilities in the region's infrastructure that are difficult to foresee and could result in thousands, or even tens of thousands, of deaths from heat exposure in a matter of days. The risk to people in cities would be higher because all the concrete and asphalt amplifies the heat, pushing temperatures in the mid-afternoon as much as 15 degrees to 20 degrees higher than in surrounding vegetated areas.

The *derecho* that hit Houston was a warning of just how quickly risks are multiplying in our warming world. As if to prove this point, some 10 days after the Houston blackout, another windstorm knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses in and around Dallas.

One of the most dangerous illusions of the climate crisis is that the technology of modern life makes us invincible. Humans are smart. We have tools. Yeah, it will cost money. But we can adapt to whatever comes our way. As for the coral reefs that bleach in the hot oceans and the howler monkeys that fell dead out of trees during a recent heat wave in Mexico, well, that's sad, but life goes on.

This is, of course, an extremely privileged point of view. For one thing, more than 750 million people on the planet don't have access to electricity, much less air-conditioning. (In India, New Delhi recently experienced temperatures as high as 120 degrees, leading to an increase in heatstroke, fears of blackouts and the possibility of water rationing.) But it is also a naive point of view, if only because our bubble of invincibility is far more fragile than we know. So what can we expect in a heat Katrina?

Last year, researchers at Georgia Institute of Technology, Arizona State University and the University of Michigan published a study looking at the consequences of a major black-



HEAVY WINDS BLOW THROUGH CORVALLIS, ORE., A WIND-ROCKED TOWN.

out during an extreme heat wave in three cities, Atlanta, Detroit and Phoenix. In the study, the cause of the blackout was unspecified.

"It doesn't really matter if the blackout is the result of a cyberattack or a hurricane," Brian Stone, the director of the Urban Climate Lab at Georgia Tech and the lead author on the study, told me. "For the purposes of our research, the effect is the same." Whatever the cause, the study noted that the number of major blackouts in the United States more than doubled from 2015-16 to 2020-21.

Dr. Stone and his colleagues focused on those three cities because they have different demographics, climates and dependence on air-conditioning. In Detroit, 53 percent of buildings have central air-conditioning; in Atlanta, 94 percent; in Phoenix, 99 percent.

The hotter temperatures get, the more difficult it is for our bodies to cope.

The researchers modeled the health consequences for residents in a two-day, citywide blackout during a heat wave, with electricity gradually restored over the next three days.

The results were shocking: In Phoenix, about 800,000 people — roughly half the population — would need emergency medical treatment for heatstroke and other illnesses. The flood of people seeking care would overwhelm the city's hospitals. More than 13,000 people would die.

Under the same scenario in Atlanta, researchers found there would be 12,540 visits to emergency rooms. Six people would die. In Detroit, which has a higher percentage of older residents and a higher poverty rate than those other cities, 221 people would die.

Perhaps we should not be surprised by these numbers. Researchers estimate that in Europe there were 61,672 heat-related deaths in the summer of 2022, the hottest season on record on the continent at the time. In June 2021, a heat wave led to nearly 900 excess deaths in the Pacific Northwest. And in 2010, an estimated 56,000 Russians died during a record summer heat wave.

The hotter it gets, the more difficult it is for our bodies to cope, raising the risk of heatstroke and other heat illnesses. And it is getting hotter across the planet. Last year was the warmest year on record, and the 10 hottest years have all occurred in the last decade.

In the study simulating a heat wave in those three cities, researchers found that the much larger death toll in Phoenix was explained by two factors. First, the temperatures modeled during a heat wave in Phoenix (90 to 113 degrees) were much higher than the temperatures in Atlanta (77 to 97 degrees) or Detroit (72 to 95 degrees), which historically have had milder heat waves. And second, the greater availability of air-conditioning in Phoenix means the risks from a power failure during a heat wave are much higher.

A lot can be done to reduce these risks. Building cities with less concrete and asphalt and more parks and trees and access to rivers and lakes would help. So would a more sophisticated nationally standardized heat wave warning system. Major cities also need to identify the most vulnerable residents and develop targeted emergency response plans and long-term heat management plans.

Making the grid itself more resilient is equally important. Better digital firewalls at grid operation centers to thwart hacker intrusions. Burying transmission lines protects them from storms. Batteries to store electricity for emergencies are increasingly inexpensive.

But the hotter it gets, the more vulnerable the grid becomes, even as demand for electricity spikes because customers are running their air-conditioning full throttle. Transmission lines sag, transformers explode, power plants fail. One 2016 study found the potential for cascading grid failures across Arizona to increase thirtyfold in response to a 1.8 degree rise in summer temperatures.

"Most of the problems with the grid on hot days come from breakdowns at power plants or on the grid caused by the heat itself, or from the difficulty of meeting high demand for cooling," Doug Lewin, a grid expert and author of the Texas Energy and Power newsletter, told me. The best way to fix that, Mr. Lewin argued, is to encourage people to reduce power demand and in their homes with high efficiency heat pumps, better insulation and smart thermostats, and to generate their own power with solar panels and battery storage.

The looming threat of a heat Katrina is a reminder of how technological progress creates new risks even as it solves old ones. On a brutally hot day during a recent trip to Jaipur, India, I visited an 18th-century building that had an indoor fountain, thick walls and a ventilation system to channel the wind through each room. There was no air-conditioning, but the building was as cool and comfortable as a new office tower in Houston.

Air-conditioning may indeed be a modern necessity that many of us who live in hot parts of the world can't survive without. But it is also a technology of forgetting. Once upon a time, people understood the dangers of extreme heat and designed ways to live with it.

And now, as temperatures rise as a result of our hellbent consumption of fossil fuels, tens of thousands of lives may depend on remembering how that was done. Or finding better ways to do it.

The Point

Selections from Times Opinion's blog



ROBERTS MARCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Hochul's Unwarranted Retreat on Congestion Pricing

Mara Gay, editorial board member

Americans didn't need a reason to feel more cynical about politics. But Gov. Kathy Hochul has delivered one. Just weeks before New York was scheduled to finally begin a landmark program to improve the nation's largest mass transit system by charging drivers a premium to enter the busiest part of Manhattan, Ms. Hochul, bowing to political concerns about the plan, announced on Wednesday that she would indefinitely delay it.

She said she had become concerned that the program could hurt Manhattan's economic recovery from the pandemic. But Ms. Hochul has been issuing glowing news releases about how New York State, including Manhattan, has already achieved "full economic recovery" and any economic effects of the pricing plan are nothing new, having been hashed out for years.

The more likely reason, as Politico reported, is that Democratic officials, including the House minority leader, Hakeem Jeffries, are worried that starting the program now could hurt Democratic chances in competitive House races this November.

Congestion pricing has always faced opposition, and now, in an election year, Ms. Hochul has apparently lost her political backbone. The program was scheduled to go into effect on June 30 and was expected to provide a critical \$1 billion revenue stream for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Under the plan, drivers of passenger cars would be charged \$15 for entering Manhattan at or south of 60th Street; commercial trucks would be charged more.

That was always going to bring some sticker shock for commuters used to driving into the city, but it's sound public policy in New York, a region with a strong public transit system in need of steady investment and used by roughly 5.5 million people every day.

It's also likely to improve the quality of life in the city, where concerns about air quality, traffic congestion, pedestrian safety and noise have become paramount. To replace the lost revenue stream, Ms. Hochul is reportedly considering raising taxes on businesses in New York City instead.

Ms. Hochul, the State Legislature should have found the political courage to stick with what they promised. Congestion pricing should begin without delay.



KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES

Did Boeing Just Fix Its Very Bad Year?

Neel Patel, Opinion staff editor

NASA astronauts jettison off to the International Space Station is standard stuff. But on Wednesday, two astronauts went into space aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft for the first time and are en route to a rendezvous with the space station.

It's a win for the company's battered reputation. Never mind the plunge in public trust for the company's airline division after two Boeing 737 Max crashes in 2018 and 2019, faulty plugs causing an aircraft door to burst open during a flight in January and malfunctioning landing gear affecting a cargo plane in May. Starliner has been trapped in development hell in the decade since NASA selected it and SpaceX's Crew Dragon to be the vehicles that send astronauts into space.

SpaceX managed to launch astronauts in the summer of 2020 and has been regularly transporting people to and from the space station since. Starliner's first test demo flight in December 2019 ended in embarrassing failure because of a software glitch. The spacecraft didn't take off again until 2022.

Starliner's achievement should be celebrated. It's a good thing for the country that there's another American-made spacecraft that can take people into space. But Starliner also feels like the last hurrah of an era of American space that is on its way out.

For decades, aerospace manufacturers like Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin and United Launch Alliance were the go-to contractors for NASA's needs. Then, SpaceX crashed the scene, with reusable rockets and cheaper architecture. It superseded the old guard to become the company of choice for much of the U.S. space program.

Starliner won't be able to repair Boeing's reputation by itself. And it certainly won't be able to restore the space industry's old guard to its former glory in the skies and in space. It seems as if Wednesday's launch signaled the twilight of one of the most important American success stories of the past century.

lies had floated the idea of changing India's Constitution in various ways, including removing its commitment to secularism and enshrining Hinduism as the national faith. These kinds of appeals have helped the B.J.P. in the past but seem to have had less power this time around. One clear sign was its heavy losses in Uttar Pradesh, which is not just India's most populous state; it is also part of the heavily Hindu heartland of northern India.

It also seems that the opposition may finally have gotten its act together. India's main opposition party, the Indian National Congress, has been in decline for years and had struggled to make common cause with other opposition parties in previous elections. But this year the opposition parties managed to make a much stronger coalition. They focused on kitchen table issues and highlighted the Modi government's ties to big business and high-flying billionaires.

The opposition didn't shy away from making the stakes for Indian democracy clear. But the relentless focus on what voters said mattered most offers lessons for those battling revanchist movements elsewhere, including in the United States. Sometimes you need to meet voters where they are.

This vote wasn't a total rebuke of Modi and his policies. He is all but certain to get his third term as prime minister by making a coalition with allied parties. But it is a clear sign that the party check on his authoritarian project.

This election is also a rebuke of Indian elites — in business and media especially — who had willingly surrendered to a kind of



BOREAS MARRAS/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

inevitability of Modi's long-term consolidation of power, making peace with it or even celebrating it. Activists, analysts and journalists who had the temerity to speak plainly about Modi's revanchist project and the threat he posed to the world's biggest democracy and its long history of tolerance, secularism and free speech have been hounded out of public life. I hope that this troubling slide ends now.

The years ahead will, with any luck, be ones of negotiation and compromise. This will be a return to form for India, a vastly diverse nation whose unruly polity has resisted autocracy at every turn since it shrugged off British colonial rule in 1947. The whole world should breathe a sigh of relief that India's voters have spoken, loudly, in favor of continuing that glorious, messy tradition.

OPINION

Why Covid Probably Started in a Lab

Alina Chan
A molecular biologist at the Broad Institute of M.I.T. and Harvard, and a co-author of "Viral: The Search for the Origin of Covid-19."

ON MONDAY, Dr. Anthony Fauci returned to the halls of Congress and testified before the House subcommittee investigating the Covid-19 pandemic. He was questioned about several topics related to the government's handling of Covid-19, including how the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which he directed until retiring in 2022, supported risky virus work at a Chinese institute whose research may have caused the pandemic. For more than four years, reflexive partisan politics have derailed the search for the truth about a catastrophe that has touched us all. It has been estimated that at least 25 million people around the world have died because of Covid-19, with over a million of those deaths in the United States. Although how the pandemic started has been hotly debated, a growing volume of evidence — gleaned from public records released under the Freedom of Information Act, digital sleuthing through online databases, scientific papers analyzing the virus and its spread, and leaks from within the U.S. government — suggests that the pandemic most likely occurred because a virus escaped from a research lab in Wuhan, China. If so, it would be the most costly accident in the history of science. Here's what we know:

1. The SARS-like virus that caused the pandemic emerged in Wuhan, the city where the world's foremost research lab for SARS-like viruses is located.

At the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a team of scientists had been hunting for SARS-like viruses for over a decade, led by Shi Zhengli.

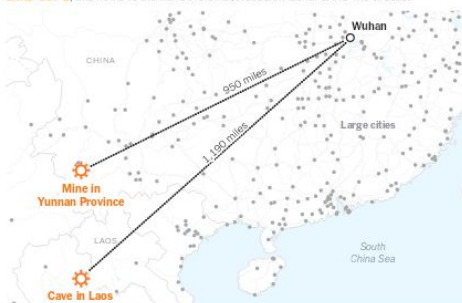
Their research showed that the viruses most similar to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that caused the pandemic, circulate in bats that live roughly 1,000 miles from Wuhan. Scientists from Dr. Shi's team traveled repeatedly to Yunnan Province to collect these viruses and had expanded their search to Southeast Asia. Bats in other parts of China have not been found to carry viruses that are as closely related to SARS-CoV-2.

Even at hot spots where these viruses exist naturally near the cave bats of southwestern China and Southeast Asia, the scientists argued, as recently as 2019, that bat coronavirus spillover into humans was rare.

When the outbreak was detected, Dr. Shi initially wondered if the virus could have come from his laboratory, saying he had never expected such an outbreak to occur in Wuhan.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus is exceptionally contagious and can jump from species to species like wildfire. Yet it left no known trace of its source or anywhere along what would have been a thousand-mile journey before emerging in Wuhan.

The pandemic started in Wuhan, roughly 1,000 miles from the closest known relatives to SARS-CoV-2, and home to the world's foremost research lab for SARS-like viruses.



Sources: Xinhua/Terramagnum et al.; Nature; SimpleMaps. Note: Cities shown have population of at least 200,000.

2. The year before the outbreak, the Wuhan institute, working with U.S. partners, had proposed creating viruses with SARS-CoV-2's defining feature.

Dr. Shi's group was fascinated by how coronaviruses jump from species to species. To find viruses, they took samples from bats and other animals, as well as from sick people living near animals carrying those viruses or associated with the wildlife trade. Much of this work was conducted in partnership with the EcoHealth Alliance, a U.S.-based scientific organization that, since 2002, has been awarded over \$80 million in federal funding to research the risks of emerging infectious diseases.

The laboratory pursued risky research that resulted in viruses becoming more infectious: Coronaviruses were grown from samples from infected animals and genetically reconstructed and recombined to create new viruses unknown in nature. These new viruses were passed through cells from bats, pigs, primates and humans and were used to infect civets and humanized mice (mice modified with human genes). In essence, this process forced these viruses to adapt to new host species, and the viruses with mutations that allowed them to thrive emerged as victors.

By 2019, Dr. Shi's group had published a database describing more than 22,000 collected wildlife samples. But external access was shut off in the fall of 2019, and the database was not shared with American collaborators even after the pandemic started, when such a rich virus collection would have been most useful in tracking the origin of SARS-CoV-2. It remains unclear whether the Wuhan institute possessed a precursor of the pandemic virus.

In 2021, a 2018 proposal for a research project named Defuse was leaked. The proposal had been written as a collaboration between EcoHealth, the Wuhan Institute and Ralph Baric at the University of North Carolina, who had been on the cutting edge of coronavirus research for years. The proposal described plans to create viruses strikingly similar to SARS-CoV-2.

Coronaviruses bear their name because their surface is studded with protein spikes, like a spiky crown, which they use to enter animal cells. The Defuse project proposed to search for and create SARS-like viruses carrying spikes with a unique feature: a furin cleavage site — the same feature that enhances SARS-CoV-2's infectiousness in humans, making it capable of causing a pandemic. Defuse was never funded by the United States. However, in his testimony on Monday, Dr. Fauci explained that the Wuhan institute would not need to rely on U.S. funding to pursue research independently.

While it's possible that the furin cleavage site could have evolved naturally (as seen in some distantly related coronaviruses), out of the hundreds of SARS-like viruses cataloged by scientists, SARS-CoV-2 is the only one known to possess a furin cleavage site in its spike. And the genetic data suggest that the virus had only recently gained the furin cleavage site before it started the pandemic. Ultimately, a never-before-seen SARS-like virus with a newly introduced furin cleavage site, matching the description in the Wuhan institute's Defuse proposal, caused an outbreak in Wuhan less than two years after the proposal was drafted.

When the Wuhan scientists published their seminal paper about Covid-19 as the pandemic roared to life in 2020, they did not mention the virus's furin cleavage site — a feature they should have been on the lookout for, according to their own grant proposal, and a feature quickly recognized by other scientists.

Worse still, as the pandemic raged, their American collaborators failed to publicly reveal the re-existence of the Defuse proposal. The president of EcoHealth, Peter Daszak, recently admitted to Congress that he doesn't

know about virus samples collected by the Wuhan institute after 2015 and never asked the lab's scientists if they had started the work described in Defuse. In May, citing failures in EcoHealth's monitoring of risky experiments conducted at the Wuhan lab, the Biden administration suspended all federal funding for the organization and Dr. Daszak, and initiated proceedings to bar them from receiving future grants. In his testimony on Monday, Dr. Fauci said that he supported the decision to suspend and bar EcoHealth.

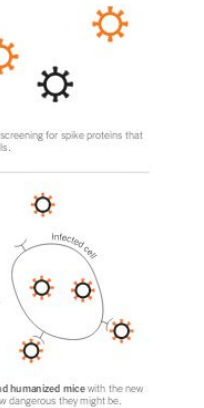
Separately, Dr. Baric described the competitive dynamic between his research group and the institute when he told Congress that the Wuhan scientists would probably not have shared their most interesting newly discovered viruses with him. Documents and email correspondence between the institute and Dr. Baric are still being withheld from the public while their release is fiercely contested in litigation.

In the end, American partners very likely knew of only a fraction of the research done in Wuhan. According to U.S. intelligence sources, some of the institute's virus research was classified or conducted with or on behalf of the Chinese military. In the congressional hearing on Monday, Dr. Fauci repeatedly acknowledged the lack of visibility into experiments conducted at the Wuhan institute, saying, "None of us can know everything that's going on in China, or in Wuhan, or what have you. And that's the reason why — I say today, and I've said at the T.L., referring to his transcribed interview with the subcommittee, 'I keep an open mind as to what the origin is.'"

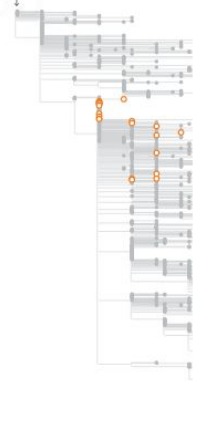
3. The Wuhan lab pursued this type of work under low biosafety conditions that could not have contained an airborne virus as infectious as SARS-CoV-2.

Labs working with live viruses generally operate at one of four biosafety levels (known in ascending order of stringency as BSL-1, 2, 3 and 4) that describe the work practices that are considered sufficiently safe depending on the characteristics of each pathogen. The Wuhan institute's scientists worked with SARS-like viruses under inappropriately low biosafety conditions.

In one experiment, Dr. Shi's group genetically engineered an unexpectedly deadly SARS-like virus (not closely related to SARS-CoV-2) that exhibited a 10,000-fold increase in the quantity of virus in the lungs and brains of humanized mice. Wuhan institute scientists handled these live viruses at low biosafety levels, including BSL-2.



An analysis of SARS-CoV-2's evolution. SARS-CoV-2 VIRUSES CLOSEST TO BAT CORONAVIRUSES



Source: Livit et al., Virus Evolution (2020)

COLUMNIST | ZEYNEP TUFEKCI

An Object Lesson on How To Destroy Public Trust

Big chunks of the history of the Covid pandemic were rewritten over the last month or so in a way that will have terrible consequences for many years to come.

Under questioning by a congressional subcommittee, top officials from the National Institutes of Health, along with Dr. Anthony Fauci, acknowledged that some key parts of the public health guidance their agencies promoted during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic were not backed up by solid science. What's more, inconvenient information was kept from the public — suppressed, denied or disparaged as crackpot nonsense.

Remember the rule that we should all stay at least six feet apart? "It sort of just appeared," Fauci said during a preliminary interview for the subcommittee hearing, adding that he "was not aware of any studies" that supported it. Remember the insistence that the virus was primarily spread by droplets that quickly fell to the floor? During his recent public hearing, he acknowledged

that to the contrary, the virus is airborne.

As for the repeated assertion that Covid originated in a "wet market" in Wuhan, China, most infectious diseases laboratory there, N.I.H. officials were privately expressing alarm over that lab's lax biosafety practices and risky research. In his public testimony, Fauci conceded that even now there "has not been definitive proof one way or the other" of Covid-19's origins.

Officials didn't just spread these dubious ideas, they also demeaned anyone who dared to question them. "Dr. Fauci Throws Cold Water on Conspiracy Theory That Coronavirus Was Created in a Chinese Lab" was one typical headline.

At the hearings, it emerged that Dr. David Morens, a senior N.I.H. figure, was deleting emails that discussed pandemic origins and using his personal account so as to avoid public oversight.

"We're all smart enough to know to never have smoking guns, and if we did we wouldn't put them in emails and if we found them we'd delete them," he wrote to the head of a nonprofit involved in research at the Wuhan lab.

I wish I could say these were all just examples of the science evolving in real time, but they actually demonstrate obstinacy, arrogance and cowardice. Instead of circling the wagons, these officials should have been responsibly and transparently informing the public to the best of their knowledge and abilities.

Their delays, falsehoods and misrepresentations had terrible real-world effects on the lives of Americans. Failure to acknowledge the basic facts of Covid transmission led the authorities to pointlessly close beaches and parks, leaving city dwellers to huddle in the much more dangerous confines of cramped and poorly ventilated apartments.

The same failure also delayed the opening of schools and caused untold millions of dollars to be wasted on plexiglass barriers (that likely made things worse) rather than effective air filters that would have helped kids to return to one another's company.

Beaches and schools are open again, but the most severe ramifications of these failures may last for decades, because they gave people cause to doubt the word of scientific and public health authorities.

If the government misled people about how Covid is transmitted, why would Americans believe what it says about vaccines or bird flu or H1N1? How should people distinguish between wild conspiracy theories and actual conspiracies?

I started reporting on Covid in February

2020. It was already clear that a catastrophe was hurtling toward us.

But people who took that fact seriously were often poo-pooed as alarmists, doomers or preppers because many health officials were, at that point, downplaying the threat.

The next month, startled by the official claims that masks were harmful, I begged the authorities to level with the public about the potential benefits of masking rather than seemingly tailoring their message to

Public health officials squandered our faith in them by not being transparent.

avoid panic over the supply shortage. That strategy, I noted, was sure to backfire — as it did.

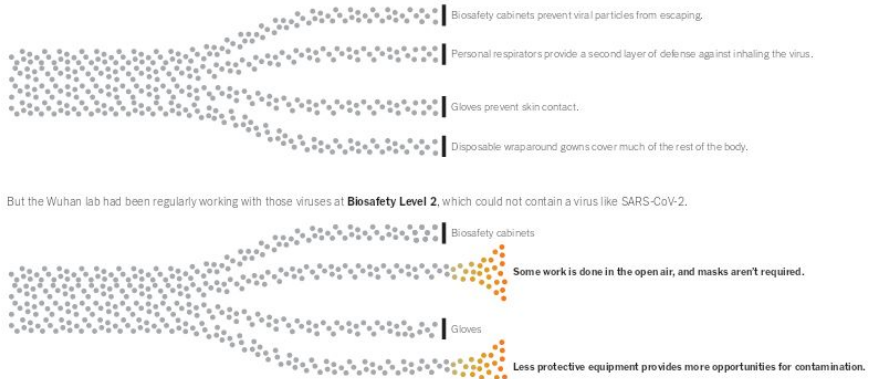
The questions around masks led me to the six-foot rule and the debate over how Covid was spread. "FACT CHECK: Covid-19 is NOT airborne," the World Health Organization declared on social media — even though SARS, a virus very much like Covid, had long since been understood to be airborne.

Frustrated scientists pleaded with the C.D.C. and the W.H.O. to take into account the new evidence. By the way, as of this writing, that "FACT CHECK" post is still up.



OPINION

In the United States, virologists generally use stricter **Biosafety Level 3** protocols when working with SARS-like viruses.



Note: Biosafety levels are not internationally standardized, and some countries use more permissive protocols than others.

These five key points about the origins of the pandemic.

Even the much more stringent containment at BSL-3 cannot fully prevent SARS-CoV-2 from escaping. Two years into the pandemic, the virus infected a scientist in a BSL-3 laboratory in Taiwan, which was, at the time, a zero-Covid country. The scientist had been vaccinated and was tested only after losing the sense of smell. By then, more than 100 close contacts had been exposed. Human error is a source of exposure even at the highest biosafety levels, and the risks are much greater for scientists working with infectious pathogens at low biosafety levels.

An early draft of the Defuse proposal stated that the Wuhan lab would do their virus work at BSL-2 to make it "highly cost-effective." Dr. Baric added a note to the draft highlighting the importance of using BSL-3 to contain SARS-like viruses that could infect human cells, writing that "U.S. researchers will likely break out." Years later, after SARS-CoV-2 had killed millions, Dr. Baric wrote to Dr. Daszak: "I have no doubt that they followed state determined rules and did the work under BSL-2. Yes China has the right to set their own policy. You believe this was appropriate containment if you want but don't expect me to believe it. Moreover, don't insult my intelligence by trying to feed me this load of BS."

SARS-CoV-2 is a stealthy virus that transmits effectively through the air, causes a range of symptoms similar to those of other common respiratory diseases and can be spread by infected people before symptoms even appear. If the virus had escaped from a BSL-2 laboratory in 2019, the leak most likely would have gone undetected until too late.

One startling detail — leaked to The Wall Street Journal and confirmed by current and former U.S. government officials — is that scientists on Dr. Shi's team fell ill with Covid-like symptoms in the fall of 2019. One of the scientists had been named in the Defuse proposal as the person in charge of virus discovery work. The scientists denied having been sick.

The hypothesis that Covid-19 came from an animal at the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan is not supported by strong evidence.

In December 2019, Chinese investigators assumed the outbreak had started at a centrally located market frequented by thousands of visitors daily. This bias in their search for early cases meant that cases unlinked to or located far from the market would very likely have been missed. To make things worse, the Chinese authorities blocked their

porting of early cases not linked to the market and, claiming biosafety precautions, ordered the destruction of patient samples on January 3, 2020, making it nearly impossible to see the complete picture of the earliest Covid-19 cases. Information about dozens of early cases from November and December 2019 remains inaccessible.

A pair of papers published in Science in 2022 made the best case for SARS-CoV-2 having emerged naturally from human-animal contact at the Wuhan market by focusing on a map of the early cases and asserting that the virus had jumped from animals into humans twice at the market in 2019. More recently, the two papers have been countered by other virologists and scientists who convincingly demonstrate that the available market evidence does not distinguish between a human super-spreader event and a natural spillover at the market.

Furthermore, the existing genetic and early case data show that all known Covid-19 cases probably stem from a single introduction of SARS-CoV-2 into people, and the outbreak at the Wuhan market probably happened after the virus had already been circulating in humans.

Not a single infected animal has ever been confirmed at the market or in its supply chain. Without good evidence that the pandemic started at the Huanan Seafood Market, the fact that the virus emerged in Wuhan points squarely at its unique SARS-like virus laboratory.

Key evidence that would be expected if the virus had emerged from the wildlife trade is still missing.

Despite the intense search trained on the animal trade and people linked to the market, investigators have not reported finding any animals infected with SARS-CoV-2 that had not been infected by humans. Yet, infected animal sources and other connective pieces of evidence were found for the earlier SARS and MERS outbreaks as quickly as within a few days, despite the less advanced viral forensic technologies of two decades ago.

Even though Wuhan is the home base of virus hunters with world-leading expertise in tracking novel SARS-like viruses, investigators have either failed to collect or report key evidence that would be expected if Covid-19 emerged from the wildlife trade. For example, investigators have not determined that those with the earliest known cases had exposure to intermediate host animals before falling ill. No antibody evidence shows that animal traders in Wuhan are regularly exposed to SARS-like viruses, as would be expected to

occur in such situations.

With today's technology, scientists can detect how respiratory viruses — including SARS, MERS and the flu — circulate in animals while making repeated attempts to jump across species. Thankfully, these variants usually fail to transmit well after crossing over to a new species and tend to die off after a small number of infections. In contrast, virologists and other scientists agree that SARS-CoV-2 required little to no adaptation to spread rapidly in humans and other animals. The virus appears to have succeeded in causing a pandemic upon its only detected jump into humans.

THE pandemic could have been caused by any of hundreds of virus species, at any of tens of thousands of wildlife markets, in any of thousands of cities, and in any year. But it was a SARS-like coronavirus with a unique furin cleavage site that emerged in Wuhan, less than two years after scientists, sometimes working under inadequate biosafety conditions, proposed collecting and creating viruses of that same design. While several natural spillover scenarios remain plausible, and we still don't know enough about the full extent of virus research conducted at the Wuhan institute by Dr. Shi's team and other researchers, a laboratory accident is the most parsimonious explanation of how the pandemic began.

Given what we now know, investigators should follow their strongest leads and subpoena all exchanges between the Wuhan scientists and their international partners, including unpublished research proposals, manuscripts, data and commercial orders. In particular, exchanges from 2018 and 2019 —

In previous outbreaks of coronaviruses, scientists found key pieces of evidence connecting the viruses to their origin in animals. For SARS-CoV-2, these same key pieces of evidence are still missing, more than four years after the virus emerged.

	SARS 2002	MERS 2012	COVID-19 2019
Infected animals found	Yes	Yes	No
Earliest known cases exposed to live animals	Yes	Yes	No
Antibody evidence of animals and animal traders having been infected	Yes	Yes	No
Ancestral variants of the virus found in animals	Yes	Yes	No
Documented trade of host animals between the area where bats carry closely related viruses and the outbreak site	Yes	Yes	No

GRAPHIC BY JEREMY ARNOLD, NARA CHOI AND GUS WELZ/2024 THE NEW YORK TIMES

MORE MUTATIONS →

nary tree shows how the virus evolved as it started to spread through humans.



The viruses that infected people linked to the seafood market in Wuhan, where the virus was suspected of having emerged naturally, were most likely not the earliest forms of the virus that started the pandemic.



ILLUSTRATION BY NARA CHOI, DESIGNED BY JEREMY ARNOLD

fective effect of ventilation and to stop shamming people for going to the beach (both July 2020). I even pined some of those scientists to write articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

But as I reported on these topics, one theme kept coming up: High-level officials were afraid to tell the truth — or just to admit that they didn't have all the answers — lest they spook the public.

It emerged during these congressional hearings that U.S. scientific authorities had no idea what viruses the Wuhan lab was using or what work it was doing. So how could they issue all those confident assurances? The hearings occasionally turned into a clown show, with some lawmakers looking to score cheap political points.

But others pulled their punches, no doubt worried about validating the misinformation that swirls around these issues. This attitude reflects a fundamental and very dangerous misunderstanding.

Misinformation is not something that can be overcome solely by spelling out facts just the right way. Defeating it requires earning and keeping the public's trust.

During Dr. Fauci's testimony last week, Representative Kweisi Mfume brought up the Tuskegee experiment, in which Black men with syphilis were denied treatment so doctors could study how the disease progressed.

Ironically, he claimed they were deliberately injected with syphilis — which is false, and a conspiracy theory — but that fact-check is irrelevant to the main question: Can vulnerable populations trust that the medical

establishment will inform and protect them?

During the pandemic, research showed that many African Americans were reluctant to get vaccines, but it wasn't because they were all Covid deniers. Many were warning to take precautions such as wearing masks and avoiding crowds. They just didn't trust that scientists had leveled with the public about the risks of vaccination.

When I visited London in 2021, I was amazed that people didn't generally know which vaccine they had taken or when they would get their booster. They answered my question with a shrug and said they would just go whenever they were told they had an appointment.

They, too, had a polarizing, Trump-like leader and the usual swirl of social media conspiracies. But they rolled up their sleeves when the National Health Service called because it was cashing in the trust it had built over decades.

It was the same for me, here in the U.S.: When I broke my strict isolation to volunteer at a vaccine clinic early in the pandemic and later, when I gleefully rolled up my own sleeve, I was elated but not because I had personally verified every single claim about vaccines.

Instead, I felt I had reason to trust that the manufacturer hadn't cheated in the trials, that the scientists overseeing the process weren't corrupt and that if something untoward had happened, it wouldn't have been covered up. I trusted that the vials were properly filled and handled and that the

nurse had injected them appropriately. Trust, not intimidation, was the key. But just when it was needed most, some of the officials in charge of our Covid response undermined it. And as Deborah Ross, a Democratic member of the House from North Carolina, said during the hearings, "When people don't trust scientists, they don't trust the science."

And studies have shown that once people lose trust in institutions, they become more open to conspiracy theories — not just about whatever specific topic might be in dispute, but across the board.

"Opportunists and 'do your own research' chase agents will take advantage of these lapses for a long time to come, fueling conspiracy theories and bad ideas of every stripe. The newest one I've heard is that Covid is ravaging people's immune systems on a mass scale comparable to that of H.I.V. On what authority can such a falsehood now be debunked?"

As the expression goes, trust is built in drops and lost in buckets, and this bucket is going to take a very long time to refill.

I hope the pandemic, both as lived experience and now as rewritten history, has proved that a paternalistic, infantilizing approach to healthcare, transparency and accountability work.

In the four-plus years since Covid emerged, millions of people died, but so did something harder to quantify: the trust of a great many people in the science of public health. The authorities will have to live with the consequences, and so, unfortunately, will all the rest of us.

OPINION

How We Celebrate, Where The Border Is Home

Text by Cecilia Balli
Photographs by Thalia Gochez
 Ms. Balli is a journalist and cultural anthropologist. Ms. Gochez is a photographer based in Los Angeles.

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS
 THE sky was muddy gray when I arrived at the Sam's Memorial Stadium parking lot on a cool February afternoon. As soon as I parked, a school police officer appeared in a golf cart to rush me to the front of the parade line. I clambered aboard, one hand holding my large white Mexican sombrero rimmed with gold embroidered roses, the other scooping my thick, long skirt.

I was there for Charro Days, a festival that honors Mexican culture and our city's intimate connection with Matamoros, Tamaulipas, across the border. As an alumna of the Brownsville school district, I'd been invited to serve as grand marshal of the children's parade. I felt regal dressed in a bright salmon pink traje de charro, a modified version of the traditional Mexican horseman outfit worn by mariachis and ranchera singers. As we whizzed by the century-old red brick buildings of my junior high campus, rocheño music wafting from nearby speakers, my eyes welled up and I felt a lump in my throat.

I was home.
 Every year, right around Lent, life slows down in my hometown, and for eight glorious days we celebrate Charro Days. The first time I took part in the festival was in 1983, when my twin sister and I danced in the children's parade to "La Cucaracha," a porterie folk song, with our schoolmates. During this week, residents often show up to work or school dressed in traditional Mexican clothing. Some wear charro outfits — the costume from central Mexico most associated with national identity. Others dress as chianpanecas and china poblanas, jarochas and tehuanas,

As the country becomes increasingly divided, Brownsville comes together.

in the blouses and skirts typical of the south. And there are lots of tamalipecas, the fringed suede jackets of Tamaulipas.

To outsiders, it may all seem like a caricature of Mexican culture, but for Brownsville natives this is a time when we get to take pride and joy in who we are, in a country where it sometimes feels difficult to do so.

In the coming months, as the presidential campaign gets in full swing, Americans will no doubt be bombarded with visions of a broken U.S.-Mexico border. (Just last week President Biden issued an executive order that temporarily blocks most migrants from seeking asylum.) What will be missing are portraits of the beautiful border some of us know — a place of community, continuity and celebration.

I like to say the border begins in Brownsville, where President James K. Polk first provoked a war with Mexico. In April 1846, after the U.S. annexation of Texas, Polk dispatched 4,000 soldiers into the Nueces Strip in South Texas, ordering a land and water blockade of Mexican troops and civilians. Mexico claimed the border ran along the Nueces River in Corpus Christi, while the United States insisted it was the Rio Grande, 150 miles to the south.

When Mexican forces crossed the Rio Grande attempting to break the blockade, Gen. Zachary Taylor sent a small force to meet them. The Mexican Army fired, killing 11 American troops. Polk then convinced some skeptical members of Congress that it was an invasion. The war ended two years later, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which required Mexico to cede 55 percent of its territory to the United States. Soon surveyors began the task of demarcating the new border from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, which was nearly 2,000 miles long. Thus the U.S. Southwest was born, marking the beginning of American westward expansion.

AS CHILDREN, we didn't learn much about our city's pivotal role in the construction of our nation, but the repercussions of that history hung over us. Both sides of my family, the Ballis and the Hijonjas, had been in the region since the 1700s and once owned vast tracts of land that, as was true for most Mexican American families in the region, they lost over time to Anglo land grabbers. My paternal grandfather was raised in Texas but moved to Matamoros in the late 1910s, during a period of intense racial violence against Mexican Americans.

While the national boundary changed, the border remained fluid. My parents were born in Matamoros. After they married, they got jobs as seasonal farmworkers. Eventually, they saved enough to build a home in Brownsville. Even though a vast majority of students I went to school with in the 1980s were Mexican American, there was a strong pressure to assimilate. In first grade, my

teacher gave me a C in English because I spoke too much Spanish with my friends.

On Sundays, we crossed the international bridge to visit our grandparents on their small ranch outside Matamoros, which had an outhouse and no running water. We ate tamales and celebrated Christmas there. At night, my grandmother lulled us to sleep with Mexican folk tales. Mexican culture was the safe that helped blunt the pain of growing up in poverty and of my father's eventual cancer diagnosis and premature death.

Living in Brownsville I was able to be both deeply Mexican and deeply American — and crossing the border showed me that it was possible to hold these two identities at once. I learned to shift between countries, cultures, societies and political systems, ultimately giving me a stronger sense of myself.

Charro Days was founded in 1938, the brainchild of a local white businessman who wanted to stimulate the economy during the Great Depression, draw tourists and cultivate civic pride. It eventually morphed into a four-day fiesta that included parades, street dances, fireworks, a carnival, a rodeo and motorboat races.

It soon captured the nation's imagination. By the 1950s, radio and television networks were broadcasting some of the festivities from coast to coast. Around the same time, the main parade began crossing over into Matamoros, which also held its own events. In 1954, the U.S. government began opening the Gateway International Bridge in downtown Brownsville, which connects the two cities, so revelers could cross back and forth freely during the festival.

But our binational ties would wear thin as the border became harder to cross. In the early 1980s, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans and Guatemalans fleeing civil wars poured into Brownsville and across other parts of the border. The Reagan administration responded by prosecuting religious activists who provided them safe harbor.

As world economies became more interconnected, the movement of people and goods across national borders increased. The attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, further changed the nature of border enforcement. The Department of Homeland Security was established in 2002; the Border Patrol eventually doubled in size. In communities like Brownsville, these changes were felt intimately. Many residents stopped going to Matamoros, afraid of growing violence between Mexican drug cartels. With customs lines to get into the United States now stretching for hours, many Matamoros residents also lost the incentive to come to Brownsville.

AFTER my grandmother died in 2022, my family too lost our anchor across the border. So, when the school district invited me to participate in this year's parade, it was a chance to reconnect with an older Brownsville that I missed. I arrived in town a few days early to attend Fiesta Folklorica, an evening event where the children who will dance in the parade perform for their families. Dozens of little girls in elaborate costumes stomped on the wooden dance floor and twirled their colorful skirts furiously, like butterflies ready to fly.

That morning, the White House announced that Mr. Biden would be coming to Brownsville the same day as the children's parade to underscore his policy wins. For a moment, we weren't sure if his visit would interrupt our celebration. It's a form of theater border communities are familiar with: politicians visiting, flanked by border agents and cameras.

The record numbers of migrants and refugees are undeniable. In the 2023 fiscal year, which ended in September, Customs and Border Protection apprehended over 2.4 million people at the southwest border, many of them hoping to gain asylum. Border communities are sandwiched between the issue, the politics surrounding it and the often misguided policies, which can prove unhelpful or even make the situation worse.

In the end, the children's parade went on as planned. When I arrived at the meeting point that day, the young costumed dancers were lining up behind the car I would ride in. They were a picture of fierce beauty and joy, decked out in red lipstick with flowers and bows on their heads. "I like your dress!" one little girl yelled, pointing at me. "You're so pretty!" another one said. I laughed and asked if I could take their picture.

A mile away, the Rio Grande meandered languidly. On the grounds of the old Amigoland Mall, carnival operators added finishing touches to the mechanical rides that would begin receiving thousands of guests that evening.

My car lurched forward. What followed was a sweet, nostalgic blur. Spectators on metal folding chairs cheered. Children dressed as small charros and charras flashed toothy grins and waved. One little boy with a mustache penciled on his upper lip took off his cowboy hat, twirled it chivalrously and bowed. All the while, local, state and federal agents lurked at every street corner: hulky tactical vehicles and men in camouflage with radios, buzz cuts and bulletproof vests. It was emblematic of all the increased policing we've seen at the border.

A woman waved, and I realized it was Mrs. Gomez, my former kindergarten teacher. A couple of bandmates from high school called out my name. But it was my mom, aunts and cousins who screamed the loudest when I passed them in front of the old Majestic Theater. Fourteen blocks from where it started, the parade ended at the Gateway International Bridge — the bridge that has defined our lives.

As the festival wound to a close, I visited with Rosendo Escareno, the director of Charro Days Inc., the main organizer of the festival, and Henry LeFrier, the board president. They described the simple satisfaction they get watching children enjoy themselves at the parades with their parents, as so many generations did before them. Every cycle builds the tradition. "It becomes a really huge memory for us," Mr. Escareno said, "and that's why we're here, 87 years strong this year."

While the country becomes increasingly divided over the border, during Charro Days, those of us from Brownsville have something that still brings us together. In one another's waves along the parade route, in our approving gazes, we saw ourselves. We belonged to the same thing, the same place. A place called home.



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OPINION



OPINION

Long Before the Wide Awakes, There Were the Wide Awakes

Jon Grinspan

A curator of political history at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and the author of "Wide Awake: The Forgotten Force That Elected Lincoln and Spurred the Civil War."

GEORGE KIMBALL was ready for war as soon as the first brick hit his head. The 20-year-old volunteer was listening to an abolitionist lecture in Bowdoin Square in Boston during the 1860 presidential campaign when a pro-slavery throng tried to shut it down. Mr. Kimball was prepared, and as part of a torch-and-barricade, bodyguard called the Wide Awakes, who beat the brick throwers back using their torches as clubs.

As Mr. Kimball walked home, blood in his eyes, he wanted "war declared at once." Years later, having fought his way through from Bull Run to Gettysburg to Petersburg, he still considered that Boston brickbat, "as much a cause belli as was the firing upon Fort Sumter." For him, it was the embattled right to publicly protest slavery that triggered the conflict—a fight over free speech brought on by the war.

Today, our starkest political debates often turn on similar questions of public speech and violence. Across diverse conflicts, from college campuses to the Capitol's steps, we keep asking where the line is between heated words and aggressive deeds. Though framed as a legal question concerning the First Amendment, more often it's a conundrum for our political culture.

In a democracy, how far is too far? It's a question that fueled America's bloodiest war. The Civil War was fought over slavery (anyone who says wasn't is just wrong). But how did American slavery, which began in 1619, cause a conflict in 1861? How did a long-running debate turn into a shooting war? Where, exactly, was that dynamic moment when an argument became a fight?

George Kimball's Wide Awakes help make sense of it all. That half-forgotten movement provides a missing link between the election and the war. In the presidential campaign of 1860, hundreds of thousands of diverse young Americans joined companies of Wide Awakes, marching in militaristic uniforms, escorting Republican speakers, fighting in defense of antislavery speech. Their grass roots rising helped elect Abraham Lincoln as president, but also began the spiral into war.

"Slavery," Frederick Douglass warned as the conflict loomed, "cannot tolerate free speech." In the decades before the Civil War, many Americans kept quiet on the subject. Over the years, that took mounting coercion. States banned public criticism, regular "mobbing" persecuted abolitionists. In Congress, antislavery leaders were bullied and beaten. In Northern cities, abolitionist speech was possible, but so was racist terrorism. Lincoln grumbled that most in the North "crucify their feelings" on the subject, but they would not do so forever.

The pushback came from a surprising place: Hartford, Conn. Even that orderly New

England town saw brutal mobbings. In the 1856 presidential campaign, local Democrats blasted a Republican rally with fireworks angled like howitzers into crowds of men, women and children. So, to kick off the 1860 campaign, local Republicans invited the braving Kentucky abolitionist Cassius M. Clay, widely known as Cash. Cash took the stage on a wintry February evening, attacking the way the forces of slavery "suppress the voice of the pulpit, the freedom of the press and of speech" and warning "insurrection is certain."

Insurrection began that evening. As Clay's audience filtered out into the night, they held a strange tableau: five young textile clerks in black, shiny, makeshift caps. Though designed to keep torch-oil from dripping on their clothing, the outfits embodied the same aggressive verve Clay had just expressed. As the five capped clerks led a torchlit march through town, Democrat thugs attacked. When young Republicans beat them back, a new movement was born.

Within a week, the new club had dozens of members, elected officers and a name—the Wide Awakes—building off a sense of generational awakening against slavery.

For their first official march, they had the random good luck to escort Lincoln through Hartford's dark streets. Their branches started to bubble up across Connecticut that spring, using embattled antislavery speech as a recruiting tool. When a Wide Awakes rally was attacked in New Haven, the movement placed blooded comrades onstage as proof of the suppression they faced.

The movement was like a black flag, flashing across the North. Young Chicagoans organizing the Republican National Convention took it up, outfitting thousands of Wide Awakes a few weeks. Companies exploded from there, proliferating from Maine to California, led by German radicals in Milwaukee, fugitive slaves in Boston, Knickerbocker aristocrats on Broadway, antislavery Southerners in D.C., even young women at Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts.

By the end of that summer, Americans believed that there were half a million Wide Awakes in a nation of 31 million. The real number might have been smaller, but even that exaggeration showed how large the movement loomed.

Some Wide Awakes were radical abolitionists, others cautioned moderation, but they all shared a sense that pro-slavery forces were suppressing their views. Free speech provided a convenient cause all could march under. It was vague on the most divisive topics, it conveniently united their enemies (dumping Southern enslavers in with Northern Democratic mobbers), and it suggested that the Wide Awakes' democratic birthright was being stolen.

Republican protests, for the right to protest, drew protesters of their own. Northern Democrats asked when it had become OK for political parties to march like armies. A more pointed response came from farm radicals. Pointed misinformation and disinformation swirled. Senator Louis Wigfall of Texas told Congress that the Wide Awakes movement



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY, ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE

How a club you've never heard of from the 19th century changed the world.

was plotting "to sweep the country in which I live with fire and sword."

Angry young Southern Democrats now felt that they were the ones being suppressed. Many started uniformed clubs of their own to "offset" Wide Awakes. In Charleston, S.C., and St. Louis, the Southern Democratic Party organized "Minutemen" clubs. In Washington and Baltimore, they formed to shadow National Volunteers, which included a worrisome number of the Capitol Police. Again and again, they warned of "coercion" by a Northern majority. By the peak of the 1860 campaign, hundreds of thousands of uniformed young men—both Wide Awakes and their "offsets"—were marching for the right to protest each other.

By the time he won the election, Lincoln was ready to be done with the Wide Awakes. But radical secessionists weren't, using the movement as a boogymen in their campaign for disunion. South Carolinians invoked the Wide Awakes the night they left the Union. Virginia's ex-governor told his state that if it did not secede, it would "be cut to pieces by the Wide Awakes." There, a minority of extremists planned to break away no matter what, but the Wide Awakes armed them with a potent symbol to scare more moderate Southerners out of the Union.

Wide Awakes hotheaded also began to repurpose their marchers as fighters. Some wrote to Lincoln, offering to send thousands of armed Wide Awakes to his inauguration. In St. Louis, Wide Awakes sneaked in rifles and drilled secretly in breweries, while the Southern Democratic Minutemen evolved into a paramilitary militia from a political club.

Soon their former campaign headquarters bristled with shotguns, cannon and Confederate flags.

When Confederates fired on Fort Sumter, they began the Civil War, but the fighting killed no one. The first bloodshed came from the kind of street-mobbing that had escalated over decades. As Massachusetts troops headed through Baltimore a few days after Fort Sumter, those anti-Wide Awake National Volunteers led a force against them. Five soldiers and 12 civilians were killed. A few weeks later, St. Louis's militarized Wide Awakes pushed back, with about 30 dying in an awful street fight.

Wide Awakes who had started out as demonstrators were now combatants. What had been a political organization with militaristic motifs became a military organization with political motives.

In the generations since, we have willfully forgotten the Wide Awakes, and with them the fight over democratic speech that precipitated the conflict. Americans have taught themselves an oddly cozy account of their Civil War, jumping from genteel orators debating the "peculiar institution," to Blue and Gray soldiers arrayed on Virginia cornfields, all set to mournful fiddle music.

Founders use the phrase "The Coming of the Civil War." But the war didn't come. Americans brought it, argued it, protested it into being. The Wide Awakes helped politicize that story, as an unfolding and uncertain tug of war between speech and action, equal parts inspiring and troubling. Marching for the best of causes, they helped bring on the worst of consequences.

Boys' Struggle? Loneliness.

Ruth Whippman

The author of "Boymorn: Reimagining Boyhood in the Age of Impossible Masculinity."

THE 20-year-old college student and gamer I met in Cedar City, Utah, didn't seem particularly amused by his own joke that he was a cultural cliché. He lived in his grandma's basement, and barely left the house except to go to classes. He spoke with the weary, stilted tone of an online—playing video games, watching porn and hanging out on Discord, the heavily male-skewed communication platform, where users gather in communities devoted to topics ranging from the innocuously nerdy to the utterly horrifying. By his own admission, he was brutally lonely.

During the pandemic, he was a moderator for a Discord community, at first mainly sorting out technical problems and weeding out trolls. But one night, he developed a crush called him over voice chat, and started sharing how lonely and depressed he was. He spoke with the boy for an hour, trying to talk him down and give him hope. That call led to more like it. Over time, he developed a reputation as an unofficial therapist on the server. By the time he left Discord a year or so later, he'd had about 200 calls with different people, both men and women, who spoke of contemplating suicide.

But it was the boys who seemed the most desperately lonely and isolated. On the site, he said, he found "a lot more unhealthy men than unhealthy women." He added: "With men, there is a huge thing about mental health and shame narratives, and I have come to believe the conditions of modern boyhood amount to a perfect storm for loneliness. This is a new problem bumping up against an old one. All the old deficiencies and blind spots of male socialization are still in circulation—the same mass failure to teach boys relational skills and emotional intelligence, the same rigid masculinity norms and social prohibitions that push them away from intimacy and emotionality. But I've seen—dictated, culture war-ton America, we have also added new ones.

The micro-generation that was just hitting puberty as the #MeToo movement exploded in 2017 is now of college (and voting) age. They have lived their whole adolescence not just in the digital era, with a glorious array of virtual options to avoid the angst of real-world, but they have also the shadow of a wider cultural reckoning around toxic masculinity.

We have spent the past half-decade wrestling with ideas of gender and privilege, attempting to challenge the old stereotypes and power structures. These conversations should have been an opportunity to throw out the old pressures and norms of manhood, and to help boys and men be more emotionally open and engaged. But in many ways this environment has apparently had the opposite effect—it has shut them down even further.

For many progressives, weary from a plea of male misconduct, the refusal to engage with men's feelings has now become almost a point of principle. For every tough guy urging his crying son to "man up," there's a voice from the left telling him that to express his concerns is to take airline away from a woman or someone more marginalized. The two are not morally equivalent, but to boys, the impact can often feel similar. In many cases, the same people who are urging boys and men to become more emotionally expressive are also taking a moral stand against hearing how they actually feel. For many boys, it can seem as though their emotions get dismissed by both sides. This political isolation has combined with existing masculine norms to push a worrying number of boys into a kind of resentful, semi-politicized repression.

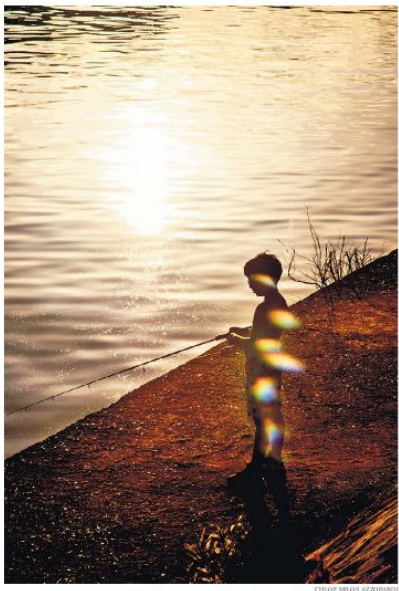
The statistics are starting to feel like their own cliché. Over a quarter of men under 30 say they have no close friends. Teenage boys now spend two hours less a week socializing than girls do, and they also spend about seven hours more per week than their female peers on screens.

As a mother of boys, I get a chill down my spine at these numbers. And my own research has fed my fears. I talked to boys of all types. Jocks and nerds, popular kids and socially awkward, rich and poor. And the same theme came up over and over for boys on the face of it had little else in common. They were lonely.

Some of them were genuinely isolated. Others had plenty of friends. But almost all

of them had the nagging sense that something important was missing in those friendships. They found it almost impossible to talk to the male peers about anything intimate or express vulnerability. One teenager described his social circle, a group of boys who had been best friends since kindergarten, as a "very unsupportive support system." Another revealed that he could recall only one emotionally open conversation with a male friend in his life, and that even his twin brother had not seen him cry in years. But they felt unable to articulate this pain or seek help, because of a fear that, because they were boys, no one would listen.

As one 20-year-old put it, "I am a voiceless any concern, they get deflected with all of their so-called privileges." He added: "They'd be like, 'Whatever. Women have suffered more than you, so you have no right to complain.'"



Modern boys get everything — except the thing that is most worth having.

Almost without exception, the boys I talked to craved closer, more emotionally open relationships, but had neither the skills nor the social permission to change the story.

Perhaps it's not surprising that boys don't know how to listen and engage with their friends' emotions on any deeper level; after all, no one really engages with theirs. We are convinced that men and boys have had more than their fair share of our attention already because in a sexist society, male opinions hold outsized value. But the world—including their own parents—has less time for their feelings.

One study from 2014 showed that parents were more likely to use emotional words when talking with their 4-year-old daughters. (Right from birth, mothers were less likely to chat back to boys' early sounds.) A more recent study comparing fathers of boys with fathers of girls found that fathers of boys were less attentively engaged with their boys, spent less time talking about their son's sad feelings and instead were more likely to roughhouse with them. They even used subtly different vocabularies when talking with boys, with fewer feelings-centered words, and more competition and winning-focused language.

Spend any time in the manosphere, and it's easy to start to hate men and boys. The extreme misogyny, the gleeful hate speech, the violent threats and thum of resistance make it hard to summon much sympathy for male concerns, and easy to forget the ways that patriarchy harms them, too.

Perhaps it's not surprising that in the grip of the culture wars, caring about boys has become subtly coded as a right-wing cause, a dog whistle for a kind of bad-faith politicking. Men have had way more than their fair share of our concern already, the reasoning goes, and now it's time for them to pipe down. But for boys, privilege and harm intertwine in complex ways—male socialization is a strangely destructive blend of indulgence and neglect. Under patriarchy, boys and men get everything, except the thing that's most worth having: human connection.

Silencing or demonizing boys in the name of progressive ideals is only reinforcing this problem, pushing them further into isolation and defensiveness. The prescription for creating a generation of healthier, more socially and emotionally competent men is the same in the wider political discourse as it is in our own homes—to approach boys generously rather than punitively. We need to acknowledge boys' feelings, to talk with our sons in the same way we do our daughters, to hear them and empathize rather than dismiss or minimize, and engage with them as fully emotional beings.

They are more than ready to talk. We just need to make sure we are listening.



OPINION

A Promise to Grads Who Show 'No Promise'

Megan K. Stack

A contributing Opinion writer.

IT'S high school graduation season. Time to cheer the teenage achievers (especially the overachievers) and send them off to campus adventures and incipient adulthood. This year, though, I want to talk about the other graduates. The ones without honor society stoles or academic medals or college plans. The ones who still don't know what they could or should do, who taste a tiny dread when the band strikes up "Pomp and Circumstance."

I'm talking about students who flailed academically, never discovered any particular talent, drifted unnoticed in the halls. The kids who got into trouble and now think of trouble as their natural habitat. The poor kids, the dwellers in volatile homes, the abusers of substances. The college rejects and even the high school dropouts.

If I could give all those kids a graduation gift, it would be this plan but important truth: Everything can still be fine. Not easy, necessarily, but fine. That is almost certainly true, no matter what seemingly hopeless mess they have made of their affairs or bleak vision they've developed of their own abilities and future. Virtually every American 18-year-old has more options and more time than they've been led to believe. A

conceived by accident. His advice to her comes straight from the American id of survival, reinvention and faking it till you make it.

"Get out of here and move forward," Don tells Peggy. "This never happened. It will shock you how much it never happened."

Here's the catch, though: While it's still possible for most 18-year-old Americans to drastically improve their material circumstances, the perception of self that forms during impressionable teenage years can inflate or cripple people into adulthood — and that part is much, much harder to change.

Scientists still don't fully understand the lifelong potency of the teenage years, but it seems to be rooted in the hyperbolic brain chemistry of adolescents, whose emotions carry an intensity unmatched during other stretches of life. The highs are higher, the pain cuts harder, and the experiences get stored deeper in the brain, an adolescent psychology expert, Laurence Steinberg, told me. In the end, the aftertaste of those years can cling for decades, and many people struggle to distinguish their adult selves from their adolescent perceptions and memories.

Dr. Steinberg, a psychology professor at Temple University who has spent decades researching the adolescent psyche, sug-

gested that messages from families, teachers and friends may be the decisive factor when it comes to rebounding from an unpromising high school career.

"If people in your life tell you, 'You're actually not very smart and you're not going to make much of yourself,' you start to internalize that," Dr. Steinberg said. "If they say, 'You can change. You're immature and made bad decisions, but you're going to grow up,' that's very important."

In my senior year, one of my friends got pregnant with her shambolic boyfriend and decided to have the baby. When I went off to college, she stayed behind in her parents' house in the next town, working in a coffee shop and, eventually, taking classes at community college. I visited her when I came home on breaks. She seemed the same — deep dimples and wry jokes — and I'd hold her baby awkwardly and pretend to think it was exciting that she was a mother. Secretly, I was horrified.

We'd been young together — sharing coffee and cigarettes in the doughnut shop, stealing through starless nights, laughing until we choked. Now she languished on a barren suburban street, cartoons squawking, coffee table sticky from leaking sippy cups. I couldn't believe she'd gotten trapped like that.

Skipping to the present day, that friend lives a few hours from the place where we grew up, in the kind of scenic New England town people visit to take pictures of fall leaves. Time unfolded well for her: She got her nursing degree, worked in hospitals,

met a new man, had another baby. As we moved deeper into adulthood, Facebook started to suggest that our positions had reversed, that she now luxuriated in a freedom I had lost. As I slogged from the milky, sleepless mess of early motherhood to the chaos of toddlers and elementary school, she was launching her own kids into adulthood and taking up mountain biking. I had raggedy nails and new circles under my eyes; she had a golden retriever, a Tesla and spontaneous getaways with her husband.

She'd been a mother too young, I guess, but then again, I wish I'd had my kids a little earlier. It had been easy at 18 to mistake our relative positions as a lifelong condition, a decisive ascent or descent into an unacknowledged American caste. Now I realize how much of my own fatalism was rooted in illusion and a vast over-simplification of time and human affairs.

Nothing particularly bad happened to me in high school, but it was, nevertheless, a difficult time containing no hint of future adventure or achievement. I stumbled over algebra and floundered in science. I read voraciously but couldn't seem to communicate the overwhelming feelings and contradictory ideas provoked by the books. It seemed as if every teacher, sooner or later, marveled aloud that someone so dull-witted had emerged from the same gene pool as my brilliant older siblings.

So I did what kids do: I told myself I didn't care and stopped trying. I distracted myself from the low hum of underachievement by seeking out friends on the margins — burnouts and bohemians, unrepentant subversives. Their company was a relief; caring and falling short had been more bruising than I wanted to admit.

I did go to college, though — mostly thanks to standardized tests — and I even

tually figured out how to use my own brain. Living inside my mind had for years been like being locked inside a car I didn't know how to drive. And then, in my sophomore year of college — I don't know how else to put this — everything, very suddenly, felt different. The obscure became obvious: how to study and memorize, retain raw information and, most crucially, trap and turn into words the complicated ideas that had previously drifted through my thoughts like clouds.

I don't remember underachievement, let alone delinquency, for anybody. I hope my own children are able to thrive along traditional lines. It's obviously preferable to leave high school with the highest possible grades and minimum erosion of self-esteem. Stepping into adulthood burdened with a rap sheet, severe emotional trauma or addiction is not ideal.

But it doesn't have to be the end of the story, either.

By my own graduation day, kids I knew in high school had already gotten arrested or addicted, failed classes or stayed out all night because they couldn't stand to go home. It would have shocked me, back then, to realize how many of them would grow up and disappear into normal, healthy-looking lives. Not everyone got a college degree, but most everybody landed, eventually, on their feet.

Even the friend who went to prison is long since free and has become more educated than I will ever be. My friend whose anguish was the hardest to grasp, the one who insisted since we were 5 that he was really a boy — he's now a dad in a faraway city we never thought about, with a fascinating job we didn't know existed, living unobtrusively as a man, which we would've assumed was impossible.

You have no idea what's coming next, or after that, or after that. If high school was good for you, keep the memories close. As for the rest of us?

It can shock you, after all, how much it never happened.



LETTERS

How Will Employers Regard Today's Student Activists?

Readers discuss a column by Pamela Paul about college protesters' job prospects and future careers.

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "And Now, a Real-Life Lesson for Student Activists," by Pamela Paul (column, May 31):

Ms. Paul tells us that students who took part in recent protests may face reduced job prospects because of their actions: "Corporate America is fundamentally risk averse." The prospects for these students are dim. Or are they?

These are students who have the courage of their convictions, who are willing to stand up for what they feel is right and make their own judgments. They are leaders. If they can't get jobs they will start their own firms — and they will thrive.

Let corporate America hire the other students, the timid, conformist followers who accept what they are told without question and "fit into the company culture." Let's see where that gets them in five or 10 years.

WALTER WILLIAMS
NEW YORK

TO THE EDITOR:

I wouldn't want to work in an organization full of people who did nothing wrong as children and adolescents. For one thing, I imagine that office parties would be dull and water cooler conversations bland. Adolescence is inherently rebellious. Creativity is disruptive. But although I feel like an old fogey for saying this, what I find lacking in the younger generation is a sense of responsibility of ownership for one's actions. We learn character and courage when we face the consequences of our choices, whether it's repaying school loans or justifying, defending, regretting, apologizing or atoning for our deeds.

As an employer, I'm willing to forgive and provide second chances. What I'm reluctant to do is hire those incapable of admitting or acknowledging that they might be wrong and unwilling to accept accountability.

JAY MARKOWITZ
POUND RIDGE, N.Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

If there's one thing I've learned during my time as a university student, it's that we are generally more socially aware than most adults. Campuses are not silent; they are "hotbeds" of the exchange of conflicting ideas.

While employers may believe that our naïveté blinds us from seeing that the world is not ready for what we want it to be, they miss out on the obvious truth. We want to change the world, and our employers along with it. We are the employees of the future. Our activism is against the very employers refusing to hire us for exercising our constitutional right to protest.

Whatever your beliefs, I exhort you: Do not underestimate the university student. Do not devalue the "moral clarity," as Pamela Paul calls it, with which we lead and protest. We are doing the dirty work, while the rest of the world watches. We have prepared our whole lives for these moments, in fact encouraged by you. Is the world truly so hypocritical?

ANISSA PATEL, DOVER, MASS.
The writer is a student at Emory University.

TO THE EDITOR:

Pamela Paul has learned the wrong lesson from the college protesters. The issue is not their zeal

passion. The issue is mindlessness, which is probably the salient quality that businesses wish to avoid.

In their passion, too many of the protesters openly support a ruthless terrorist group, repeat chants that they actually don't understand and accuse Israel of genocide. No business would ever wish to hire employees so susceptible to groupthink.

ARI WEITZNER, NEW YORK

TO THE EDITOR:

Pamela Paul maintains that the "pro-Palestinian demonstrations lacked the moral clarity of the anti-apartheid demonstrations."

I was active in the divestment movement at Columbia in 1985. It tore the campus apart. At Johns Hopkins, an encampment of students calling for divestment from apartheid was firebombed by fraternity members. At the time, the very popular president, Ronald Reagan, was denouncing protesters who took a stand for human rights in South Africa.

Reagan's idea of "moral clarity" involved promoting "constructive engagement" with apartheid South Africa. Reagan and his myriad followers on American campuses argued that you change unsavory societies by building bridges, not walls. The Reagan administration also maintained that South Africa was an indispensable geopolitical ally, too valuable to alienate.

But in 1985, as in 2024, many students took a principled stand against a great injustice, despite knowing that, in Ms. Paul's words, employers might oppose hiring anyone who agitates for change. Today's protesters, like their anti-apartheid forbears, have taken that risk believing that history will vindicate their ethical stance.

Yes, each generation's agitation for change arises from historically distinctive circumstances. But let's not exaggerate the differences between the anti-apartheid protests of the 1980s and today's protests for Palestinian human rights.

ROB NIXON, PRINCETON, N.J.

The writer is a professor of English at Princeton and is the author of "Homelands: Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond."

TO THE EDITOR:

Pamela Paul says that while students have "been raised to believe in their right to change the world, the rest of the world may neither share nor be ready to indulge their particular vision." The issue is not that students want to change the world, but the method they are using to change the world.

Tensands of college students are changing the world by joining the Peace Corps, Teach for America and the military. Those students are making the world better and will be hired by corporations.

Changing the world involves listening to people and gradually changing minds. My neighborhood voted 52 percent for Joe Biden and 48 percent for Donald Trump in the last election. I listen to my neighbors and try to respectfully change their minds.

Employers do not want to hire people who are perceived as being disruptive.

Employers will hire students who want to change the world by hard work, constructive listening and respectful persuasion.

JAMES HORTON
CHARLOTTE, N.C.



teenager's biography (whether promising or ominous) should not be interpreted as definitive proof of where to come.

That is clear to me now, having lived long enough to watch old friends rebound from seemingly ruined lives to happy, stable and prosperous adulthoods, and, on the other end, noticing that some of my most promising classmates fizzled out upon contact with the world beyond our little town. There are plenty of kids, of course, who turn out more or less the way you'd expect. But the whole process strikes me as infinitely less predictable than suggested by the mechanical churn and sort of the K-12 assembly line.

I'm not in denial. It's a tough world. Turning things around — changing one's trajectory — is difficult and daunting. Factors beyond our control, like economic class, race and lack of family support, can pile on extra disadvantages. Even the happiest endings are usually preceded by times when it all looks too hard and hopeless. And people do, tragically, fall through the cracks.

Sill' young people should be told — and should believe — that their destiny is not shaped in high school. Their personalities are still coming together in the tissues of the brain; time is on their side and — say what you want about Americans — we like underdogs, cheer come-from-behind wins and are generous with second chances.

Even passing a general educational development test, or G.E.D., can provide a path to community college, where about a third of students end up transferring to a four-year university. Those averse to academia — on trend with a growing national discussion over whether college is really worth the cost and time (for the record, I'm pro-college) — fruitful careers can be reached through trade schools, entrepreneurship or the military. Juvenile criminal records often get expunged, and research has found that only about 10 percent of kids who commit serious crimes grow up to become chronic adult offenders.

In "Mad Men," Don Draper finds Peggy, his office protégée, curled in defeat and despair after giving up the secret baby she'd

Think you've crashed? Don't worry: There's still plenty of runway.

gested that messages from families, teachers and friends may be the decisive factor when it comes to rebounding from an unpromising high school career.

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NADINE BEERLICH

11 Swing Voters On the Trump Verdict

Patrick Healy, Frank Luntz and Adrian J. Rivera

Mr. Healy is the deputy Opinion editor. Mr. Luntz is a pollster. Mr. Rivera is an editorial assistant in Opinion.

HOW the heck can you be undecided at this point? Four hours after the conviction of Donald Trump, the focus group moderator Frank Luntz posed that question to 11 voters who said they were still torn — even post-verdict — between whether to support Mr. Trump or President Biden (or, for some, Robert F. Kennedy Jr.) in November. None said they were now definitely Biden voters, though notably, several said that Mr. Trump had lost their vote or that they were more inclined to Mr. Biden.

All 11 participants in our Times Opinion focus group were swing voters: They had supported or been open to Hillary Clinton or Mr. Biden at least once in 2016, 2020 or 2024, and backed or considered Mr. Trump at least once in those years as well. These voters all said they were struck by the verdict, even swayed in different ways, yet Mr. Trump's guilt didn't decisively turn them against the former president — a point that was Mr. Luntz's biggest takeaway from the group. Inflation, the economy, immigration and abortion were the things that they said would ultimately determine their votes.

Those who came away from the verdict more inclined toward Mr. Biden, weren't exactly enthusiastic about the president. One of them, Hilary, a 55-year-old social worker from California, said, "I can envision casting a vote for Biden and then needing a very stiff drink." But Mr. Trump was now beyond the pale, she said: "I cannot have the president be a convicted felon. Full stop."

The idea of voting for a felon for president was unacceptable, un-American or too unreal for several of our participants, including some of those who gave Mr. Trump credit for managing the economy. Others thought Democrats pushed those felony charges to help Mr. Biden politically, saying that the Biden campaign was trying to exploit the verdict. And a couple of people saw Mr. Trump as an antihero; check out the feisty exchange in the group about Tony Soprano.

If these voters are any indication, the guilty verdict will complicate Mr. Trump's bid for the White House. Character and integrity mattered for the presidency, and disgust with Mr. Trump could tip the scales for some of them in the end.

PARTICIPANTS

Ben 42, Texas, white, college adviser	Hilary 55, Calif., white, social worker	John 58, Pa., white, customer relations	Jorge 52, Calif., Latino, medical field	Neshunda 36, Fla., Black, educational registrar	Shantel 33, Calif., Middle Eastern, rental manager
Frank 65, Ariz., white, computer sales	James 53, Iowa, white, financial manager	Jonathan 37, Fla., Black, operations manager	Logan 31, Okla., white, lawyer	Wendy 57, N.Y., Black, admin support	

What's your reaction to the guilty verdict in the Trump trial?



Not surprised, given Trump's behavior of late.

— Frank



Concern about the future of America.

— Neshunda



Just. A jury heard the case, looked at the facts and rendered a verdict.

— Hilary



Baffled. A former president on trial? How did we get to this point?

— Ben

Did the jury's decision have any impact on how you will vote?

Shantel: "How is he going to run the presidency from jail?" is what I'm thinking. It kind of doesn't make sense to vote for him.

Ben: So now it's down to voting for the convicted felon or voting for Biden, the super-old, out-of-touch guy. I don't really like either of those choices, but I think I'm going to go with the old guy losing his mind over the convicted felon who's probably going to be out for blood as soon as he's elected. It's like I'm in Poland trying to choose between the Nazis and the Soviets. I'm just going to flip a coin, but probably voting for Biden. I don't know if I'll vote.

Logan: For me, it is exactly what Ben said. It's the fear of retribution. I think we got skin-to-teeth thin on our democracy staying together. And this time, he knows where the pitfalls are in the places that he needs to appoint people who can really get retribution.

Hilary: I'm desperate to try to honor the system. He's now a convicted felon. I cannot have the president be a convicted felon. Full stop. Therefore, he is disqualified for me. Despite my absolute concerns about the mental fitness and policy disagreements that I have with Joe Biden, I cannot envision casting a vote for Donald Trump.

Frank: He's disqualified for me, too. As a president, you're supposed to be setting an example, not making an example of yourself in a negative way. Second of all, with regard to what Hilary said about he's a convicted felon, OK. The particular charge is not something that I would think qualifies or disqualifies you for being a president. Everybody bribes someone, somewhere. But there's two other cases pending. And again, innocent until proven guilty, but they're much more serious charges of the Jan. 6 insurrection and then trying to fix an election.

Jonathan: But that's the thing. To say, OK, today is the nail in the coffin because he's now classified as a convicted felon is superficial because he lost the E. Jean Carroll case and he was accused and found liable of much more heinous crimes than filing a wrong financial document. That wasn't enough? That wasn't disgusting?

Shantel: Donald Trump is corrupt and he wasn't good enough at it, and he failed.

Ben: The guy tried to write off his bribe, and OK, maybe it's not illegal, but he's supposed to set a freaking example. And as far as porn stars go for affairs, he could have set a better example for who to have an affair with. But the dude tried to write off a bribe — that doesn't seem wrong to you in the slightest?

Moderator: Wendy, you're laughing.

Wendy: This has been the most stressful presidential election process since Donald Trump has run for office. And some people, they're on the sidelines. They're not even going to try to vote.

Jorge: Trump is not reliable. And I don't think Biden is in his brightest years. So I guess the only choice right now is Kennedy.

Jonathan: Brain-worm Bobby.

Jorge: Yes.

Jonathan: You have to remember why Trump is the choice of millions of people. Trump represents a shock to the system. His supporters don't hold him to the same ethical standards. He's the antihero, the Soprano, the "Breaking Bad," the guy who does bad things, who is a bad guy but does them on behalf of the people he represents.

Frank: And in 2016 I voted for him for that very reason. Drain the swamp.

Hilary: As did I.

Logan: Me, too.

Do you think the trial was rigged?

James: I wouldn't say it was rigged, but I wouldn't go as far as to say that it was fair. There were problems. Bad witnesses. I'm not sure the jury made the right decision.

Moderator: What's your disagreement with the jury?

James: That they listened to witnesses like Cohen and took him at his word.

Shantel: I definitely agree that the whole reason for the trial was to get him politically. But I'm not a lawyer. I wasn't in the courtroom. I have to just trust the system. And if it was wrong, it'll come out with an appeal. But I don't have an authority to say definitively that it was rigged.

Jorge: Trump would never have a fair trial in New York because, like many people said, most of the jury was probably Democrat. It's like if we have a trial for Biden in Houston.

Ben: We're all regular people with regular jobs. If any of us all did, like, one-thousandth of what this guy did for being on trial, the financial stuff, the forms, the bribes, the meeting with people, we all would have been fired. We all would have been out on our butts, applying for jobs at grocery stores or driving Uber or whatnot. You're saying it's all a political theater and farce and whatnot. But he was having an affair with a porn star and not a particularly attractive one at that.

Jonathan: That's not a crime.

Ben: After talking to you, Jonathan, I'm thinking about voting for Biden now.

Jonathan: Trump is not a moral compass to a lot of his supporters. He's the bad guy that I'll do things on our behalf. He's the Tony Soprano or the Walter White —

Ben: Don't bring my "Sopranos" into this.

Jonathan: He's an antihero.

Hilary: Jonathan, when you brought up "The Sopranos," I got it. He's the antihero. And that's why I cast a vote in 2016 for him, though I did expect at the time that a lot of the shibuk was just shibuk and that once elected, if elected, no grown 71-year-old man would comport himself in the way he did. What does that portend, though, for a democracy if we have nothing but antiheroes, going forward? That these people, these complicated, murky, ambiguous, morally ambiguous people, are the models? And maybe that's putting it mildly and gently.

Moderator: Describe American democracy in a single sentence.

Jorge: It's on a dangerous road.

Neshunda: It is fair and just, and people are awakening now.

Logan: Absolute hyperbolic chaos.

Frank: It's a system in which the majority is supposed to rule, but there are those who are unethically controlling it.

Wendy: The lesser of the evils but the evils nonetheless.

Shantel: Messy, imperfect, but it works.

Ben: Watching the Hindenburg land on the Titanic.

John: Our democracy currently is on life support.

Hilary: Will the center hold?

Jonathan: A perpetual work in progress that needs testing every now and then.

James: A very polarized system that is severely broken.

OK, that leads to the next question: How the heck can you be undecided at this point?

Jonathan: As an independent, my No. 1 factor is economics. Full disclosure: Under Biden, I make more money. But under Trump, my money was worth more. So that's why I'm undecided. I'm waiting to see who Trump chooses as his vice president.

Hilary: Well, I disclosed earlier that the conviction makes it so I can't imagine voting for Trump. Obviously, Kennedy is a nonfactor for me. Biden's — ooof. Oof. Gof. To love it.

Logan: I feel that, yes.

Hilary: Yes, just that: O-O-O-O-F I mean, I can envision casting a vote for Biden and then needing a very stiff drink after that.

John: Well, I would say Biden now is off the table after today but I think today's action —

Moderator: Biden?

John: — is off the table for me. Yes, Biden.

Hilary: Because of the verdict?

John: Yes, because — I think Biden looks ungracious and looks incredibly weak to me. I can envision a scenario where a lot of undecideds who maybe won't pull the lever for Trump run to Robert Kennedy Jr.

Moderator: But I've never had someone blame another candidate for the failure of the original candidate. And that's exactly what you're doing here.

John: I was highly critical of Trump in 2019, and that's what led to his first impeachment when he was trying to go after Biden politically. That was a mistake. He lost my vote on that in 2020. But I guess I thought Joe Biden was above this.

Jorge: I agree with you.

Hilary: May I ask — is it based on anything that Joe Biden said after the verdict?

John: I think it's just a campaign tagline: Trump, convicted felon.

Jorge: Well, Biden has dirty hands on this. He's a very weak candidate right now, so they need to make Trump even weaker. And you see it with Kennedy. I know that Kennedy is not perfect, but he doesn't have a platform because they don't let him have a platform. Biden looks bad. They need to do something to influence voters, something like this, so he can win the election.

Neshunda: It just seems like the timing of the trial, right before elections, is just a little off-putting for them to go to this level.

Shantel: Well, this is changing my vote to not vote for Trump. The only thing is: What happens if it gets appealed or something comes out of Trump's favor? But this is swinging me toward Biden.

Ben: A couple people have mentioned a massive judicial conspiracy of everybody going after him. OK, let's talk conspiracy math here. The sheer number of people who would have to be working together to get something like this working just boggles the mind. And have you ever tried to get four people to agree on what to order for pizza? I just don't see this working out. And at the end of the OK, fine, OK, I'm going to deal with Jonathan on this one, saying, what's the big deal about bribing Stormy Daniels?

But I want a president who's going to be able to cover up a \$150,000 bribe to Daniels. If he can't pull that off, I'm not going to trust him with the nuclear football. This seems like such an easy thing for him to screw up. I'm kind of leaning toward Biden now.

Moderator: James, why undecided?

James: The trial really didn't affect me one way or the other. I'll be more interested seeing who Trump picks for his vice-presidential candidate and maybe seeing a debate before I make up my mind.

Wendy: I agree with James.

Frank: The more I see Trump dealing with this, the less confident I am in him. A president's got to be a step apart from just a good person. And I have a problem with his integrity and ethics. I'm swinging toward Biden.

And I don't like Biden.

Hilary: I'm absolutely with you, Frank.

Frank: Got no ethics, either.

Logan: I voted for Obama in '12, Trump in '16, Biden in '20. And I am exhausted. And I will be honest with you, Frank: I will vote in this election. But I understand people who won't.

I voted for Trump because of the change I thought he would bring and the people he selected or was going to select in his cabinet.

I voted for Biden because he preached for 12 months that he was to unify the country. I don't think he's the worst president, but he is very weak. I am disappointed. I really am. Like I said earlier, the retribution is a factor. But to be honest, Frank, I don't know who I'm going to vote for, and I don't know that I will know until I step into that box.

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Jonathan: Me, too.

Actor Cites Racial Bias In Rejected Rental Bid

Wendell Pierce says a white landlord denied his application for an apartment in Harlem.

By DEBRA KAMIN

The actor Wendell Pierce says his rental application for an apartment in Harlem was denied by a white landlord, and he believes racism is the reason.

Mr. Pierce, who is Black, shared his experience on X in a post on Monday night that quickly garnered thousands of comments and shares.

In the post, he described his “righteous anger” and said that “Even with my proof of employment, bank statements and real estate holdings, a white apartment owner DENIED my application to rent the apartment.” The apartment was, Mr. Pierce wrote, “in Harlem, of all places.”

“Racism and bigotry are real,” he continued. “There are those who will do anything to destroy life’s journey for Black folks. When you deny our personal experiences, you are vile and despicable.”

Mr. Pierce, 60, is best known for playing Detective Bunk Moreland on HBO’s “The Wire” and has stepped into starring television roles on “Suits,” “Treme” and “Jack Ryan.” He appears in the Starz drama “Power Book II: Raising Kanan” and the CBS comedy-drama “Elsbeth.”

In addition to his screen work, Mr. Pierce, who trained at Juilliard, is active on the stage. He was a producer of the 2012 Tony Award-winning play “Clybourne Park” and was nominated for a Tony in 2023 for his performance as Willy Loman in the Broadway revival of “Death of a Salesman.”

The post, which had been shared more than 11,000 times, drew comparisons to the story of Raven Baxter, a Black molecular biologist in Virginia who was in escrow for a condo in Virginia when, she alleges, the

Mr. Pierce has a history of harnessing his celebrity for civil rights activism.

white seller tried to cancel the home sale because of her race.

Dr. Baxter shared her story with The New York Times, in an article published late last month.

Mr. Pierce did not immediately respond to requests for comment. But Lionel Coleman, one of the directors of “Raising Kanan,” said he was stunned when he saw his friend’s post.

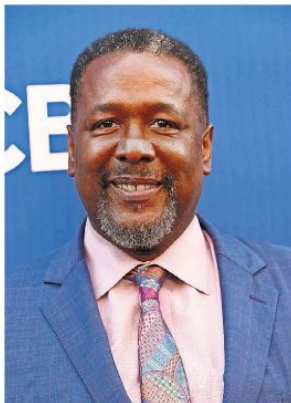
“Wendell is royalty in the entertainment community,” he said. “If it can happen to Wendell, it means it can really happen to any of us.”

Mr. Coleman, who has a Black father and a white mother, said he often thinks of stories his mother told him of going alone to see apartments for rent in Brooklyn so that the landlord would not know her husband’s race.

“I guess that strategy is something we still have to keep using,” he said. “Systemic racism still exists in this country, and in our current political climate it’s as if it’s been given fertilizer.”

The Fair Housing Act makes housing discrimination illegal in both renting and buying, and landlords who are found to discriminate based on race, gender, religion or sexual orientation or identity can face fines in the tens of thousands of dollars or higher.

In addition, New York State and New York City each have their own fair housing laws, and the New York City Human Rights Law explicitly states that housing discrimination is illegal.



The actor Wendell Pierce, who railed against racial discrimination in a series of posts on X last week after his rental application for an apartment in Harlem was denied.

The New York City Commission on Human Rights, which enforces the Human Rights Law, has an online form and a tip line for reporting violations.

“The New York City Commission on Human Rights protects the right of everyone in New York City to live, work and thrive, free from discrimination,” a representative for the organization said, encouraging “anyone in New York City who believes they have experienced or witnessed discrimination in employment, housing or public spaces” to reach out.

But despite nationwide laws, renters continue to face housing discrimination. One study in Boston, published in 2020, found evidence of discrimination based on the renter’s race in 71 percent of cases.

Mr. Pierce has a history of harnessing his celebrity for civil rights activism. After Hurricane Katrina destroyed his childhood home in Pontchartrain Park, one of New Orleans’s seminal Black neighborhoods, he formed a community development organization to lead the rebuilding process in the area. He received a Distinguished Citizen Award from the Congressional Medal of Honor Society in 2023 for his work.

In his post on Monday, Mr. Pierce did not name the landlord or give any more specifics about his rental application.

Hours after publishing his initial post, Mr. Pierce returned to X to rail against the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling against the Fairness Fund, a program that awards grants and training to Black women who start their own businesses. Racism continues to rage in America, he warned, and his story of housing discrimination was but one example.

“While I appreciate the response to my own personal experience of discrimination in housing, I only mentioned it as an example of the insidious nature of bigotry,” he wrote. “This court decision is profoundly more disturbing and injurious. CALL TO ACTION.”

Minutes later, he added another post: “SYSTEMATIC RACISM IS A CHRONIC DEBILITATING AND DESTRUCTIVE FORCE IN AMERICA. To ignore it is revisionist history.”

Calculator Where to Raise Children

Ranking the Top Cities for Families

Raising children in the best possible environment is a solid reason to relocate. But today’s tough real estate market has slowed migration. In 2023, about 26 million people moved, way down from nearly 43 million in 2019, according to the Census Bureau. All the more reason for parents to carefully consider local resources, support systems, living costs and other attributes when researching a new city.

A recent study by WalletHub ranked 180 U.S. cities according to family friendliness, using 45 metrics spread across five categories. One was “health and safety,” which parsed data on air and water quality, access to quality food and health care, and crime and traffic risks. “Education and child care” considered public-school quality, day care costs and parental leave policies. “Affordability” calculated the cost of living relative to income, savings

rates, credit scores and other measures of financial fitness. “Socioeconomics” covered job opportunities, rates of divorce, poverty, unemployment and foreclosures. Finally, “family fun” accounted for parks and other attractions, weather and the share of families with young children.

Freemont, Calif., in the Bay Area, topped the list, helped by its top scores in the education, child care and socioeconomics categories. Its high cost of living was balanced by a high median income. At the bottom was Memphis, which scored low in socioeconomics and health and safety. One thing was clear in the results: the effects of income inequality. Cities at the top of the list had high median incomes and mostly white or Asian populations, while those at the bottom had low median incomes and mostly Black or Hispanic populations.

MICHAEL KOLOMATSKY

Family Friendly?

The cities that scored highest and lowest for raising children, and the categories that helped or hurt their rankings most, according to WalletHub.

Highest Score

↑ Fremont, Calif.
Education and child care
Socioeconomics

Overland Park, Kan.
Affordability
Socioeconomics

Irvine, Calif.
Health and safety
Education and child care

Plano, Texas
Socioeconomics
Health and safety

Seattle
Education and child care
Affordability

Gilbert, Ariz.
Socioeconomics
Affordability

San Jose, Calif.
Education and child care
Socioeconomics

San Diego
Family fun
Education and child care

Boise, Idaho
Health and safety
Affordability

Huntington Beach, Calif.
Education and child care
Socioeconomics

Source: WalletHub

Lowest Score

↓ Augusta, Ga.
Health and safety
Socioeconomics

Jackson, Miss.
Health and safety
Socioeconomics

New Orleans
Health and safety
Socioeconomics

Birmingham, Ala.
Socioeconomics,
Health and safety, Affordability

Gulfport, Miss.
Affordability, socioeconomics,
Education and child care

San Bernardino, Calif.
Education and child care
Affordability

Newark
Affordability
Socioeconomics

Cleveland
Socioeconomics
Education and child care

Detroit
Socioeconomics
Education and child care

Memphis
Health and safety
Socioeconomics

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ask Real Estate Co-op Dispute



I’ve Had It With My Neighbor’s Smoke. What Can I Do if She’s Rent-Stabilized?

I’m a shareholder in a large co-op in Queens. The lease prohibits odors from traveling from one apartment to another but doesn’t include a smoke-free policy. My elderly downstairs neighbor lives in a rent-stabilized apartment and can no longer go outside to smoke. My bedroom smells like her ashtray, and I have been sleeping on my couch. The co-op’s management has sent her notice after notice for four years, and recently reached a settlement with her after threatening to bring an eviction case. They agreed that the owner of her apartment would install a commercial smoke abatement machine, but it’s been 10 weeks with no installation. What do I do now?

You should be able to live without second-hand smoke, as described in your lease. However, the co-op has made some effort to abate the smoke and your neighbor has protections against eviction as a rent-stabilized tenant — both of which work against your chances of success in housing court.

“No one has a right to let smoke emanate into your apartment, but when it’s a rent-stabilized tenant, it makes it more difficult to take legal action,” said Lisa A. Smith, who practices real estate law at Smith, Gambrell & Russell in Manhattan.

To submit your questions or comments, email realestateq@nytimes.com

You could bring the co-op to court, but it is covered by the business judgment rule, which protects co-op board actions that are made in good faith, making a legal claim difficult. Ultimately, it’s the apartment owner who is responsible for eliminating the odor.

Even if your building did have a no-smoking policy, it likely wouldn’t help your situation if it were enacted after your neighbor moved in. Rent-stabilized tenants typically enjoy the privileges they had when they arrived in the building.

You can request that the co-op board hire a company that administers smoke tests, which can determine how and where the smoke is entering your apartment. The co-op should also gain access to your neighbor’s apartment to perform this test and make any necessary repairs.

Don’t bother pressuring building management to compel the installation of the smoke abatement equipment, said Adam Leitman Bailey, a real estate lawyer in Manhattan who has handled cases involving smoke odors. “That machine has never worked to solve any case” in his experience, he said.

Having your neighbor open her windows while she smokes is another potential solution, even in winter. “This is usually a November-through-end-of-April problem,” Mr. Bailey said. JILL TERRERI RAMOS

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The Morning

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The New York Times

6 EXCLUSIVE
 'A townhouse in the sky'
 is on the market once again.
7 HAMPTONS HUBBUB
 Zero Bond, a private club,
 may turn up the volume.



12 IN THE GARDEN
 Landscape detectives read
 the history of a property.
13 LIVING SMALL
 The energy is basically free,
 and the air never feels sticky.

OWNERS | RENTERS | RENOVATORS

RealEstate

The New York Times

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024
 8



An American Dream Lives On in Sweden

ADRI HANSEN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The United States once looked to modular construction as an efficient way to build lots of housing at scale. Other countries have put the idea into practice.
 BY FRANCESCA MARI | PAGES 8-10

A bathroom unit is installed onto the floor base of what will become a modular housing cube at the Lindbäcks factory in Sweden.



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On the Market

HEATHER SENISON



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES COMBIE/VIRT PHOTOGRAPHY

NORWALK 19TH-CENTURY HOUSE

\$2,595,000

FAIRFIELD 285 Silvermine

Avenue
A four-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath, 3,426-square-foot house with hardwood floors, crown molding, vaulted ceilings, a sunroom, French doors to a patio, a laundry room, a finished third level, a pool, a fire pit and a garage, on 0.9 of an acre. Michele Ferguson Nichols, Douglas Elliman, 203-434-3713; elli@man.com

TAXES \$12,230 a year

PROS There is natural light throughout the home. Some original details, including the front stairwell banister and radiators, remain. The yard is fully fenced.

CONS The walk-out basement is mostly unfinished but has a wine cellar.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY HUDSON CREATIVE PRODUCTIONS

WHITE PLAINS CENTER HALL

\$1,995,000

WESTCHESTER 23 Oxford Road

A five-bedroom, three-full-and-two-half-bath, 4,460-square-foot house with formal living and dining rooms, a first-floor parlor, a heated sunroom, a solarium, a primary bedroom suite with a sitting area, a finished lower level, a patio with a fireplace, and a garage, on 0.44 of an acre. Amy Singer, Houlihan Lawrence, 914-772-3526; houl@hlanlawrence.com

TAXES \$34,753 a year

PROS The house is stately but not stuffy, with spacious, light-filled rooms and recently renovated baths. Storage space is plentiful. The property is beautifully landscaped.

CONS Some may find the steps on the multi-leveled backyard patio an inconvenience.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY ANNE MANCUSO AND ALICIA NAPIERKOWSKI.

Given the fast pace of the current market, some properties may no longer be available at the time of publication.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDI BRIDGES/VIRT FOR THE CORCORAN GROUP

ROOSEVELT ISLAND CO-OP

\$1,399,000

MANHATTAN 575 Main Street, No. 1312

A three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath, roughly 1,656-square-foot duplex with an en suite primary bedroom with a walk-in closet, two bedrooms and a bath on the lower level, and a washer/dryer, in a doorman building. Kaja Meade and Katie Cook, Corcoran, 703-655-5856; corcoran.com

MAINTENANCE \$2,156 a month

PROS The East River and the Manhattan skyline are visible from the primary bedroom. The living area is spacious and gets sun all day. There are ample closets, and the use of a storage cage is included.

CONS It's a large space to cool without central air-conditioning.



UPPER WEST SIDE CO-OP

\$425,000

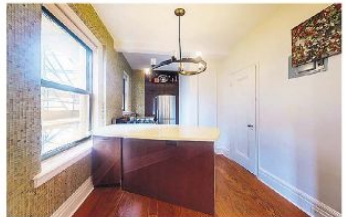
MANHATTAN 269 West 72nd Street, No. 14D

A roughly 450-square-foot studio with a windowed kitchen, a dishwasher, and a windowed bathroom, in a building with a live-in super, a bike room, a waiting list for storage bins and shared laundry. Tate Kelly, Coldwell Banker Warburg, 212-327-9678; cbwarburg.com

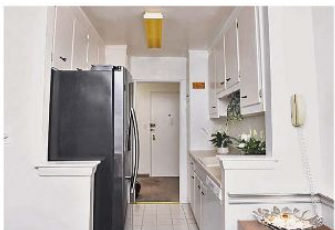
MAINTENANCE \$1,360 a month; assessment, \$170 a month through June 2027

PROS The maintenance fee includes Spectrum TV and internet. Pleds-à-terre are permitted.

CONS The building lacks amenities such as a gym or outdoor space.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLDWELL BANKER WARBURG



PHOTOGRAPHS BY INTERIORS STEVE WHITE/EXTERIORS PHILIPPO PIZZELLI LLC

ST. GEORGE CO-OP

\$279,000

STATEN ISLAND 350 Richmond Terrace, No. 7Q

A two-bedroom, one-bath, 1,050-square-foot unit with a Pullman kitchen and a dining alcove, on the top floor of a building with a live-in super, shared storage, bike racks and a library. Holly Olivier, Holly's Staten Island Buzz Realty, 917-414-0847; hollywiesneroliver.com

MAINTENANCE \$890 a month

PROS Water views abound from every window. There are ample closets and through-the-wall air-conditioning.

CONS The kitchen and other spaces could use updates. The building lacks shared outdoor space.

RENTERS

She Wanted a Roommate, but Not Any Booze

By VICTORIA M. WALKER

When Shelby Cohen posted advertisements on Facebook for a new roommate in her Brooklyn apartment, she noted the most important details. She listed the bedroom's dimensions, mentioned that there was just one bathroom, and noted nearby subway stations. But there was an important caveat for any potential roommate — no alcohol was allowed in the apartment.

"I did put it on my lease as part of the roommate agreement: I was like, 'If anyone drinks, the agreement's forfeited,'" Ms. Cohen, 31, said, though she noted that the addendum most likely wasn't enforceable.

Home is a sacred place for Ms. Cohen, who has been sober for three years. And whom she chose to bring into that space mattered. Concerns — a roommate stumbling home from a bar late at night or of Ms. Cohen opening the fridge to find a case of beer — were at the forefront of her mind during her search.

The responses she received, Ms. Cohen said, ranged from the witty to the downright cruel. On Facebook housing groups like Gypsy Housing, originally formed to help artists find apartments or rooms, Ms. Cohen navigated a land mine around preferences. "I want to come home to, like, a safe space," she said, "a space that I feel comfortable in. I don't want to have to open the fridge and see alcohol and have someone smoking weed in the apartment."

Indeed, preferences around roommate lifestyles aren't a new phenomenon. There are vegans and vegetarians who prefer to live with roommates who don't cook meat at home — or even eat meat away from home. Roommates can also align on similarities such as religious backgrounds or political ideologies, and some people prefer not to room with someone of the opposite gender. (While it is illegal for landlords and real estate companies to discriminate based on race, sex, or religion, the Fair Housing Act doesn't apply to shared housing situations.)

Still, no preference garners quite the same response as someone looking for a roommate who doesn't drink. For Ms. Cohen, the bars from strangers on-line struck — and these were people who didn't even want to live in her \$3,625 two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment in East Williamsburg.

"People thought they were so funny with these ridiculous jokes, like, 'I'm going to need a drink if the rent is that much,'" she said.

But sober and sober-curious living is on the rise, partly from an overreliance on booze during Covid-19 lockdowns, rising al-



Shelby Cohen now calls Jersey City, N.J., home, though she still maintains an active social life in Brooklyn. Large, floor-to-ceiling windows were a selling point for Ms. Cohen.

Name Shelby Cohen, 31

Occupation Ms. Cohen is doing paid gig work as a data annotator at Data Annotation Tech while she takes an online digital marketing course.

Location Jersey City, N.J.

Rent \$2,675

On a social life Ms. Cohen doesn't spend too much time in her Jersey City neighborhood, though she has identified her favorite drugstores and supermarkets. "I'm such a Brooklyn girl," she said. "I lived in Queens forever, I lived in Astoria forever, and I was like, 'I'm never moving to Brooklyn.' And then I spent three days in Brooklyn — I was like, 'I love Brooklyn.'"

On mocktails Ms. Cohen doesn't go to bars but will dine at a restaurant with a bar. "I love a mocktail, but I don't like the mocktails that have fake alcohol in it. I won't drink nonalcoholic beer; I'm not into nonalcoholic wine. But when it's like lemonade and lavender or something cute and colorful that's not meant to taste like alcohol, I love to do that."

cohol prices and an influx of nonalcoholic craft cocktails and beers. Sixty-three percent of Americans 12 and over reported that they drank alcohol in the past year, according to data from a 2022 study from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

In New York, one only has to look at the influx of nonalcoholic bars to see that sober living isn't merely a January resolution but a full-year commitment. Still, finding a sober roommate in a city of drinkers proved difficult. In addition to online housing groups, Ms. Cohen said she struck out among people in her network of sober friends. There were roommates who committed to a sublease agreement only to move elsewhere with a partner. And even when she did find interested candidates who didn't drink, her cat allergy stopped even the most well-matched potential roommates.

Eventually, the difficulty of finding a roommate who abstained from drinking, plus the allure of finally living alone, was too hard to resist. That meant moving to Jersey City. Across the river, Ms. Cohen pays around \$2,675 monthly (her parents cover a portion of the rent as she mulls a career change to the e-commerce field) for her one-bedroom apartment, which she moved into in late March.

"It's nice to have the space to myself and not have to worry," she said. "There's always the worry: What if the other person wants to start drinking again? What do you do in that situation?"

With the space all to herself, Ms. Cohen has taken to decorating her apartment. Floor-to-ceiling windows give her unobstructed views of the hills of New Jersey, an in-unit washer and dryer helps doing laundry with a bad back, and plates gifted to her by her grandmother have made a large building feel more homey.

In her apartment, she's gone with a cozy, midcentury modern approach. Much of the furniture is borrowed from her Brooklyn apartment, from her "piece of junk" TV stand from Wayfair to a green velvet couch. Trying to strike a balance between keeping a homey aesthetic with the dazzle of a new-construction apartment has been a challenging, fun project.

Though she's enjoying a respite from the city in New Jersey, Ms. Cohen still considers her life to be in Brooklyn. Her friends and community in Brooklyn are just a Path train and M.T.A. ride away for coffee dates, nonalcoholic dates and concerts.

"Coming home and having this beautiful safe space, where after being out with friends, it's just relaxing," Ms. Cohen said. "It honestly feels like heaven."

Know a renter with an interesting story? Email: renters@nytimes.com

The Hunt

A French Expat Living in Dubai Decides to Invest in a Long-Term Home

What could she find for under \$1 million in what her broker called a seller's market?

By LÉONA NDIKWE

When Clementine Martini arrived in Dubai six years ago for a new job, she was dated to find that the United Arab Emirates' biggest city was more than a manufactured metropolis of glass and steel towers.

Instead, she said, she found a safe, vibrant and cosmopolitan social scene, and a natural wonder. "Contrary to what most people think, nature is everywhere," said Ms. Martini, 44. "Dubai is the perfect combination of living in a global business hub with access to the beach and desert."

Born and raised near the French seaside city of Marseille, she worked in public relations in Belgium for a decade, then relocated to Qatar for a few years. She landed in Dubai in 2018 as a senior manager for global campaigns at the Dubai tourism board, and lived in rentals as the city grew around her.

Last year, she considered investing in property in France or Belgium, but with housing prices and inflation rates surging across Europe, the returns wouldn't make it worthwhile. At the same time, Dubai was experiencing its own boom, fueled by a wave of foreign buyers: Home prices rose 19 percent from September 2022 to September 2023, according to a market report by the real estate consultancy Knight Frank.

With her own rent of about 15,000 dirhams (\$4,000) a month set to increase, Ms. Martini grew more comfortable with the idea of investing her money in the Gulf. "The price per square meter is actually half of the price of Paris real estate, in addition to access to amenities such as parking, a gym and swimming pool," she said.

With a budget of around 3 million United Arab Emirates dirhams (\$815,000), preferably for a two-bedroom apartment in one of Dubai's higher-end condo towers, Ms. Martini sought the help of Clement Audon, a broker at BlackOak Real Estate.

Mr. Audon called Dubai a seller's market: "Now rent is high, tenants are buying rather than renting." He said 75 percent of home purchases there are cash deals, but recently he has seen more buyers take out mortgages with standard 20 percent down payments, which was Ms. Martini's plan.

Among her options:

1. TWO-BEDROOM IN ARTS DISTRICT

This bright, 1,700-square-foot two-bedroom, three-bath apartment was in the 71-story Opera Grand building in the Opera District,

The Buyer Clementine Martini in her Dubai apartment.



"You know when you walk into a place and you have a vibe? You know when you know."

The Options

1 This 1,700-square-foot Opera District unit had two bedrooms, three bathrooms, floor-to-ceiling windows and a balcony. There were two pools.



2 A one-bedroom in the "Wall Street of Dubai" was 1,300 square feet, with two bathrooms, glass walls and a balcony with stunning views.



3 A 1,500-square-foot two-bedroom downtown had three bathrooms, an open kitchen and a balcony. The complex had two pools.



a high-traffic cultural hub. Floor-to-ceiling windows and a balcony off the living room offered views of the 160-story Burj Khalifa skyscraper and its artificial lake. The building had a gym, a conference room and two swimming pools, among other amenities. The price was above her budget at 4.25 million dirhams (\$1.15 million).

2. ONE-BEDROOM IN FINANCIAL DISTRICT

This one-bedroom, two-bath unit was in the 65-story Burj Daman tower, Dubai's bustling International Financial Center. It had about 1,300 square feet, with glass walls throughout, a built-in wardrobe and a long balcony that offered stunning views. The development, which included a five-star Waldorf Astoria hotel, had two pools, a gym and a squash court. The price was 2.5 million dirhams (\$650,000), comfortably within Ms. Martini's budget, and she thought it would be a sound investment given its location in the "Wall Street of Dubai."

3. TWO-BEDROOM IN DOWNTOWN DUBAI

This corner two-bedroom, three-bath unit was in the 16-story DLT tower in downtown Dubai. It was about 1,500 square feet, with an open kitchen and island, two en suite baths, and a balcony overlooking the ring of the downtown area. The complex offered a public art gallery, a private parking space, a gym and two pools. The price was 3.425 million dirhams (\$932,000).

HER CHOICE

Although the Opera District was a premium location, Ms. Martini was concerned by the amount of traffic in the area.

She liked the idea of living in Dubai's financial hub and looked into converting the one-bedroom unit into two bedrooms. But the space simply wasn't large enough.

Anyway, she fell in love with the apartment in downtown Dubai as soon as she saw it. Beyond fitting her criteria for size and layout, it was flooded with light, and the high-quality fittings and furnishings felt like a "You know when you walk into a place and you have a vibe? You know when you know," she said with a smile.

Thought was a bit above her initial budget, she quickly made an offer at the asking price, which was accepted. She put 20 percent down and paid about 6 percent in fees. "I see myself living in Dubai for the near future," she said. "For me, home is very important. I never compromise on my home. This is what keeps me grounded. This is my stability. So for me, it was worth investing."

EMAIL: thehunt@nytimes.com



1. Absolute Perfection

535 1st. 5BR. 3.5 Bath.
\$18M. Web #22926049.
David Feldman 917-449-4260
Richard Orenstein 212-381-4248

2. Sophisticated, Elegant, and Exceptional in Every Facet

378 Brookside Rd. Darien, CT. 6BR. 6.3 Bath.
\$5.5M. Web #24010185.
Pamela Stutz 203-554-2132

3. Outdoor Oasis With Postcard Views

425 West 50th. 2BR. 2.5 Bath.
\$4.7M. Web #22957760.
Nada Rizk 646-226-8115
Joanne Greene 917-716-6880

4. Timeless Elegance

905 West End Ave. 4BR. 3 Bath.
\$3.275M. Web #22941580.
Roberta Moser 917-549-4862

5. Perched Perfectly on the 19th Floor

211 Central Park W. 4BR. 4 Bath.
\$12.95M. Web #22963872.
Lisa K. Lippman 212-588-5606
Peter Ocean 646-627-5227

6. Expansive Luxury Loft

39 Lispenard St. 5BR. 3 Bath.
\$11.5M. Web #22165086.
John R. Edwards 917-334-3232

7. Architectural Beauty

145 Nassau St. 2BR. 2.5 Bath.
\$2.795M. Web #22923557.
Richard N. Rothbloom 917-613-1610

8. Three Bedroom Condominium Delight

340 East 64th. 3BR. 3 Bath.
\$2.695M. Web #22978402.
Susan Silverman 917-863-4634

9. Perfect Fifth Avenue Elegant Residence

900 Fifth Ave. 3BR. 3.5 Bath.
\$2.499M. Web #22920782.
Kimberly T. Hastie 212-381-2240
Debra Hoffman 212-381-2397

10. The Ultimate Park Avenue Turn-Key

1111 Park Ave. 4BR. 3.5 Bath.
Co-Excl. \$11.475M. Web #23019978.
Burt F. Savitsky 917-561-0925
Jessica L. Savitsky 917-767-2648

11. Welcome to Central Park West

1 Central Park W. 4BR. 4.5 Bath.
\$7.945M. Web #23025693.
Douglas S. Russell 917-687-6999

12. 2BR Duplex with Private Terrace

45 West 54th. 2BR. 2.5 Bath.
\$1.295M. Web #22934349.
Steve Orselet 917-601-7008

13. Duplex Living at its Best

247 West 115th. 2BR. 2 Bath.
\$1.249M. Web #22861814.
Whitney Osentoski 917-804-0134
Michael Kelley-Bradford 347-781-8625

14. Renovated Two Bedroom on Park Avenue

785 Park Ave. 2BR. 2.5 Bath.
\$2.395M. Web #22921613.
Matthew D. Hughes 212-906-9351
John Burger 212-906-9274

15. Striking Newly Constructed Family Compound

6290 SW 130 Terrace, Pinecrest Florida.
7BR. 8.5 Bath. \$7.248M. Web #11552567.
Josie Wang 305-666-9759

16. Stunning 10,000 sf. Country Estate with Pool

1227 Ponus Ridge Rd. New Canaan, CT.
7BR. 8.2 Bath. \$7.1M. Web #24012391.
Mary Higgins 203-247-1625

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Exclusive

Will the Third Time Be a Charm? Adam Neumann Lists His Triplex Penthouse Again.



CALLA KOSLOFF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

WeWork's co-founder is selling his four-bedroom overlooking Gramercy Park for \$25 million.

By ANDY NEWMAN

Adam Neumann has been doing some downsizing.

For several years, the maverick co-founder of what was once the most valuable American start-up, WeWork, has been offloading luxury estates almost as prodigiously as he once stockpiled them.

Gone is the 12,000-square-foot manse on 27 Marin County acres with the guitar-shaped living room and three-story water slide. Gone is the Greenwich Village townhouse. Gone, too, are at least one of the châteaux in Westchester County and at least one of the Hamptons getaways. Mr. Neumann owned the properties with his wife, Rebekah Fuhrman Neumann.

His wallet has shed some bulk as well. His Forbes net worth, adjusted for inflation, is down 54 percent since 2019 — despite Mr. Neumann's receipt of a severance package worth hundreds of millions after he left WeWork, the co-working company he led to the brink of collapse. (He is still, however, worth a respectable \$2.3 billion, up from \$1.4 billion in 2022.)

Late last month, he dropped a bid to reacquire WeWork, which had filed for bankruptcy reorganization last fall and whose stock price has tumbled more than 99.99 percent from its 2021 peak.

And now, for at least the third time, the Neumanns have listed their marquee New York City dwelling, a 6,630-square-foot, three-story-plus-rooftop perch atop a fortresslike apartment building that peers down at Gramercy Park. The asking price is \$24,995,000.

The four-bedroom penthouse, on the fifth, sixth and seventh floors of 78 Irving Place, is a testament to Mr. Neumann's wealth.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY OTTAVIO TERNI WEIBER, EVAN JOSEPH IMAGES FOR DOUGLAS ELLMAN



"We're looking at essentially just a townhouse in the sky," said Eleonora Srugo, one of the Douglas Elliman brokers handling the listing. Her colleague Jordyn Taylor Braff said, "It's very Parisian-inspired, filled with a ton of quiet luxury, but then there are pops of a little bit more over-the-top magic." Ah, the pops. The nautilus-cious spiral staircase. The

30,000-watt starlight installation depicting the Milky Way, suspended above a custom bed so many light-years across that Ms. Braff abandoned the traditional mattress size hierarchy and decreed it "ginormous." The riotously pink kids' bathroom. The other kid's bathroom designed to resemble the Beatles' Yellow Submarine, complete with porthole windows. The playroom walls covered with em-



The home features a 30,000-watt installation depicting the Milky Way.

Adam Neumann, far left, bought the Gramercy Park triplex for \$27.5 million. Its features include, clockwise from left, John Rosselli chandeliers in the living room, silver fixtures in the kitchen, and a constellation of lights in the master bedroom.

bossed patterns of leaves and vines.

Most of the metal fixtures — faucets, doorknobs and the like — are made of silver. "There's like marble wainscoting in the shower," Ms. Braff noted.

The architectural redesign is by Pietro Cicognani. The interior is by Windsor Smith. The chandeliers are by John Rosselli and Associates. If you have to ask who any of these people are, you probably can't afford it.

The 955-square-foot roof terrace, which already has a barbecue zone, has hookups for water and electricity so that the buyer can "create their little wonderland on a roof," Ms. Braff said. Or go the other way and "make it this jungle oasis," she added, expanding upon the existing boxwood plantings by Audrey in the Garden. Or both!

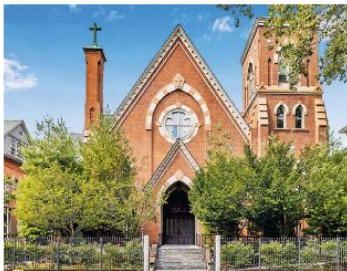
The penthouse may be a bit of a bargain. Adjusted for inflation, the price is 40 percent below the \$27.5 million the Neumanns paid for the space in 2017 before doing extensive renovations. It has been listed in combination with either a duplex on the first floor or a carriage house next door for as much as \$37.5 million. But according to Douglas Elliman, this is the first time the penthouse has been marketed separately. The taxes on it are \$163,400 per year.

Mr. Neumann, 45, said through Douglas Elliman that he seeks to part ways with the penthouse because his family has not lived in it since 2019.

If the penthouse finally sells, it will not leave the Neumanns and their six children homeless. They appear to be hanging on to Linden Farm, their 60-acre estate with a waterfall and a horse-riding ring in Pound Ridge, N.Y. And sometime after 2021, The New York Post reported, the Neumanns moved into a "palatial new home" in "an exclusive private neighborhood in Miami" along 360 feet of waterfront with multiple marina slips, on property for which they had paid \$44 million.

Mr. Neumann has further plans to rebuild his wealth, too. In 2022, he founded a real estate company called FLOW. Its mission is to build rental developments that foster a feeling of ownership and community.

WHAT YOU GET \$700,000



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROSE VISUAL MEDIA

New Haven, Conn.

WHAT A three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath-room condominium in a converted 1872 church

HOW MUCH \$675,000

SIZE 1,780 square feet

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT \$379

SETTING This property is a five-minute walk from a stretch of Wooster Street with several of the city's most popular pizzerias, Yale University Art Gallery, the school's library and Yale New Haven Hospital — all are less than 10 minutes away by car. Driving to Union Station takes about five minutes. From there, Amtrak trains travel to Penn Station in Manhattan in less than two hours.

INDOORS The apartment's front door opens into a foyer with a

staircase that leads up to the main level. Two bedrooms are on the entry level. At the top of the stairs is a living room with high ceilings, a fireplace and glass doors that open to a private deck. Adjoining this space is a dining area open to a kitchen. Up another flight of stairs is a large primary suite with original woodwork.

OUTDOOR SPACE The deck off the living room is partially shaded by a roof overhang and has enough space to hold a table and chairs.

TAXES \$13,896 (estimated) and a \$1,000 monthly homeowners association fee.

CONTACT Jack Hill, Seabury Hill Realtors, 203-675-3942; seaburyhillidbroker.com



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CALLAWAY HENDERSON ROBBIE INTERNATIONAL REALTY

Lambertville, N.J.

WHAT An 1873 semidetached house with three bedrooms and one and a half bathrooms, on a tiny lot

HOW MUCH \$679,000

SIZE 1,469 square feet

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT \$462

SETTING This house is less than half a mile from Bridge Street, the city's main drag, putting it within walking distance of shopping, dining and antiquing. Philadelphia is an hour away, New York City is a 90-minute drive.

INDOORS The front door opens into a living room with hardwood floors, a decorative fireplace mantel and a staircase to the upper levels. The hardwood floors continue past the staircase into a

dining room with a built-in china cabinet. The kitchen has wood cabinetry and stainless steel appliances. One bedroom with a decorative fireplace is on the second floor, and two more bedrooms are on the third floor. The primary bedroom has a decorative fireplace and a wall of built-in storage.

OUTDOOR SPACE The patio off the kitchen is surrounded by landscaping, including raised planting boxes and a mature magnolia tree.

TAXES \$10,351 (estimated)

CONTACT Louis R. Toboz and Beth M. Steffanelli, Callaway Henderson Sotheby's International Realty, 609-751-1247; sothebysrealty.com



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL STABLER

Atlanta

WHAT A 1938 bungalow with three bedrooms and two bathrooms, on 0.3 of an acre

HOW MUCH \$669,900

SIZE 1,845 square feet

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT \$407

SETTING This house is less than half a mile from a shopping center with a Kroger grocery store, a pet supply store and a Target. Downtown is about 10 minutes away, or car or half an hour by public transit. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport is within a half-hour drive.

INDOORS The front door opens into a living room with hardwood floors, large windows and a decorative brick fireplace painted black. The hardwood floors contin-

ue through a wide doorway into a windowed dining room open to an updated kitchen. The primary suite is at the back of the house, off the kitchen. The bedroom is big enough to hold a king-size bed. The other two bedrooms are off a short hall extending from the dining area. The bedroom at the front of the house is set up as a home office and den; the one at the back has a walk-in closet.

OUTDOOR SPACE The wood deck off the kitchen has room for a dining table and a grill. It steps down to the backyard, which has a storage shed in one corner.

TAXES \$11,297 (estimated)

CONTACT Alan Corey, eXp Realty, 646-554-3320; exprealtty.com



JACOB BERNSTEIN/PATRICK MCELROY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Late-Night Partyers No Longer Welcome

A Hamptons village's stance against a members-only club is a last-gasp effort to quell noise.

By JACOB BERNSTEIN and ANNA KODE

Whether it's complaints about air traffic at the East Hampton airport, teenagers partying on the beach or the arrival of Uber and Lyft drivers, the controversies that dominate the news cycle on the East End of Long Island are usually about one thing: noise — and who, in a place where residents are used to getting nearly everything they want, is allowed to make it.

This summer, media fireworks are popping over Zero Bond, the members-only club in Lower Manhattan that is attempting to open an outpost in East Hampton Village four years after the club became the ne plus ultra of downtown status spots — the place Page Six wrote about because it was where Kim Kardashian and Pete Davidson had their second date, where Gigi Hadid celebrated her 27th birthday, where Elon Musk hosted his after-party for the Met Gala and where Eric Adams made himself at home during his 2021 mayoral campaign.

Much like that of a Birkin bag, Zero Bond's appeals due (at least in part) to how difficult it is to gain access. As its founder, Scott Sartiano, has said, "You can't buy code."

Although having money helps: After submitting an application, a suggested letter of recommendation from a current member and a headshot, anyone who wishes to join the club must also pay a one-time initiation fee and yearly dues, which increase with the age of the applicant. (Those under 28 pay a \$750 one-time fee and \$2,750 annually; those over 45, a \$5,000 initiation fee and \$4,400 annually.)

Mr. Sartiano's efforts to establish his private club in a centuries-old building known as the Hedges Inn, currently a 13-room luxury bed-and-breakfast, have been widely reported. But while he is said to be negotiating to lease the property, even town officials do not have confirmation of whether an agreement has been signed.

Mr. Sartiano declined numerous requests for comment. So did John Cumming, the owner of the Hedges Inn, although he emailed a statement saying that "the future of the Hedges Inn is an important and sensitive topic to everyone involved" and expressing confidence that "the next 40+ years of this iconic inn will be as bright as its past."

Wherever things stand with the lease, many neighbors aren't pleased. On May 18, in the latest salvo, the East Hampton Village mayor, Jerry Larsen, and the board of trustees passed a law requiring restaurants in the historic district to close and have all customers out by 11 p.m., which would put a damper on Zero Bond's business. (Mr. Larsen had hoped to establish a 10 p.m. closing time but encountered resistance from restaurants in the area.)

Back in March, when Mr. Sartiano began his campaign, he attempted to win over the East Hampton mayor by promising to have Mr. Adams, the New York City mayor, call and attest to his character.

"I told them not to waste Mr. Adams' time," Mr. Larsen said. "It was not going to change my mind."

Carrie Doyle, a village trustee, said, "One of the lost things in this world is quietude. People come out for peace and quiet, and the ironic thing is that to get it you have to make a lot of noise. So that's what we've done."

But the dispute is about more than decibel levels; it's also about access. One argu-



KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top, the crowd at the Surf Lodge in Montauk in 2009 and, above, Jimmy Buffett tending bar during a Coldplay performance at the Stephen Talkhouse in Amagansett in 2016. The Hamptons long ago shed its reputation as a quiet getaway, but the party scene today is a shadow of what it was. Scott Sartiano, the founder of Zero Bond, is said to be negotiating a lease on the Hedges Inn in East Hampton Village, above right, for his club's new outpost.

ment repeatedly made for keeping Zero Bond out of East Hampton has do with the club's insistence that it be welcomed by people it might not welcome in return as members. And the Hamptons is a particularly difficult place to make that pitch.

A Tricky Spot

Almost anyone who goes to the Hamptons can tell you that it long ago shed its reputation as the quiet getaway spot where Jackson Pollock hid out and splash-painted his way through existential despair.

The Stephen Talkhouse, in Amagansett, has hosted shows by Jon Bon Jovi and Jimmy Buffett. The lines to the bathroom at the Surf Lodge in Montauk are notable enough to have inspired their own New York Times article. And that didn't stop Malia Obama from celebrating her birthday on the outdoor deck.

So it made sense that Zero Bond would try to open in the Hamptons, said Corey Dolgon, the author of "The End of the Hamptons" and a professor of sociology at Stony Hill College, in Easton, Mass.

"The Hamptons — as symbolic of the 'richest and most famous' — is exactly the kind of cultural capital that Zero Bond craves," he said. "Every new generation of rich and famous look to put their imprimatur on the land they are conquering."

Still, Mr. Sartiano picked a tricky spot for his clubhouse.

"Montauk has all those hotels," said Kathleen Cunningham, the executive director of the Village Preservation Society of East Hampton. "There's tons of commercial property, and that's part of why it is a party scene — because it can be. The commercial side of East Hampton is much smaller, and therefore what is permitted and what should be permitted is different."

Beyond that, while the Hamptons is a shadow of what it was in the early 2000s, when Lizzie Grubman famously crashed her black Mercedes SUV outside a Southampton nightclub called the Conscious Point Inn, injuring 16 people.

"The era of major nightclubs is over," said Nick Kraus, a partner at the Talkhouse, rattling off a list of clubs, now shuttered, that were known for their popularity with the plastic surgery set and detested for the inclination of those patrons to pitch their plastic cups onto the street.

"Those places have become Pier 1s or dog parks," he said, adding, "The towns bought them because they were nuisances and then transformed them."

Among the residents disturbed by the prospect of having Zero Bond as a neighbor

is Kenneth Lipper, a former New York City deputy mayor under Ed Koch who became a titan of finance, serving as a partner at Lehman Brothers and Salomon Brothers before opening Lipper & Co., which manages investments for high-net-worth individuals. (He also wrote the novel "Wall Street," based on the 1937 movie by Oliver Stone.)

Mr. Lipper, who lives on a side street a few hundred feet from the Hedges Inn, has shown up at village board meetings to oppose the lease of the property to Mr. Sartiano, including the meeting last month where the 11 p.m. closing time was established.

While Mr. Lipper said he had never exactly been close to Mr. Cumming, things between them were always cordial. He also knew Mr. Cumming's father, Ian Cumming, a billionaire investment banker, who lived on the block and died in 2018 at 78.

Last summer, he ran into Mr. Cumming at a party in the Hamptons. "He said he had to make money at the Hedges Inn," Mr. Lipper recalled. "Everything has to make money. I kind of rolled my eyes." He added later: "It's mental gymnastics. It has nothing to do with real business or actual need."

Mr. Lipper likened it to "Wall Street." "It reminds me of that line," he said. "Greed is good," a kind of modern Gordon Gekko attitude.

Idling Cars

Mr. Larsen, the mayor, has framed the issue as being principally about noise.

"Even the slightest thing of cars idling in the parking lot next to somebody's house, people talking late at night in a parking lot — after people have drinks, sometimes they come out laughing, and they're louder than they would normally be — all of that is going to disrupt the neighbors, because that's how close the houses are," he said.

But others have suggested that he may have a personal incentive to keep Zero Bond out of East Hampton.

In the past, the mayor has been decidedly pro-business. He has raised parking charges, introduced a plan to privatize ambulance service and secured funding from Prada, which operates a store on Main Street, to pay for the lighting of the Christmas tree in the center of town — where Santa Claus arrived for the 2022 lighting ceremony by police helicopter.

But the possibility of a nightclub opening in a primarily residential part of the village posed an obvious problem for him, said David Rattray, the editor of The East Hampton Star, the town's main newspaper.

Being the village mayor, Mr. Rattray pointed out, is a side job that pays Mr.

Larsen around \$26,000 a year. His principal source of income comes from Protec Security, a private security firm he runs with his wife, Lisa Larsen.

"He has clients within earshot," said Mr. Rattray, whose newspaper is based across the street from the Hedges. "His trucks are there daily."

Indeed, it was not hard to find triangular Protec signs sprouting from the lawns of summer homes nearby: one less than a quarter of a mile from the Hedges on the corner of Main Street and James Lane; another at the house directly behind Mr. Lipper's; and more on Hunting Lane, Middle Lane, Egypt Lane and West Dune Lane.

When asked about a possible conflict of interest, the mayor more or less shrugged. "If someone came before the board of trustees," he said, and he was doing business with that person, "I would have to recuse myself."

Still, residents are bracing for a battle that could stretch into next summer, all hinging on a lease and a liquor license.

Liquor licenses granted by the New York State Liquor Authority allow businesses to sell alcohol until 4 a.m., but counties are able to further restrict these hours with their own legislation. And this could set up a potential legal battle between Mr. Sartiano and the village officials.

But perhaps not — for this summer, at least. —J.M. Sartiano runs out of time to get the club up and running. Marcos Baladron, the East Hampton Village administrator, said there is no indication that Mr. Sartiano has signed a lease, much less obtained a liquor license, a process that can take nearly a year. And the mayor noted that the State Liquor Authority will consult the village before giving Mr. Sartiano a license to serve alcohol.

It continues to puzzle them, though, why Mr. Cumming has been so intent on doing business with Zero Bond. "I let the owner know, 'If you really want to sell the place, I can give you a list of individuals who are happy to purchase,'" Mr. Baladron said. "And none of them would do something the village would hate to see."

He did seem to understand that, however, why Mr. Sartiano won't give up.

Earlier this spring, Mr. Baladron said, he suggested that if Mr. Sartiano was set on coming to the Hamptons, there were far better places to go.

"He could go to Montauk and have zero resistance," Mr. Baladron said. "Instead, he's opening in a property that's defective in terms of what he wants to do; it's not even a good business decision."

He recalled Mr. Sartiano's response: "I hate to lose."

HEADWAY

Little Boxes Could Hold A Housing Solution

Modular home construction was seen as a potential cure for a U.S. shortage 50 years ago. In Sweden, they're making it work.

By FRANCESCA MARI
Photographs by AMIR HAMIA

It drives Ivan Rupnik up the wall that building a house, even the most basic house, is such a ridiculous time suck. As an architect, he sees the solution to America's affordable housing shortage in simple terms: Build more houses. Start today. But the way houses are built in the United States makes speed impossible.

Some years ago, Rupnik's Croatian grandmother, an architect herself, pointed him to an intriguing answer to this conundrum: modular housing, specifically the large-scale, prefabricated projects built in Europe in the 1950s and '60s. Rupnik was awed. Sure, prefab complexes, and especially Soviet bloc housing, could be ugly and too homogenous — partly why modular housing remains so stigmatized in the United States — but the process created millions of housing units in a flash.

Hooked, Rupnik started researching modular housing for his doctoral dissertation. In the basement archives of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, he stumbled upon an old journal article that discussed government-sponsored, large-scale affordable initiatives in the places he had expected. But one reference took him by surprise: an industrialized housing initiative called Operation Breakthrough that built nearly 3,000 units between 1971 and 1973 — in the United States. How had he never heard about it?

It turned out few people had. Unable to find much more information, Rupnik turned to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which created the program. In 1969, when Operation Breakthrough was announced, HUD was less than four years old and affordable housing was still a bipartisan issue. The plan's visionary, HUD Secretary George Romney, a former Republican governor and Nixon appointee (and, yes, Mitt's father), made an Economics 101 argument for this big government program: If you quickly increase the supply of housing, you drive down the price for all.

"This can do more to stimulate economic growth and employment in the balance of this century than anything else we can do,"

A U.S. government plan to build millions of homes started in the 1970s. Congress deemed it too expensive.

he wrote in the program's announcement. Romney said the country needed to build 26 million houses in 10 years, almost three times as many as had been built in the previous 10. Industrializing construction, he argued — making all or parts of houses on an assembly line in a factory — was the only way to do it.

This is not the way most houses are built in the United States. While nearly every other industry has become more productive since 1968, productivity in homebuilding — the amount of work done by one worker in one hour, essentially — has declined by half. The country is barely building enough to maintain the status quo, which is some four million units short of need, according to Freddie Mac. In the coming years, with population growth, climate change and the natural deterioration of housing stock, we'll only need more.

Housing shortages were already a problem in 1969. Romney understood that companies wouldn't invest in the machinery and overhead needed to industrialize because varied local building and zoning codes made it impossible to scale up. Operation Breakthrough proposed using the vast purchasing power of the federal government to guarantee a large market. It also promised to study and chronicle the regulatory barriers to industrialization, so that it could change them.

Operation Breakthrough selected nine sites around the country. Among its factory-built experiments were housing for older adults in Kalamazoo, Mich., and owner-occupied co-ops on a lake in Macon, Ga. The program created public housing in Memphis and 58 modern (some would say Brutalist) townhouses in downtown Seattle for renters with housing vouchers. But in 1976, Congress decided that the program was too costly and that HUD shouldn't be doing demonstration projects. Less than a decade after it was announced, Operation Breakthrough was dead.

But as Rupnik pored over the record, he was struck by what the program had accomplished. It had led to a national code that regulated the previously lawless



From top: a door frame being installed at the Lindbäcks modular construction factory in Sweden; a roof being installed; and a roof section being painted vertically. Housing modules simultaneously assemble lines cut down on delays. At Lindbäcks, one unit of volumetric housing is created every half an hour.

trailer-home sector. (Trailer homes are categorized as personal property, not real estate, and they move across state lines, making them subject to interstate trade laws and thus federal regulation.) This made mobile homes safer and expanded their production, bolstering a form of affordable housing that now accounts for 10 percent of single-family homes. To Rupnik, the experiment demonstrated something powerful: When a uniform national building code was implemented, industry would respond. The barriers to building housing fast, in other words, weren't technological, but institutional.

While Operation Breakthrough made little impact in the United States, it radically influenced other countries. Japan sent a delegation to tour the Operation Breakthrough construction sites and to study its reports: Nearly all construction in Japan now is industrialized, and 15 percent of homes are prefabricated in steel. In Sweden, 45 percent of construction is industrialized. Builders there erect tall structures with wood, the preferred housing material in the United States, and the one that's most climate-friendly.

After he got his doctorate, Rupnik became an associate professor at Northeastern University in Boston and co-founded a firm called MODX that focuses on advancing industrialized construction. He couldn't shake the absurdity that in the United States, where Operation Breakthrough was tested, industrialized housing makes up just a 3 percent market share. So MODX got the Department of Housing and Urban Development to let it re-evaluate Operation Breakthrough with the goal of figuring out how to produce efficient industrialized housing in the United States.

In June 2023, I joined one of the firm's research trips. Instead of revisiting Operation Breakthrough by crunching hypothetical numbers, the team was visiting alternate universes. What would housing in the United States be like if Congress hadn't canceled its premiere modular pilot? We flew to Sweden to find out.

How to Build a House Like a Volvo

The premise of Operation Breakthrough was essentially: What if we could build houses in the same way the automotive industry produces cars? Lindbäcks, a family-owned construction company in Sweden, just shy of the Arctic Circle, took that question literally. Before opening a housing factory in 2017, its management visited the factories of Toyota and Volvo as well as nearby pulp and paper plants, borrowing ideas.

The Lindbäcks factory now spans 10 acres, an aircraft hangar for the most earth-bound of structures. On a foggy June day, Stefan Lindbäck, the fourth-generation chief executive of the company, gave a tour to our delegation. We put on safety boots before being led onto a metal walkway overlooking the vast factory floor. Humans moved around machines, like people on the track of a music box.

Everything in the factory was oriented around one main line — a slow-moving conveyor belt on which finished components were assembled into fully formed modules. The main line was the spine, more time-consuming subassemblies — shorter lines with machines building floors, walls, ceilings and so-called logistics, like countertops and cabinets — fed into the spine like ribs. One box unit was completed every 30 minutes. The units could be connected to create apartments of different sizes and floor plans.

On one rib, an interior wall traveled onto a rack where it stood vertical for painting. This trick struck Mary Fingerthal, former commissioner of Minnesota Housing and now a special adviser to a modular company called RISE, as almost revolutionary. The little industrialized construction that happens in the United States tends to proceed down a single assembly line. Wet construction, like painting and staining, generally happens within a closed box and slows the progress. In this factory, she marveled, "It's constantly out in the air!"

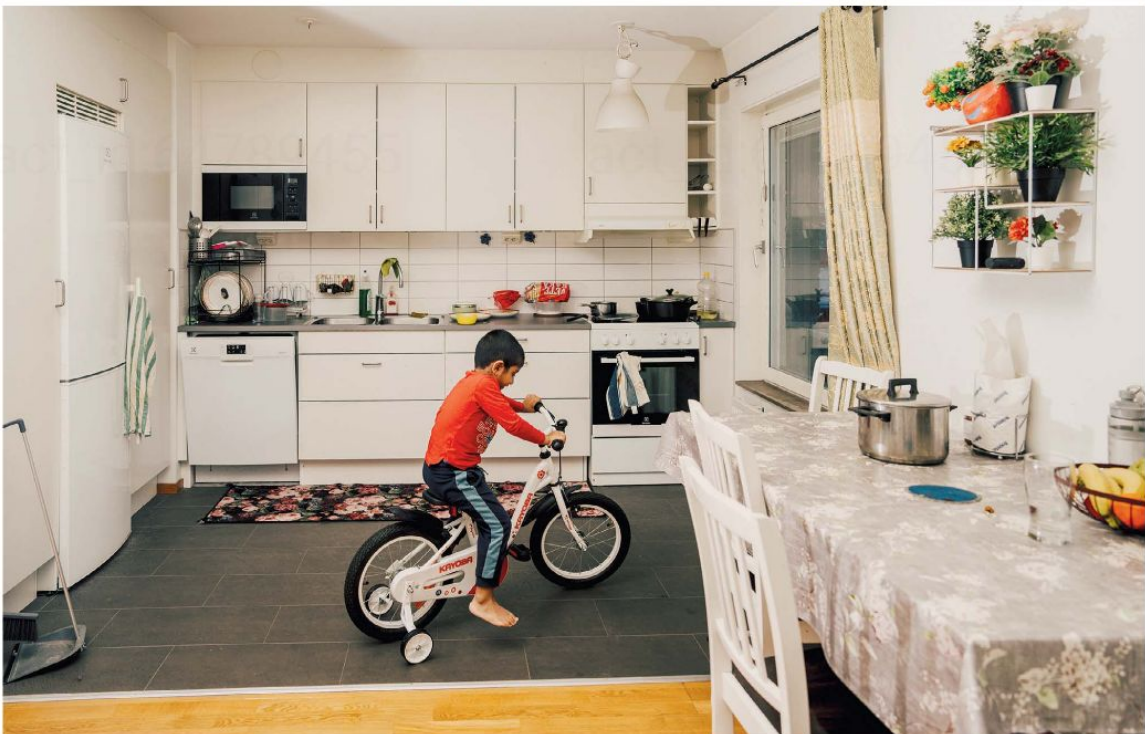
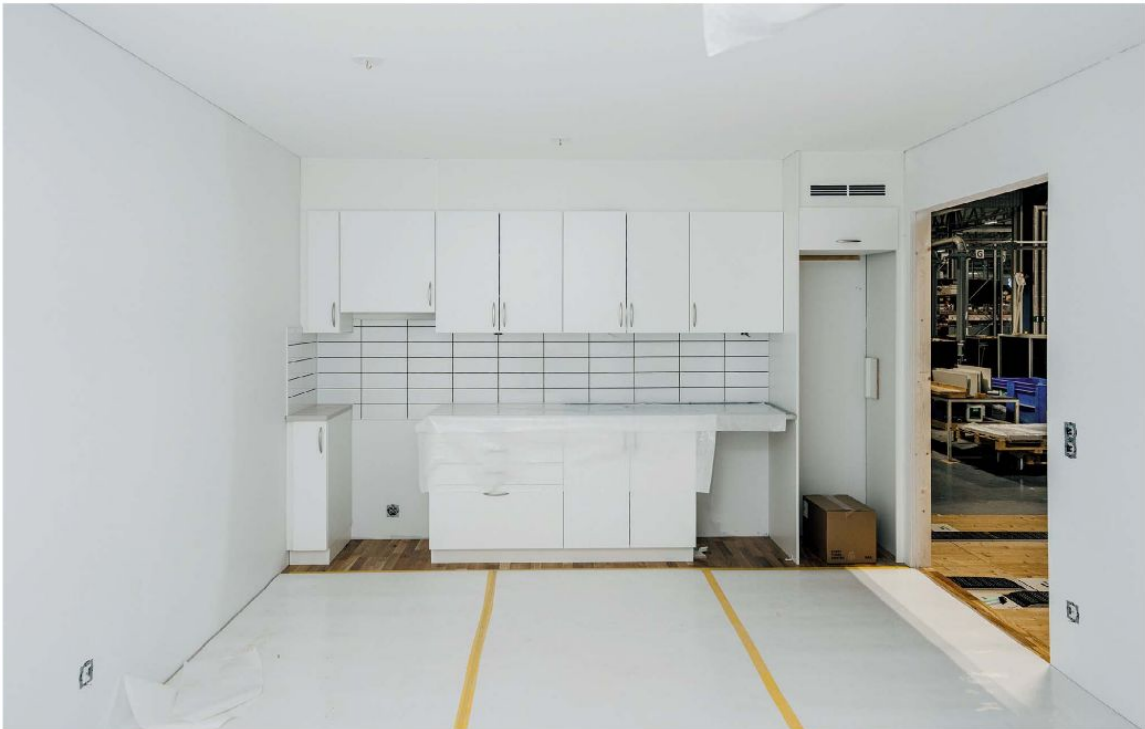
But the most remarkable difference between the United States and Sweden is regulatory. The two countries have codes intended to make buildings, and the people who live in them, safe. The United States does this by prescribing exactly what materials must be used and how (a prescriptive code); in Sweden, the government sets goals and lets the builders come up with a way to achieve them (a performance code).

So, for instance, U.S. building codes mandate the thickness of drywall that must be used for fire resistance, how many layers are needed and how many nails are required to attach it. In Sweden, the code requires that a wall must resist burning for two hours, say, and lets engineers and manufacturers figure out how to accomplish that. The regulator's job is to check the engineer's work.

The result of both is fire resistance and structural safety, but in the United States, each residential building needs to be granted a permit. During construction, work often halts for inspectors to make periodic visual inspections (for instance, after framing or plumbing). That contrasts to a stop-and-go pace that frustrates pretty much everybody except lenders, who get

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HEADWAY



Top, the kitchen space inside a unit of Lindbäck housing at the factory. Above, the kitchen of a Lindbäck three-bedroom apartment, where Sumon Bhuyan and his family live in northern Sweden.

interest on financing. In Sweden, the codes require more work on the front end when builders have to demonstrate that their methods are up to snuff, but factory processes that comply with the performance code can be certified. This encourages innovative solutions and results in less waste.

Building quality homes, whether on-site or off-site, will never be cheap. You don't want to scrimp on materials or labor, and the savings of factory-built homes might not be obvious at the start, Lindbäck told our group. A conventional builder might bid lower than Lindbäck, but that bid isn't the final fee. There are the costs of supervising the construction on-site and growing interest charges as a project drags on. And conventional builders profit from changes late in the process.

With factory-built houses, modifications are minimized because customers generally select from a standardized framework and changes are allowed only up to a certain point. Financing costs are reduced because much of the balance isn't due until delivery. The factory builder's advantage is quality control and speed. Real profit, long-term profit, comes from streamlining the building system for predictable outcomes and

fast delivery.

"It's not about the cheapest product," Lindbäck said. "We want the cheapest solution."

An Alchemy of Design and Wood

As we rode on a bus about an hour and a half south of the Lindbäck factory, sun flickered for miles through thin bars of pine and spruce outside the windows. Then the boreal forest parted onto a small city where one building towered above the rest: Sara Kulturhus, a cultural center topped by a hotel, a 20-story mass timber building, constructed with factory-made units. The hotel tower contains 205 identical rooms sheathed in double-pane windows, like cubbies sealed in glass.

Before Sweden adopted its performance-based code in 1995, wood buildings had been limited to two stories; almost overnight, wooden buildings could be as tall as engineers could prove safe.

Construction accounts for 40 percent of global carbon emissions, but in Sweden it's 20 percent because so much is built with wood. Sweden has a lot of it. Carbon is captured in the trees harvested and in the trees

planted to replace them. While wood costs more than some other materials, building with it requires less energy and allows for faster construction. That, in turn, means developers need not carry construction loans for as long and can rent units sooner.

A wooden key card clicked me into a spruce hotel room with a floor-to-ceiling window. The boxiness felt more a function of minimalist Scandinavian design than volumetric modular construction. It was well past midnight, but at the end of June, the sun merely dipped below the horizon for a few hours, casting a dim glow, like a lamp from a room around the corner. More even than the light at this magical, crepuscular hour, the critical element of the room's alchemy of architecture and interior design was the soft, soothing wood.

Oskar Norelius, a partner at the firm White Arkitekter, which designed Sara Kulturhus and the hotel, told me that quality timber was expensive, so he economized by designing for industrial production. Hotels are perfect for this, as are dorms, offices and hospitals. "One module," he said, referring to the hotelroom itself, "is large enough that you can fit everything into it: the bathroom, all the finishes, and it will still be quite

Timber can be expensive, but wood homes ultimately save time, have other cost savings and are climate-friendly.

easy to transport."

The volumetric modular units were assembled at Derome, a factory not dissimilar from Lindbäck. They were then driven, 95 percent complete, to the site, where they were stacked by crane, as quickly as one floor per week, depending on the wind. Each floor has 16 units. When units were bolted together, gaskets around their perimeters suctioned together, airtight. Another big advantage: Hotel modules could be assembled off-site at the same time that the cultural center, the base of the hotel, was being built on-site. This parallel construction translated into a year of saved time, according to the contractor.

Norelius walked us through the cultural center, which contains a public library, two art galleries and six theaters. As we passed through the monumental lobby into an open gallery space, Rupnik excitedly identified

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the system of standardized timber modules that had been designed for this project. The main entrance opened onto a staircase that doubled as seating for community readings and events. Above, a kinetic wooden chandelier opened and closed its wooden petals to reflect whether the building and its solar panels were adding or subtracting energy from the grid.

To Rupnik and others on the trip, the advantages of modular housing were obvious. But efforts to build this way in the United States haven't caught on in a big way.

The most famous U.S. off-site housing manufacturer is actually infamous: Kattera, founded in 2015, was the start-up that everyone believed would make the leap. It had oodles of money — SoftBank invested \$2.4 billion — but it tried to do everything, everywhere, all at once. “They went on a very rapid growth acquisition,” said Todd Beyreuther, the former senior director of advanced building materials at Kattera, who had come on the Sweden trip. Kattera bought construction companies across the country — some of which bristled at a start-up telling them to radically change their ways. A year into the pandemic, having splurged on state-of-the-art factories, the company imploded and filed for bankruptcy, its talent and investments blown to the wind.

In spite of Kattera's failure, Rupnik is excited about other initiatives across the country. A company in Philadelphia bought Kattera's factory in Tracy, Calif., and has completed more than 6,000 modules. In Vallejo, Calif., the workers at Factory OS have delivered housing to clients including Alphabet, Google's parent company, and Oakland developers. In Minneapolis, the Public Housing Authority commissioned RISE Modular to build 16 buildings around the city.

What's most likely to force the adoption of industrialized housing in the United States, however, isn't excitement about modular houses, but labor shortages. In fact, a skilled labor shortage has already affected one area of homebuilding: roof trusses, the



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA LIA/THE NEW YORK TIMES



From top: board installed on a modular unit at Lindbäck; wood-framed units churned out by the factory; a modular apartment building in northern Sweden. “It’s not about the cheapest product,” said Stefan Lindbäck, the chief executive. “We want the cheapest solution.”

Factory-built homes can address a construction labor shortage, in part, by opening the field to more women.

structural timber frame works that support a roof. Trusses require precisely cutting angles, a skill few workers possess, and so the structures are now mostly made in factories.

Worker shortages are bound to get worse. The median age of a construction worker is 42, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Traditional construction means working unpredictable hours in unpredictable elements and requires physical strength to climb and hoist materials on a job site. In a factory, those constraints don't necessarily apply. One data point: In the United States, women make up less than 15 percent of construction workers; at Lindbäck, more than 30 percent of the work force is female.

The controlled environment isn't good just for workers; it's also good for the product. Rupnik recalled watching a stack of timber sit on a job site in Boston all winter. It snowed, the snow melted into sooty slush, and the lumber soaked in a dirty puddle for weeks, compromising the construction quality.

The Need for Speed

No one seems to know exactly how many of the 3,000 units built by Operation Breakthrough still stand. Bryant Manor, the complex of 58 townhouses in downtown Seattle, is being torn down without fanfare. In its place will be a building with 250 apartments, 58 of which will remain affordable.

On a recent Sunday, I dropped by. I approached one resident, Fatuma Hussein, as she was leaving the complex. Now a student at the University of Washington, she had grown up in Bryant Manor. “It's gated and the kids can play outdoors — water balloon fights, soccer, everything you can think of,” she said. “The elders walk the green space in the morning. I know every family.” She asked if I wanted a tour and led me inside. A toddler pressed her cheeks against a window with a doughy smile. As Hussein waved hello, two more smiling children appeared at the glass to greet us.

I followed Hussein into the townhouse where she lives with her mother and two sisters. We took off our shoes before entering. In the living room, red Turkish carpets were layered on top of the beige wall-to-wall carpeting. Hussein's corner unit was one of the smaller ones, and yet it was adequate for a family.

Hussein's mother, Asha Mohamed, a Somali refugee, stood in the galley kitchen, stirring an Ethiopian lamb stew, a recipe she learned from neighbors at a community center event. It took seven onions and was delicious; she wouldn't let me leave until I'd taken a piece of injera and soaked up a plate of it. She was cooking for a former neighbor who had lived in a unit that had been razed. The former neighbor was lonely since relocating temporarily, and her Bryant Manor friends were surprising her with a potluck.

The unit was old, and there was a water stain on the kitchen ceiling. The bedrooms were small. But there were two full bathrooms. I could not tell that the home was factory-built. What I could tell was that it was loved and well-cared-for by its occupants. And most important, Mohamed, who worked at a nearby day care, could afford the place on a housing voucher.

Whenever I talked to Rupnik, he was more interested in the productivity part of the affordability equation than the affordability part. This had confused me. But after spending time in Sweden talk-

ing to modular manufacturers, architects, government officials and leaders in the timber industry, I started to see the connection. Productivity means more permanent homes for more people, faster. Speed is what secures perhaps the greatest long-term savings — preventing the trauma of homelessness and offering security, community and continuous enrollment at the same school. It had been lulling to see the beautiful Swedish modular housing, but America is where I saw the real potential of even imperfectly designed modular housing.

Speed is how industrialization achieves affordability. Even when the labor and ma-

terial cost savings are modest, the introduction of many more units in a relatively short period of time has the effect of lowering the market price of all units. That was Operation Breakthrough's objective and MOD X's main takeaway.

Rupnik is finishing his report for the Department of Housing and Urban Development and preparing for the next phase of MOD X's HUD research, which involves identifying and solving for the regulatory barriers to off-site construction in six pilot regions. He has been struck by how well the theories underpinning Operation Breakthrough have held up. It also frustrates him. Had attention been paid 50 years ago, hous-

ing in the United States might look very different today. Maybe architects would be designing more beautiful factory-built housing. Maybe prescriptive codes that stifle innovation would have been ameliorated. Maybe, Rupnik says, affordable housing would not be so hard to come by. Housebuilding as it's done now limits the range of what builders are willing to produce: Lower-priced housing isn't as profitable, and so lower-income people suffer.

The only way to move forward, Rupnik believes, is to return to the ambition of Operation Breakthrough and unleash the power of industrialization. As he told me: “We really have run out of alternatives.”

HOW TO: REFINISH FURNITURE

It's Easier Than You Think to Restore a Chair



Two Brooklyn-based designers offer some tips for making an antique look as good as new.

By TIM McKEOUGH

Furnishing your home with antiques doesn't have to be expensive — not if you're willing to do a little restoration work. Take it from Jordan Slocum and Barry Bordon, better known as the Brownstone Boys.

"If you get a piece someone has already spent a lot of time and effort restoring, it's going to be expensive," said Mr. Bordon, 43. "But there are many pieces out there that need a lot of love, and to be restored, that you can get for a lot less. We do that a lot."

The Brooklyn-based designers — whose new book, "For the Love of Renovating," is out this month — are always on the hunt: in vintage shops along Atlantic Avenue, in architectural salvage yards, even among piles of trash on the sidewalk.

"We're fortunate to live in New York, where stooping is a thing," Mr. Slocum, 41, said.

Recently, they rescued a wood side chair with a ruined seat and gloopy paint from the curb. To restore it, they employed many of the same techniques they use on woodwork in historic brownstones.

Peel the Paint

Start by removing any upholstery you don't plan to keep, so you can work on the wood frame. Then use a heat gun on the old paint and peel away as much as you can with a metal paint scraper.

"You heat the paint, and then you scrape," Mr. Bordon said. (Just be careful not to burn the chair.)

"That's going to get most of the paint off," he continued. "It's going to come off like butter, but also leave some remnants."

To deal with any tenacious paint, use a liquid paint stripper, like CitriStrip. Spread it on generously with a paintbrush — and be patient.

"We'll let it sit for at least five to 10 minutes," Mr. Slocum said. "And then assess how it's scraping off."

Work stubborn areas with steel wool and wipe them with a rag.

Sand It

Now that most of the paint is gone, spray the chair with denatured alcohol and scrub with more steel wool to clean off any residue. Then sand the entire chair to remove any remaining flecks of paint and refresh the surface of the wood.

"We do want to get down to the raw wood," Mr. Slocum said.

Start with coarse sandpaper — maybe 80 grit — and work up to progressively finer grades, ending with 400 grit. The Brownstone Boys sometimes use a power sander, but to get into curves and crevices, Mr. Slocum said, it's often easier to work by hand with ordinary sandpaper.

"Sometimes we tape it to a wood block if we need to get a little more force into the furniture," he said.

Stain It

With the bare wood exposed, add stain in a color of your choice. The Brownstone Boys wiped Varathane Early American stain onto their chair with cheesecloth.

For even coloration, Mr. Slocum said, "you want to work with the grain."

After the stain dried, they sanded the chair again to smooth out any raised grain.

Choose a Replacement Seat

An upholstered seat is always a nice option, but Mr. Slocum and Mr. Bordon were feeling ambitious. So when they noticed a groove around the seat of the chair, they decided to use pressed-cane webbing, they bought on Amazon instead of fabric.

To add cane to a seat, cut the material a little larger than needed and soak it in water for about 20 minutes.

"That will help us not only apply it, but get rid of stiffness we don't want," Mr. Slocum said.

Use wood wedges or a screen-rolling tool to drive the edges of the cane into the groove and trim off the excess. To hold the cane webbing in place, add wood glue and a reed spline — a continuous strip of material that fills the gap.

Finish It

To complete your restoration, add a clear coat. The Brownstone Boys applied Varathane matte polyurethane. It's best to use a fresh paintbrush or rag, Mr. Slocum said, to avoid brushstrokes.

For their chair, one coat was enough. But if the finish looks uneven or you want better protection, you can apply additional coats. Then all you have to do is figure out where to put your new piece of furniture.

"We're going to put it in our office," Mr. Slocum said.

But the chair, he added, may eventually end up in a home they help someone else renovate. "Then they can enjoy it for the next hundred years."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY CENCOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES



Far left, Jordan Slocum, left, and Barry Bordon are specialists in restoring furniture. Middle left, liquid paint stripper makes it easier to remove old paint. Left, from top, after letting the stripper work for a few minutes, use a metal tool to scrape it off; spray on denatured alcohol after the paint stripper; scrub stubborn areas with steel wool.



Finish the job by sanding, gradually moving from a coarser to a finer grit of sandpaper.



To add a cane seat, soak the material in water before driving it into the groove running around the chair. Add wood glue and a reed spline to lock the cane in place.



Complete the job with clear polyurethane. To avoid brushstrokes, it's best to use a fresh paintbrush or rag.



Use cheesecloth to apply wood stain. For even coloration, Mr. Slocum said, "you want to work with the grain."

Below, the final product. (If the finish looks uneven or you want better protection, apply additional coats.)



IN THE GARDEN

Learn a Backyard's Story by Reading the Land

Slopes, soil, trees, stone walls and animal routes offer clues about the history of a property.

By MARGARET ROACH

When Noah Charney and his wife were house-shopping near Philadelphia, one real estate agent after another claimed to have the ideal home for them and couldn't wait to offer a virtual tour of its features: the renovated kitchen, the ample closet space.

But the listings never included the image that Dr. Charney, a conservation biologist, most needed to see: the satellite view from Google Earth.

"You want to see what?" was the typical response when he suggested opening an extra browser tab so he could explore the properties in an entirely different way before deciding which ones to see in person.

The decision, he knew, wouldn't hinge on square footage or the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, but on location, location, location. To Dr. Charney, that meant a lot more than a street address.

He had done preliminary online scouting of the larger area using satellite imagery and had identified three places with forest remnants that had escaped development. They looked like his sort of neighborhoods — the kind most likely to appeal to the greatest possible diversity of birds and other wildlife.

Were any of the houses being suggested contiguous to those areas?



"I wanted to see, in part, what animals could survive there, and would be in our yard," he said. "Because what's next to it informs what is going to end up there."

Today he and his family live in New England, splitting their time between Orono, Maine, where he is an assistant professor of wildlife, fisheries and conservation biology at the University of Maine, and Western Massachusetts, where they used to live full time.

Dr. Charney is an advanced practitioner of reading the land and the author of the 2023 book "These Trees Tell a Story: The Art of Reading Landscapes." He divines information about a landscape's past and present, and hints of its future, from clues and patterns most of us wouldn't notice or think to look for, even when the place in question is as familiar as our backyard or the park where we walk the dog every day.

He is a sleuth by nature, endowed with the gift of deep curiosity, arguing in his writing and teaching for the need to heighten our intimacy with the places in our lives — and showing us exactly how to do that.

Finding Our Place on the Map

Do you really know where you live?

To get a better sense of a place, even one you think you know, Dr. Charney said, don't start too small. Whenever he explores — whether it's on a hike, teaching a class in the field or in that long-ago home search — he begins by using maps to expand his perspective beyond human constructs like property lines and town boundaries.

"Get a satellite map and look down, and look at your place, and look around," he said. "What is it connected to? What's the nearest river or wetland or hill or big, expansive forest? And get to thinking about if you're an animal, if you want to wander: Where would you go?"

The Northern leopard frog, for instance, breeds and overwinters in water, but a meadow of longish grass is its preferred summertime habitat. If that's not in your immediate backyard, are there places nearby that could accommodate the amphibian, whose numbers have been decreasing?

Satellite imagery from Google Earth can reveal the relationship of a particular place to forest remnants like those Dr. Charney saw around Philadelphia, and topographic maps can tip us off to a variety of features, from the elevation of the land to any bodies of water in the vicinity.

Dr. Charney uses the United States Geological Survey national map viewer, Maine's state and counties have their own viewer portals revealing local conservation corridors and other environmental layers. (A few examples include New York's Environmental Resource Mapper tool, Maine's Beginning With Habitat viewer and the MassMapper from Massachusetts.)

Getting a more intimate sense of place



PHOTOGRAPH BY NOAH CHARNEY



Clockwise from far left: Noah Charney, a conservation biologist and an advanced practitioner of the art of reading landscapes; a wolf tree with lower branches, which suggests it grew in a field and not close to other trees; Dr. Charney's Massachusetts yard, left, which contrasts with his neighbor's traditional lawn-heavy property; an old stone wall, which suggests the land was once a pasture or agricultural field; split-trunk trees may suggest that an area was logged, as multitemped trees often sprout from stumps; and the Northern leopard frog breeds and overwinters in water but prefers a meadow of longish grass in the summer.

zone.

Go ahead and put your shovel in the ground. Pull it away from the side of the hole and look: Do you see defined layers, or bands of various color?

"Has it been tilled, disturbed by people recently, or does it still have those natural horizons in it?" Dr. Charney asked. Wind moves soil and, in floodplains, water transports it. So do glaciers, like those that once occupied the land where Dr. Charney's Massachusetts home now stands. Some 10,000 years ago, his property was near a glacial lake, before the last ice age receded. So it's not surprising that there are no rocks in the yard.

"The house itself is down below lake level," he said, "where there's lots of deep soil" — essentially former lake-bottom sediment — "and the garden grows really well."

He added: "And then if you walk a little bit up the hill, you're above lake level and it's all glacial till — rocky, acidic soil."

On the topic of rocks: Are there human artifacts like stone walls, a sign that the land was once a field for grazing or agriculture? If the walls incorporate lots of little rocks, Dr. Charney's guess is that those fields were tilled, for planting.

"Every year, with the frost heaving, it brought the rocks up to the surface, and so they put them into those stone walls," he said.

Walls without those little rocks, he suspects, probably ran alongside sheep pasture: "They weren't tilling the soil, so they just left all the little rocks in the field."

Seeing Patterns in the Trees

A walk in the woods looks different through Dr. Charney's eyes. He observes the mix of trees, comparing the older canopy to the younger understory, visualizing the past and imagining what the forest will become someday, as the force of succession continues.

He notes any indicator species, too, like sycamores, cottonwoods and silver maples — all wetland indicators — or chestnut oaks that favor dry, acidic hilltop soils. "And then there's just some generalist trees that don't tell you much," he said.

As the title of his book implies, trees have much to teach us. "Trees hold clues for a long time," he said.

Have you ever seen a wolf tree? That's a tree in a wooded area that stands out because it has a lot of lower branches, while those surrounding it don't. Trees growing together within a forest don't develop that way; they grow up straight, competing for light.

"The wolf tree tells you that tree was there when it was a field," he said. "And then whatever was maintaining the field — sheep or people or whatever — went away. And then the forest grew up. It's telling you what it used to be like there: big and open."

Split-trunk trees can be another historical tip-off, especially if they're oaks or other hardwood species. They may hint that the area was logged, as multitemped trees can sprout from stumps.

"Those split trunks tell you that there was a forest there of single-trunk trees that got cut down, and then they were allowed to regrow," Dr. Charney said.

Have you viewed your land on a satellite map or explored the wild spaces nearby? The payoff in wonder can be substantial, and such research shouldn't be reserved solely for real estate transactions.

It did make a difference, though, during that Philadelphia adventure. Dr. Charney stuck to his instincts, and his family eventually found a home next to one of the areas he had circled on the Google Earth maps.

And what great features that property had — just the ones he hoped for.

"It had screech owls and lots of different salamanders, belted kingfishers and green blue herons, and an assortment of old trees," he recalled. "And we were half a mile from the largest mall in America."



also requires on-site checks, some more obvious than others. If your land slopes, for example, what is the aspect: Which direction is downhill?

North-facing slopes, which face away from the sun in the Northern Hemisphere, offer moister, cooler environments; sunnier, south-facing slopes generally have drier soils.

Those are "two really different habitats on those two sides," Dr. Charney said, and especially in a hilly neighborhood, the extremes can exist side by side, "just down the road and around the bend."

Another characteristic of slopes: They can have wide variations in soil depth. But rather than thinking of a particular depth or

kind of soil as good or bad — a judgment often based on what we hope to grow — Dr. Charney encourages us to cultivate an awareness of how it got there.

Soil, he said, basically "comes from the rocks below the surface weathering, and the plants above the surface decomposing generally."

Higher areas on slopes have less soil buildup, and tend to be erosion zones. "If you dig down and suddenly you hit rock, and there's no soil — that's an erosional zone," he said.

At the bottom of the slope, where all that eroded material from above came to rest, "if you can just keep on digging and you can't find the rocks," he said, it's a depositional

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COMPASS



The Pizzeria That Plays Itself Onscreen

Sam's Restaurant in Cobble Hill has long been a go-to spot for film crews looking for a bit of rustic Brooklyn charm.



By ALLIE CONTI
Sam's Restaurant, a 94-year-old red-sauce joint in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, was uncharacteristically full of life. Serious-looking women in peacocks and laminated badges typed frantically on laptops. Carhartt-clad carpenters straightened picture frames and other period-appropriate props, all jangling carabiners and nervous energy. For a week, dozens of people had been working to turn Sam's into a believable replica of an Italian American social club during the Great Depression.

And even though this was the 58th time that a film crew had descended on Sam's to turn it into an idealized version of its former self, this was also the biggest-budget production to ever do so. In fact, by half past 8 in the morning on that recent Friday, more people were inside the restaurant's wood-paneled dining room than had been for a long time — perhaps since the actual 1930s.

The only person there with no obvious

task was Louis Migliaccio. "I'm here to make things easy," he said to an electrician who was standing on top of a ladder and trying to focus on removing a period-incorrect exit sign. "I can't just sit here doing nothing."

Although Mr. Migliaccio made it clear that he was not afraid to get his hands dirty, no one seemed to need his help. So instead, the 67-year-old did what he normally would as the proprietor of a restaurant that now practically seems to exist to play itself in movies: He headed outside for a smoke and a survey of the street.

Up came a white-haired couple in matching puffer jackets; they had lived in the neighborhood for decades. The man was gesticulating like a character from "The Sopranos," clearly relishing the chance to play around with his authentically Italian American neighbor. But Mr. Migliaccio was circumspect and did not mention the production happening inside, or that "The Bride!"

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Louis Migliaccio, above left, is something of a known quantity in the New York entertainment world, though he doesn't have an IMDb page or a Producers Guild card.

Lower East Side Fights a Sprouting of Illegal Weed Shops

Residents are coming together to track the stores' proliferation and push the city to close them.

By COLIN MOYNIHAN
Just before 11 p.m. on a recent Saturday, a young woman was buzzed into Flame Zone Convenience, an unlicensed weed store on Delancey Street on the Lower East Side displaying bags of potent gummies and several strains of marijuana, including one called Gunkpowder.

It was four days after Mayor Eric Adams had announced a crackdown on unlicensed shops. But the woman paid \$20 for a joint, and then began smoking it on the sidewalk.

A few minutes later, at Dubai Cannabis Supply, an unlicensed shop nearby on Stanton Street, a visitor asked: "Do you have 'shroom chocolate bars, by any chance?"

A glass display case inside included Diamond Shroomz bars in fruity cereal and cookie butter flavors, which are marketed

as containing psilocybin — a psychedelic compound found in over 200 types of mushrooms that is illegal to possess in New York.

Other unlicensed shops were open for business within a few blocks, offering cannabis-based products like joints, vape cartridges, rosin, THC-infused gummies, chocolates and tinctures.

Nearly 3,000 unlicensed cannabis stores are estimated to have opened across New York City since 2021, when a state bill was passed legalizing recreational marijuana and allowing for the distribution of retail cannabis licenses. Few neighborhoods may have been better equipped to fight the crush of renegade shops than the Lower East Side, which has a long history of activism and civic engagement.

In 2022, with local authorities and the state's Office of Cannabis Management doing little to shut down the shops, some neighborhood residents created a spreadsheet listing the locations of nearly three dozen unlicensed sellers, which they said



Unlicensed shops are inundating neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, above.

they distributed to government officials, hoping to prompt enforcement.

That D.I.Y. ethos was consistent with previous actions on the Lower East Side and in the neighboring East Village, including a picket in the 1980s against drug dealers, rallies in the 1990s against the destruction of community gardens and protests in the 2000s over an influx of bars.

But residents say that the unlicensed weed shops have seemed impervious to their efforts.

"We've been begging for help," said Diem Boyd, a longtime resident who has organized neighborhood efforts against bars, among other causes, and helped coordinate the spreadsheet effort.

That effort was born of sidewalk conversations among neighbors who were struck by the sight of illegal establishments operating openly. Eight people, including Ms. Boyd, a public-school teacher, a landscape architect, a dance instructor and a television

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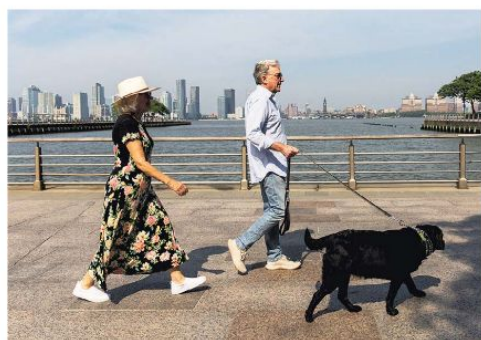
MATT WILLIAMS



PHOTOGRAPH BY A GALLERY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Writer Gleans Snippets From the City

Over the past four decades, Matt Williams has been intimately involved in many of America's most successful television programs. He is credited as a writer, showrunner, producer or creator on "The Cosby Show," "A Different World" and "Home Improvement," among others. "Roseanne," which he created, transplanted his family from New York to Los Angeles, where they lived until the Northridge earthquake in 1994. After the earthquake, Mr. Williams relocated to Manhattan with his wife, the actress Angelina Fiordellisi, and their two young children. From then, Mr. Williams lived a bicoastal life, commuting weekly between New York and Los Angeles for almost 20 years as he worked on movies and TV shows. In 2018, he closed his production company and began living, once again, full time on the East Coast. "It was really time to make New York City my home again," he said. "My wife and I especially enjoy Sundays in New York. After all that hustle and bustle of Monday through Saturday, the city sits back and relaxes a little on Sunday, so you can enjoy New York in a different way." His first book, "Glimpses: A Comedy Writer's Take on Life, Love, and All That Spiritual Stuff," was published this year. Mr. Williams lives in a three-story townhouse in the West Village with Ms. Fiordellisi and their black Labrador, Nova. **ANDREW COTTO**



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HUDSON WALK AND TALK My wife and I usually wake up early on Sunday morning, and, over coffee, we talk about our week and what's happening with our kids and our little granddaughter, who's 1 year old. Once we've completed this weekly ritual, we are out the door. We love to walk, especially on Sundays, and our first walk of the day is through our neighborhood and to the park along the Hudson River. Our black lab, Nova, comes with us. On the way back, we'll usually grab breakfast sandwiches and maybe that extra cup of coffee at Merriweather Coffee + Kitchen on Hudson Street.

PEOPLE-WATCHING We go back home to read the paper, get caught up on emails or whatever else we have to do. We relax until it's time to go for our second walk. This is a long walk, without the dog. I moved to New York in October of 1976, and I often tell people that back then you didn't leave the house without \$20 mug money in your pocket. I'm still shocked about the arc from 1976 to today, and how much the city has transformed. On this walk, we go through different parts of the city: the High Line, the meat market, SoHo, the East Village and the Lower East Side. We just walk and walk and walk. That, to me, is the great joy of Sundays in New York. As a writer, there isn't anything on earth more intriguing than human behavior, so I love walking the streets and watching people.

I'm convinced that if you are a writer, it's impossible to have writer's block if you're a writer in New York City, because everywhere you go there's stories and snippets of dialogue. And all of that is just like priming the well. It gets my mind going, and in these walks, I'm gleaming little snippets of humanity that may one day become part of a novel or short story or something.

HATS, SHOES, SALAD Once back near home, my wife will stop in any shop if they're selling hats or shoes, if only for a look. Then, we usually end up having lunch somewhere in the West Village. There's an Italian place on Seventh Avenue near our home called Rafele, which is really great. I always start with the melanzane — a miniature eggplant Parmesan — and usually order the papardelle bolognese or linguine vongole. Angelina orders the cavolfiori salad and always has tomatoe cacio e pepe. The servers are prompt and polite. And the best part is you can actually carry on a conversation. The restaurant isn't as noisy as others in the neighborhood.

TV/MOVIE TIME Mid-afternoon, we'll either walk around the corner to a movie or watch



Sunday is about flipping the pitcher up and refilling it for the week.

something at home. We don't go as often to the movies since we've got streaming services, so we may try to find something to watch like "Ted Lasso," "Shrinking" or a classic film. After a career in TV production, it took me a long time to be able to watch TV and relax. But I've been working on this, much to my wife's delight, and I've gotten better at it since leaving the industry.

RECHARGE AND REFILL After the movies, I go to my home office to write in my journal because I have to get down what I witnessed or overheard earlier in the day. Sundays are like filling up for me, and I fill my journal. Nothing structured. I saw a woman walking a dog. She had white sneakers, the dog had a red collar and the dog was prancing.

I find that by the end of Sunday afternoon, my brain and my heart are kind of recharged, and I'm ready to plunge into the week and get into a rhythm of writing, which I do Monday through Saturday in a very structured manner. Sunday, though, is free-form. It's just plain "What if?" If you think of creativity as water, during the week, you've got the pitcher, and you're pouring the water out. Sunday is about flipping the pitcher up and refilling it for the week.

CONNECTING THE DOTS Cooking is the ideal activity for me as a writer because I find that

while I'm cooking, my hands are busy, but my brain is still connecting all those little snippets I've heard or observed during the day. While cooking, I will jot down anything that bubbles up without judgment. I don't ask why I'm writing about that pigeon I saw in the middle of Eighth Avenue poking at this piece of toast so persistently that he was almost run over by a car. It's just allowing my brain on Sunday to flow, because come Monday morning, my butt is in the chair at 8:30 a.m.

READING AND WINE My wife and I are both voracious readers. After dinner, we will curl up, usually with a glass of wine, and read. I'm currently on a Tana French kick. I've been reading her back to back because I just love her voice. I love anything having to do with Ireland. I also just read Kristin Hanan's "The Women." I also read a lot of creative nonfiction these days. Hampton Sides is one of my favorite nonfiction writers. I just read Timothy Egan's "A Fever in the Heartland."

INTENTIONAL TIME I try to go to bed with some clarity as to my intentions for the week. I write out my intentions in my office. I intend this to be the most productive week of writing I've ever had because I have no meetings. This week, I intend to do nothing but spoil my granddaughter and take her to as many places as possible. By setting intentions on Sunday night, I set the ground tone on my expectations. It might not work out exactly as planned, but I've at least gotten the compass out and have a sense of where I'm heading for the week.

GINIA BELLAFANTE | BIG CITY

D.A.'s Next Decision on Trump Is Fraught With Political Peril

ALVIN L. BRAGG, the Manhattan district attorney, went into Donald J. Trump's hush-money trial besieged by death threats from extremists, reproval from political commentators for creating a national distraction ("Save the mug shots for Georgia, the handcuffs for Jan. 6," Peggy Noonan wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*) and criticism from legal analysts who saw the case as structurally unsound, too quixotic to proceed. The result nevertheless was a guilty verdict on all 34 counts of falsifying business records in the name of concealing a shady scheme to disrupt the 2016 election.

The district attorney's work will soon turn to the sentencing memo his office will present to the judge in the case, Juan M. Merchan, which ought to prove equally controversial no matter what it recommends.

Mr. Trump was convicted of class E felonies, the lowest level in the state, and could be sentenced to probation or up to four years in prison — or, alternatively, what is known as a split sentence, with a relatively brief amount of time spent in a city jail in advance of a probationary determination. (The notion of a former president and his requisite Secret Service detail all piling into Rikers Island is unlikely.) Certainly to be considered is the fact that Michael D. Cohen, one of the executors of the conspiracy for which Mr. Trump served as impresario, was sentenced to three years in federal prison — though he ultimately did not serve the full term — after pleading guilty to campaign finance violations and lying to Congress. Last year, Allen H. Weisselberg, the former chief financial officer of the Trump Organization, spent 100 days in jail after pleading guilty to tax fraud involving his former employer — also a "paperwork" violation. And he was sentenced to jail time again in April, in accordance with Mr. Bragg's recommendations, after pleading guilty to perjury in Mr. Trump's civil fraud trial.

The political consequences around this issue are layered, both in terms of the presidential election and Mr. Bragg's own career.

Unlike a federal prosecutor in a similar position, Mr. Bragg is an elected official. (Granted, history provides no analogous example of a county prosecutor weighing in on the fate of an ex-president with a criminal conviction.) Should he bend toward leniency, he faces the potential backlash of the Trump-hating Manhattan Democrats whose votes he would need to



YUEN HESLER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Recommending either leniency or jail time will draw intense rebukes.

retain his post. Should he lean into harsh punishment, he faces charges of hypocrisy from legal purists as well as a vast Trump support system, which, as one former prosecutor put it, would raise millions of dollars in stannity of the designation of a maximum sentence.

Mr. Bragg is a well-known reformist who has built his reputation on turning away from the prosecution of low-level street offenses and championing anti-carceral approaches to criminal justice. What would it mean for him to send a 77-year-old man with no prior criminal record to prison?

"It's a sad day to put anyone in jail; 'lock him up' — we don't believe in that," Duncan Levin, a former Manhattan prosecutor turned defense lawyer, told me. "A conviction of a former president is sad," he added, and the task of sentencing him is

Alvin L. Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney, must now produce a sentencing memo for the judge after former President Donald J. Trump was convicted of falsifying records to cover up a sex scandal that threatened to derail his 2016 presidential campaign.

one "you wouldn't wish on anyone."

Still, Mr. Levin maintained that he struggled "to imagine an E felony case that calls out for jail time more than this one." He pointed to Mr. Trump's three pending indictments, his lack of demonstrated remorse — which is given considerable attention during sentencing decisions — and the several times he was held in contempt during the trial.

"You can criticize the D.A. for asking for jail time as politically motivated," Mr. Levin said. "But it doesn't mean that Trump doesn't deserve it."

EMIL Hagerty at nytimes.com follow
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READER COMMENTS

Harmony: When Dreams Converge

Readers responded at nytimes.com to Katherine Rosman's article last Sunday about three friends from Texas who made it big on Broadway. Comments have been edited.

SO WONDERFUL TO READ A positive story. In a society that dwells on the negative, it is refreshing and uplifting to know that the friendship, persistence and passion of these young men have brought them to realize their collective dream. Bravo to Ms. Rosman for sharing this positive tale.

ROBYN BROOKS, HENDERSONVILLE, N.C.

THANK YOU, THIS MADE MY day. I don't know these young men, but I'm in awe of their dedication to their art and one another. I wish them all long, challenging and productive careers. They have already made the world a better place.

ANNE DAVIS, EVERGREEN, COLO.

THIS IS A WONDERFUL STORY. The odds against this happening were pretty long. I grew up in Pittsburgh, and a kid named Billy Porter with all the odds against him was well known at Reizenstein Middle School as someone who was going to be a star on Broadway. Sometimes, you just know.

Congratulations to these three pals who reached for the stars and all made it.

RAM GORDON, WOODBRIDGE, CONN.

A Legal Team Assembled Over Twitter

Readers also responded to John Leland's article on May 26 about how a joke on the legal media site ended up creating a team of lawyers. Comments have been edited.

LOVE THIS STORY! Smart and talented individuals getting together to fight for what is right, without the constraints of law school pedigrees and recommendation letters. I wish more of such "subversion" was going on.

JACICA TANCABELIC, TOPEKA, KAN.

I WOULD SUGGEST AKIVA COHEN is a very clever man to employ his hiring scheme. All too often mere looking at credentials tells you little about the person you are hiring, whereas the Cohen approach looks at skills instead of credentials. Well done, sir, well done.

TOM ROWE, STEVENS POINT, WIS.

I STUMBLED ACROSS AKIVA'S POSTS a couple years ago and, as a nonlawyer, enjoyed his serious dissection of legal cases, his posts offering job opportunities and his playfulness. But most of all, I appreciated his humanism and faith, to his family and his religion. Akiva "went dark" on Shabbat.



AMER HALL/A.THE NEW YORK TIMES

From left, J. Quinton Johnson, Vincent Jamal Hooper and Trey Curtis became friends in Austin, Texas, and have supported one another on the way to Broadway jobs.

An excellent example of all seeking balance in their lives.

CRAIG M. HARRIS, SARASOTA, FLA.

I READ THIS STORY to my wife over breakfast, who knows that I was accepted to law school but didn't go. She joked that I should apply again. I'm 80, so I'd be 83 at graduation. Hard to get a job at that age, but maybe Mr. Cohen would hire me.

MICHAEL A. SANDMAN, BROOKLINE, MASS.

THE THOUGHT OF ARGUING ONLINE with a bunch of strangers makes me break out into a cold sweat, and yet I love this story and how these people came together. I especially love how that one woman went back to school and then got a job all based upon her Twitter posts. For a story about being snarky and aggressive online, it's an oddly feel-good piece.

JULIE BARRETT, BROOKLYN

A NICE LARGER STORY is that brilliant minds can argue and advocate without the formality of law school. Lincoln was a self-taught lawyer! You saw how much he changed. This varied set of legal warriors seems to care about fixing injustice — that's what binds them. Perhaps making law school optional for the bar or democratizing entry into the legal profession could be their next task!

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Metropolitan Diary



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADRIAN LEE



Solo Trip

DEAR DIARY:
At 35, I set off on my first solo trip to the Upper West Side. My husband and I were visiting his parents on Long Island, and I was going into the city to spend a few days with my sister.

Dragging a small roller bag, I found my way to the correct subway line and even found a seat. A gaggle of teenage girls sat across from me. Their liveliness reminded me of my teenage self. At the next stop, a young man with a rolled towel tucked under his arm entered the car and sat next to me. I continued to look straight ahead. My eyes were focused just above the teenagers' heads.

Observations for this column may be sent to Metropolitan Diary (diary@nytimes.com) or to The New York Times, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018. Please include your name, mailing address and daytime telephone number. Submissions become the property of The Times and cannot be returned. They may be edited, and may be republished and adopted in all media.

Suddenly, I detected some motion from the young man's direction in my peripheral vision. Knowing that subway etiquette dictated I remain totally oblivious, I continued looking straight ahead even though I could still see small movements to the side. I noticed the teenage girls becoming quite animated, their eyes moving from my face to whatever was moving next to me. Eventually, their excitement



Gene Palma

DEAR DIARY:
Anyone who lived or worked in Midtown Manhattan in the 1970s and '80s knew Gene Palma as the guy who "played" Sixth Avenue. He even had a cameo in "Taxi Driver."

prompted me to look to the side. The towel was now unwrapped, and standing in the young man's lap was a pigeon, which he was stroking with a toothbrush to the bird's apparent pleasure. I can only imagine my expression as I faced front again. When I did, the teenagers burst out laughing. Thankfully, the next stop was mine. BARBARA Y. PHILLIPS

With shoe-polish blackened hair and heavy makeup, Gene would play his drum on the sidewalk. Sometimes, he would bang his sticks on newspaper vending machines, or sit on the curb and play the street itself. In the winter, to avoid the frigid north wind that swept down the avenues, he would move onto the side streets. Once, when I saw him on 52nd Street, I asked why he moved onto the side streets every winter. "The sound's better," he said. JACE WEAVER

Wiggly

DEAR DIARY:
I dropped off my well-worn boots at a shoe repair place near the office that I had found on line and that had good reviews.

Expecting a street-side shoe-shine parlor, I instead found myself ascending a freight elevator and fumbling down an old, winding hallway.

Inside a large bright room was a man behind a counter with a small cactus that had one pink flower on its side.

After getting the estimate and paying the deposit, I noticed a series of old photos. One was a close-up of the man behind the counter playing an instrument. I asked if he was a musician.

He said he was, and then asked if I had an extramontent. Not really, but I'll try, I said. He pulled out a case, took out a clarinet and proceeded to play a sinuous, wiggly tune.

Did he write it? "I just made it up," he said. Was it Middle Eastern-style jazz? "Not quite," he said. He told me he was from Uzbekistan — Bukhara to be exact.

Benny Goodman? I asked. "Not just him," he said. "All." MIA TRAN



Foraging With John Cage

DEAR DIARY:
In 1959, I signed up for a mushroom identification course at the New School taught by the composer John Cage.

In those days, I often accompanied my uncles when they gathered mushrooms in the woods near Greenwood Lake in New Jersey. I thought it would be a good idea to really know something about what we were picking.

The class met on Sundays, in a park off the Palisades Parkway. About 15 of us walked around with baskets and picked mushrooms. Not smelling anything, I began to walk toward the terminal. As I did, I heard a woman just behind me speak.

"Now I've seen everything," she said. "You just kissed your car goodbye." PHILIP PETERS

Staten Island Ferry

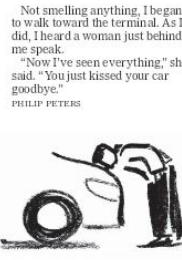
DEAR DIARY:
For most of my adult life, I lived on Staten Island and commuted to Manhattan for various jobs in the financial district. Most days I drove my car to the Staten Island Ferry terminal to catch the boat to Manhattan.

One day when I was driving to the terminal, I noticed a smell that seemed to be coming from the car's engine compartment. After parking and getting out of the vehicle, I leaned over the hood with my nose slightly against it to quickly check whether the smell was indeed coming from my car.

It was all very casual. We just walked in the park, saw different mushrooms and I learned about them, including which ones were harmful. I still remember that the amanita is poisonous.

Cage was instrumental in starting the New York Mycological Society and he also got me started on collecting mushroom-related things: prints, ceramics and so on.

Nowadays, I get my mushrooms at the local Acme or ShopRite, sauté them in butter, or pickle them with vinegar, and dress them with garlic and olive oil. ADRIANA O'TOOLE



Decades Later, 'Black Angels' Get an Earthly Exhibition

A show honors nurses who cared for tuberculosis patients at a Staten Island hospital.

By TAMMY LAJORCE

In the early 20th century, tuberculosis was raging in New York City, killing thousands of people each year. The city's health department chose Staten Island in 1905 as the location for Sea View Hospital, which became one of the biggest tuberculosis hospitals in the country.

But tuberculosis was highly infectious, and by the 1930s the number of white nurses willing to risk their lives to care for Sea View's patients was dwindling. Administrators started calling on workers often overlooked because of racism: Black nurses.

An exhibition now on view at the Staten Island Museum, "Taking Care: The Black Angels of Sea View Hospital," tells the story of 300 Black nurses who were recruited. The name Black Angels came from patients and was embraced by the nurses, said Gabriella Leone, a curator.

But wall text at the exhibition reminds visitors that the nurses "were real people with individual lives, families, flaws and stories."

The museum is about five miles from the Sea View campus, in the heart of the Greenbelt, a parkland area on Staten Island.

"It was an attractive place to build a hospital because it was the least populous of the boroughs, and it had a reputation for fresh air and sunshine," Ms. Leone said during a recent exhibition tour, noting that air and sun were then thought to be the most effective treatments for tuberculosis.

The hospital first recruited Black nurses locally from the Lincoln School for Nurses in the Bronx and the Harlem Hospital School of Nursing. But by the 1950s Sea View still had a shortage, so the call for Black nurses went national. As the Great Migration pushed forward, the Black Angels assembled on Staten Island to fill the void.

One of the women who stepped in to fill the void was Virginia Allen, now 92, who lives in what used to be Sea View's nurses' residence. In 2009, it became a private retirement home; her apartment is on the same floor of the same building she lived in during the 1940s.

Unlike Ms. Allen, many of the nurses were lured from the Jim Crow South by the promise of a living wage when most hospitals, even in New York, refused to work with Black nurses or limited the number they would hire, according to one of the exhibition's oral histories. But Ms. Allen arrived in 1947, at age 16, from Detroit. Her aunt Edna Sutton-Ballard, then a surgical nurse at Sea View, inspired her.

"I admired my aunt," Ms. Allen, one of the exhibition's advisers, said, adding: "The other nurses, the adults, adopted me. It was a real community."

Ms. Allen started as a nurse's aide at the Sea View children's hospital. According to the exhibition, 3 to 7 percent of nurses at Sea



JASMINE CLARKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



CARL E. GOSSETT JR. FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

View contracted tuberculosis. She was never scared, though. "I loved being around children," she said. "And I felt I knew how to protect myself."

By the time she left the hospital in 1957, she and her fellow Black Angels had played a major role in protecting the public. Sea View conducted the first clinical trials of isoniazid, a drug that became a key in treating

the disease in 1951. On the front lines of that trial were the nurses, who administered the medicine, observed patients and took detailed notes to report to doctors.

A panel of museum text sums up what happened next: "Drs. Edward Robitzek and Irving Selikoff, who oversaw the trial, went on to receive the prestigious Lasker Award for their work. But the nursing and support

staff who risked their lives to keep Sea View Hospital running have not received the same recognition."

Dr. Oni Blackstock, the founder and executive director of Health Justice, a racial and health equity consultancy in New York City, said that the Black Angels "were courageous trailblazers." She sees "definite parallels" between the Black Angels and the nurses who cared for dying patients early in the coronavirus pandemic.

"We know that these hospitals that were most beleaguered during the pandemic were in poor Black and brown neighborhoods, which were already underresourced and understaffed," she said.

Black nurses who couldn't afford to leave their jobs as Covid bore down on New York City "were literally putting their lives on the line taking care of patients, with an infection that hadn't yet had an F.D.A.-approved treatment or a vaccine to prevent it," she added.

Ms. Allen, who said the nurses she worked with "really did give up a lot" to treat patients at Sea View, is relieved that they are receiving more notice. The exhibition includes an original Sea View nursing cart as well as a wool cape that was part of the nurses' outdoor uniform. A book by Maria Smilios, "The Black Angels: The Untold Story of the Nurses Who Helped Cure Tuberculosis," came out in the fall.

"I'm very happy the legacy will live on," Ms. Allen said.



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PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL GOODMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Pizzeria That Often Plays Itself on TV

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

would feature A-listers like Christian Bale and Penelope Cruz. He was being paid \$85,000 for use of his restaurant, and he considered protecting the actors' privacy part of the gig — kind of like an on-set operator.

Just a few feet away from Mr. Migliaccio, extras with heavily contoured makeup and double-breasted pinstriped suits were lining up outside. The woman couldn't help but notice them. She wanted to know: "Are you going to be in the picture, too, Louis?"

"I'm the boss," he coolly replied. "I observe."

It was only once the couple was out of earshot that the restaurant launched into a lament: "Twenty years we've said 'hi' and this and that, but they've never come in to eat," he said. "Not once."

The escarole pizza at Sam's has its devotees, and the restaurant offers a raft of pastas and dishes that center on clams and chops and chicken, which is referred to on the enormous laminated menu as "fowl." There's also Chianti, as well as Cokes that come in plastic bottles. Mr. Migliaccio keeps a secret stash of Manhattan Special, an old-school espresso soda, for himself.

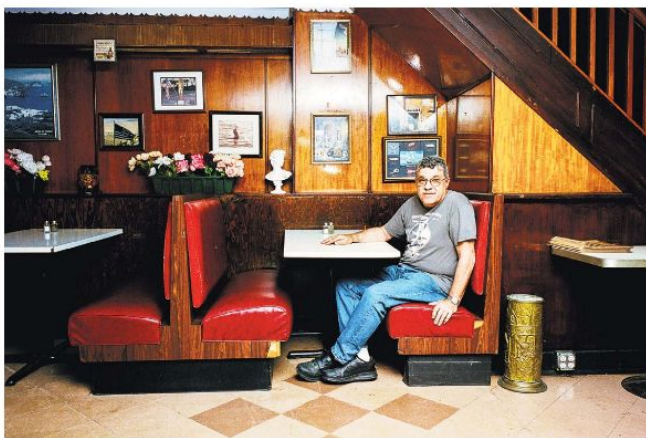
All this makes Sam's Restaurant an outlier in what was for most of the 20th century simply called South Brooklyn. There are any number of new rustic Italian places in the neighborhood and even more upscale brick-oven pizzerias. Celebrities like Jay-Z and Beyoncé regularly dine at Lucali, which has become so famous for both its calzones and its impossible-to-get reservations that it was recently name-dropped on a track by the Nobel Prize-winning rapper Kendrick Lamar.

Sam's attracts star power only on shoot days. Just before 10:30 a.m., the film's director, Maggie Gyllenhaal, arrived with a black baseball hat pulled down low over her face. She sidled up to Mr. Migliaccio on the sidewalk. "You're the best," she said before heading inside. "I was just telling everyone."

In fact, Mr. Migliaccio is something of a known quantity in the New York entertainment world. He doesn't have an IMDb page or a Producers Guild card, but thank-you notes from location scouts addressed to "Mr. Louis" hang on the walls of his restaurant, sandwiched between the long-defunct phone booths and his daughter's college diploma. And while he doesn't remember the first scout who discovered Sam's, it probably happened in the 1970s, more than a decade after his father took over the restaurant from his uncle.

There's a reason the dates are fuzzy. Even though Mr. Migliaccio was born in the apartment above the restaurant, he was never especially keen on entering the family business and instead spent his 20s working at grocery stores and attending community college. He dreamed of joining the Navy and of ultimately becoming an architect, but he fell behind in drawing and quit school. "I didn't have the brains for that," he recalled. After dropping out, he worked for a while on Fulton Street nearby, in the toy section of a department store. He ended up a reluctant waiter at Sam's around 1990.

By the time his father died and he took over, in 2016, the neighborhood where Mr. Migliaccio had grown up was no longer recognizable to him. The old Italians who lived in South Brooklyn were long gone, and the rents were now among the most expensive in the city. The area was full of the kind of restaurants that he describes as having a guy whose entire job it is to refill your water. "What's worse, the new people coming to Sam's demanded the same kind of over-the-top service from him. 'People expect you to



kiss their ass," he says. "But why do I gotta make it so dramatic when it's a family restaurant?"

It wasn't so long ago that the roughness around the edges was part of the appeal of a place like Sam's. But it was clear to Mr. Migliaccio that the newest Brooklynites had little interest in what came before. He felt like an alien standing behind these people at the local butcher, as they'd commit the unforgivable sin of asking for a couple tiny slices of meat — an order barely worth the butcher's time to cut. "The people who started moving in didn't care about the old stores," Mr. Migliaccio said. "They were not interested in helping us."

Thankfully, there was one Sam's regular interested in helping Mr. Migliaccio. She had a job scouting locations for magazine photo shoots and taught him a handful of rudimentary lessons, like never accept a first offer from a scout and always get an insurance contract before production begins. It was a blessing, but it landed him in something like purgatory.

Playing itself in the movies is now the only thing that keeps Sam's Restaurant afloat.

Michael Hartel, a location manager who has been in the business for 25 years, doesn't remember how Sam's first got on his radar, but he's shot there twice for the network procedural "FBI" — one scene in which a mobster meets with some undercover agents, and another in which criminals hold a backroom card game. Mr. Hartel says that basically everyone in his corner of the universe has worked with Mr. Migliaccio.

Sure, there are other good filming locations in the city. The production-friendly bar Capri Social Club in Greenpoint and the pizza spot John's of Bleecker Street still scream "New York." But Mr. Hartel says the portfolio of reliable spots has thinned over the past decade, and that these days it's often a florist or a soda fountain in New Jersey that stands in for one in Brooklyn.

"Trying to find a dining establishment with the red vinyl booths that looks old school is so much harder than it used to be," Mr. Hartel said. "Everything here looks like a Pottery Barn now."

For that reason, Sam's is beloved among casting directors, though Mr. Hartel notes



that there is something a bit odd about the place.

Both times after wrapping on "FBI," the location scout wanted to come back and try the escarole pizza. But he couldn't get a straight answer from Mr. Migliaccio about when the place was open — he couldn't say when it would stop being a movie set and serve food again.

"He's such a nice guy, but I have no idea how he sustains," Mr. Hartel said. "It's almost like Louis is not really running a restaurant anymore."

But he is. A week after the film crew for "The Bride 1" had cleared out and restored the plastic flowers and thank-you notes from location scouts, those photogenic red vinyl booths at Sam's were full, mostly, it seemed, with tourists and young New York transplants. Mr. Migliaccio was giving them dinner and a show, playing up the part of the frazzled and gruff New Yorker — though as the only waiter in the place, he was legitimately overworked.

A family with a young son was not making things any easier for him. The boy, who appeared to be about 2, was running amok, climbing on the bar and stomping on Mr. Migliaccio's toes. The boy's mother, who was wearing a Dodgers hat, looked on indulgently until Mr. Migliaccio hoisted the kid up and pretended to discipline him. The boy giggled and his mother let out a muffled

From top: The ambience at Sam's is old-time Brooklyn; Louis Migliaccio was born in the apartment above Sam's; and the restaurant serves more than film crews.

A neighborhood fixture that draws star power only on shoot day.

gasp.

"I'm gonna put you to work in the back!" he threatened in jest. "I'm not gonna let you leave!"

A group of young women sipping martinis and sharing a plate of calamari clapped in delight. This scene — a service professional who doesn't know you can't raise your voice, never mind threaten to kidnap a customer's child — is what they came to Brooklyn to see. This is why they came to Sam's.

By 8:30, Mr. Migliaccio had kicked everyone out and closed the kitchen. He sat by the door, poring over a large black ledger. His family has owned the building for years, so he doesn't pay rent, but he uses his own savings to keep the place open during the coronavirus pandemic, which means he's in debt to himself.

And the bills never stop coming: the liquor guys, the refrigerator repairman, the payroll for the chefs. On top of everything else, the exterminator was set to arrive by the following week. "I'd be better off blowing up the place with a stick of dynamite," he said.

His dream is to retire and leave all the annoyances behind. But it's complicated. He claims that he doesn't want to give his new neighbors the satisfaction, but in reality he has no one to take over the place; his daughter is pursuing a career in law enforcement.

A real estate agent once told him he could charge an enormous sum in rent to a new tenant — tens of thousands of dollars a month. But what kind of person could afford to pay that? Sometimes, he said, he wished he'd just go under — get it over with already. The ability to rent the restaurant out for movie productions was as much a curse as it was a blessing. He had three more shoots lined up already, so he was chained to the place until at least the end of the year.

But that money may come to an end soon. Anachronisms in the background of shots can now be digitally erased. That means there may no longer be much need for a place that is perfectly stuck in time; when you can edit out air-conditioners, security cameras, ice machines and other trappings of modern life in postproduction, you can shoot pretty much anywhere. But for now, Sam's was the place to be, and shoot days gave Mr. Migliaccio a chance to come alive.

Back on set, he'd been relegated to a spot near the kitchen behind a bank of monitors. For a while he stayed there, browsing Facebook on his phone and texting with cousins in Italy. But he couldn't help wondering what the actors were doing inside the place he'd spent practically his entire life. Every half minute or so, he scooted a metal folding chair closer and closer to the men with the monitors, until he was standing with his nose practically touching one of the screens.

Eventually, even that wasn't enough. Mr. Migliaccio ducked out through a side door and used a back alley to enter the kitchen of a neighboring restaurant. Then he burst through the front door of Sam's, interrupting the movie.

"You can't be in here!" an exasperated young assistant in an apron wailed. Mr. Migliaccio gave him a withering look. Everyone in Sam's — the editors at the monitors, the character actors who had responded to a casting call for God knows what description, even Ms. Gyllenhaal herself — would have to wait patiently as the real boss of the place took a Manhattan Special from the fridge under his bar.

"The kitchen to me is boring," he said later on the sidewalk after filming resumed. "It's the same four walls. But out there, on shoot day, that's where I can have a little fun."

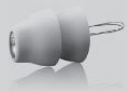
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Lower East Side Fights Sprouting of Illegal Weed Shops

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
sound engineer, worked on the project. They gathered information from others in the neighborhood, they said, researched city records, communicated through a shared Google document and monitored the unlicensed shops on nights and weekends, observing them from the sidewalk and sometimes venturing inside to corroborate details.

Most of the residents who helped gather information declined to speak publicly about the process because of fears for their safety. The teacher, a 22-year Lower East Side resident who spoke on condition of anonymity, said he helped compile the sheet in part because men connected to shops that had opened in his building regularly gathered outside, making noise and sometimes harassing residents. The teacher said he had been threatened on one occasion and recorded with a phone during another incident by men linked to an unlicensed shop.

The question of how to handle illegal shops has inevitably become intertwined with questions of social justice. Part of the aim of the 2021 law was to address decades in which Black and Latino people were arrested on marijuana charges in disproportionate numbers. New York's nascent cannabis program began by prioritizing licenses for people who had been harmed by the war on drugs.

Jeffrey Hoffman, a cannabis lawyer and legalization advocate who supports closing the unlicensed shops, said the authorities in New York had rightly avoided arresting people of color when shuttering the stores, adding, "The whole purpose of the law was to stop that."

In a statement, Mayor Adams' office said that he was committed to closing illegal shops that threatened the "health and safety" of New Yorkers.

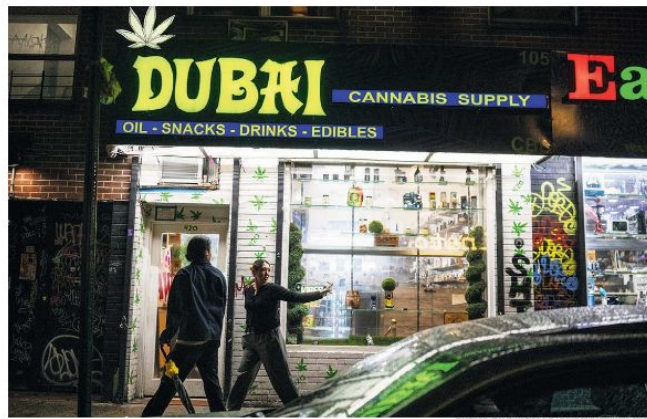
"Both the mayor and the sheriff have a long history of fighting against the criminalization of cannabis," the statement added. "And we have been clear that these operations allow us to strike a balance between shutting down illegal shops that are unlawfully selling potentially deadly products and supporting justice-impacted cannabis business owners."

The spreadsheet, which was updated most recently in April, listed 34 unlicensed shops — ranging from open emporiums to convenience stores said to sell secretly — within a 22-square-block area, outnumbering bodegas, laundromats and cafes. In addition to selling weed, the sheet says, some shops have sold tobacco, e-cigarettes or beer without the required permits.

A review by The New York Times found that 28 of the 34 shops on the spreadsheet were open in early June. Two were not open. Two appeared to have permanently shuttered and two had recently been closed by the New York City Sheriff's Office, which had posted large white stickers on their facades saying each had engaged in "the unlicensed sale of cannabis and/or cannabis products."

In response to a question about whether the Police Department sees unlicensed shops on the Lower East Side as a particular problem, a representative said in an email: "The New York City Sheriff's Joint Compliance Task Force will address all unlicensed and unregulated smoke shops which are affecting multiple neighborhoods throughout New York City."

"I hear so many complaints, constantly," said Susan Stetzer, the district manager of Community Board 3, which covers the East Village and the Lower East Side, adding



that residents had accused shops of blaring loud music late at night and selling to minors. "It's very frustrating."

Unlicensed shops on the Lower East Side have also been the sites of robberies and attempted robberies. In 2022, a group of men reportedly stole roughly \$12,000 in merchandise and \$300 in cash from a smoke shop on Orchard Street before shooting one of the workers there. In 2023, another worker at a Clinton Street shop was shot during an attempted robbery.

Bradley Turk, a former special adviser to Michael R. Bloomberg when he was mayor and now a venture capitalist who has opened a bookstore on Orchard Street, said the unlicensed shops nearby contributed to an "atmosphere of lawlessness," adding that he thought the city should approach the

shops "visibly and aggressively." He was not involved with the spreadsheet.

Mayor Adams announced the crackdown on unlicensed shops, known as Operation Padlock to Protect, on May 7. The mayor's office said on Wednesday that the city had closed more than 310 shops, 75 of them in Manhattan, prioritizing those near faith centers and schools and those with documented sales to minors.

Written requests for interviews with the owners of several unlicensed shops did not yield responses.

The first version of the spreadsheet, compiled in late 2022, included 13 shops. Updated in January 2023, it included 30. By July of that year the number had climbed to 35.

Ned Shalanski, a landscape architect and an artist on the Lower East Side who helped

Top, at least two unlicensed weed shops on the Lower East Side of Manhattan were recently closed by the New York City Sheriff's Office. Above is an unlicensed shop on Stanton Street.

Since 2021, an estimated 3,000 unlicensed stores have opened in the city.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR BLUM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

compile the sheet and was willing to talk about his role in that effort, said he wanted to bring attention to the spread of unlicensed shops. Eight of them, including the one on Clinton Street where an employee was shot last year, opened within a short walk of his apartment, Mr. Shalanski said. "It did feel like a collective local response was necessary," he added.

The residents who contributed to the spreadsheet coordinated with Ms. Boyd, who said the group had sent copies to the Office of Cannabis Management, the governor, the mayor, officials with the Police Department and the Sheriff's Office, and members of the City Council and State Legislature.

Ms. Boyd said that effort had helped gain the attention of local officials, including Councilman Christopher Marte and Assemblywoman Grace Lee.

In 2023, Mr. Marte contacted the city's Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, which cited some of the illegal Lower East Side weed shops for unauthorized "tobacco retail dealer activity," among other offenses. Ms. Lee wrote to landlords renting to the unlicensed shops and contacted the Sheriff's Office about them. In December, the office seized marijuana from shops on Clinton Street and Rivington Street.

Ms. Lee also met with more than two dozen residents to tour spots in the neighborhood that they thought needed greater attention from law enforcement, including the corner of Ludlow and Stanton Streets, where three unlicensed shops operated.

Police officers wrote in affidavits that in 2022 and 2023 a confidential informant and an undercover officer bought psilocybin bars inside two of the stores: Exotic Clouds Vape Shop and Dubai Cannabis Supply, where the Shrumz bars were displayed for sale last month.

The city initiated civil proceedings against the two shops, calling each a public nuisance and asking that they be shut down for a year. Those cases ended in settlements with no admission of wrongdoing. Both stores were enjoined from possessing controlled substances and from storing or selling cannabis products without a state license. During visits in May, however, both had marijuana and THC gummies for sale.

Lance Lazzaro, a lawyer representing Dubai Cannabis Supply and Exotic Clouds, said the shops had adhered to the terms of their settlements, adding that it was "hard to comment on" what The Times had seen for sale.

Criminal cases have been connected to another unlicensed shop in the neighborhood. A man accused of selling crack in and near a store on Clinton Street pleaded guilty to the sale of a controlled substance. A second man faces charges of selling crack in and near the shop and of possessing a firearm.

Last year, Mayor Adams suggested that all illegal shops in the city could be closed within 30 days. Just before announcing the crackdown last month, he said it would take longer, an acknowledgment of the difficulty and complexity of the task.

Mr. Hoffman, the cannabis lawyer, predicted it would take months or longer to shut down all the unlicensed shops, given the numbers and that many owners would most likely adapt by carrying out clandestine sales.

"The cat-and-mouse game is on," Mr. Hoffman said, adding: "You used to be able to do it with impunity, and now they just have to be more careful."

DODAI STEWART | STREET WARS

Ghost Bikes Offer a Haunting Alert

The memorials to cyclists also serve as calls for awareness about more dangerous streets.

ON ACHILLY Saturday evening in April, Kevin Daloia took a bicycle that he had painted white and locked it to a pole on East 181st Street and Melrose Avenue in the Bronx. Then he climbed up, stood on the seat of the bike and mounted a metal sign on the pole above it.

"Cyclist Killed Here/Rest in Peace," the sign said.

The cyclist, Thierno Balde, was hit by a car on Feb. 23 while on his way home from prayers at his mosque. The driver fled after the crash and then ditched a crumpled Jeep Grand Cherokee a few blocks away, according to reports.

The police said Balde had run a red light. But the authorities also said the driver had been speeding.

Daloia didn't know Balde, but that didn't matter.

In his free time, Daloia volunteers to paint old bicycles and fasten them to poles as "ghost bikes" for the New York City Street Memorial Project, which consists of installations around the city marking locations where cyclists have died.

The bikes — completely white, including tires, spokes and pedals — serve as stark memorials, both an alert to passers-by that a cyclist was killed and a reminder of the dangerous conditions cyclists face in New York. The activists who install the bikes hope to catch the attention of drivers as well.

Daloia isn't sure how many, exactly, he has erected. "I've done this for a long time," he said. "Calling in the Bronx I've touched, and I've touched a lot more throughout the city I don't know the number. Probably 20, 25."

Last year was the deadliest for cyclists in New York since 1999. Thirty cyclists were killed in 2023, according to the city's Transportation Department. Of those, 23 were riding e-bikes. Most fatalities occurred on streets that did not have dedicated bike lanes.



New York, but given the sobering recent death toll, you may have noticed more of them on our streets.

"It was an idea that spread from city to city," said Leah Todd, another volunteer with the project.

In New York, a group of artists called Visual Resistance first put up ghost bikes in 2005 in response to a couple of cyclist deaths. "It was supposed to speak more powerfully than words," Todd said. "A silent but very communicative memorial."

Kevin Daloia, a volunteer for the New York City Street Memorial Project, installed a ghost bike and a sign in April in the Bronx.

The idea caught on and continues to gain momentum, Todd said. "We had some grand idea and hope that people would, you know, want to care — and want to limit these deaths," she said.

Ghost bike volunteers receive donated bicycles from bike shops, friends or word of mouth. They remove a few essential parts from each bike, rendering it un-rideable and therefore less likely to be stolen.

Although cycling fatalities are usually caused by car crashes, the volunteers who install ghost bikes are not necessarily anti-car.

Daloia describes himself as "a Bronx cycling traffic safety advocate who starts his car every day."

He drives, yes, but he still loves to ride his bike. "I actually see things differently than from in my car," he said.

Daloia believes cars, people and bicycles should be able to coexist peacefully. "I want some of the roads around here to be safer for pedestrians and cyclists," he said. "And I want them to know there are cyclists out there."

With a flourishing bike-share program and ongoing projects to expand bike routes, John Orcutt, the director of advocacy for Bike New York, describes a city in flux. "We're in this place right now where it's hard to say whether it's the best of times or the worst of times for bicycling," he said. "More people are doing it than ever. And e-bikes have something to do with that. And the delivery world has a lot to do with that."

The downside, of course, is the danger.

Orcutt sees an urgent need for more dedicated bike lanes. "The bike network is still really disconnected," he said. "And worse than that, it's just routinely, ubiquitously, chronically full of cars and trucks."

Steve Scofield, another New Yorker involved with the ghost bike project, finds comfort in New York's intergenerational cycling community. "I always say I live in the biggest city in the country, but I also live in a small town: Bikeville," he said. "Because I always run into people I know."

Still, Scofield, who is 73, said that riding comes with a deep undercurrent of vulnerability. "I'm not a reckless rider," he said. "But even the most careful rider could be victimized at any time."



Ideas for Bicycle Safety

INFORM OR REMIND RIDERS OF THE RULES An organization called Pedestrians For Bike Safety has been handing out informative fliers to cyclists around the city. Printed in three languages, the fliers remind cyclists that it is illegal to ride bicycles on sidewalks, it is illegal to ride against the traffic flow of the street, and mopeds and scooters are not allowed in bike lanes. "There's a serious lack in public awareness and communications from the city to remind people who goes where and what the rules are," said Cate Savage, a co-founder of the group and a self-proclaimed "dedicated cyclist."

IMPROVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE "Do a protected bike lane network," John Orcutt of Bike New York urged the city. "The capacity needs to expand." He said that there are places in New York where bikes are reaching the capacity of what's been provided for them. "Having more space allocated makes biking safer," he said.

GET CREATIVE With an increasing number of regular bike riders and a growing number of delivery riders on e-bikes, New York should think about dividing space accordingly, said Janette Sadik-Khan, principal at Bloomberg Associates and the former commissioner of New York City's Department of Transportation. The city should get delivery e-bikes out of the general bike lane where they don't belong, and get them in an electric lane, she said.

HUMAN DECENCY "The reality is, we have several deaths in bike lanes," said Leah Todd, a volunteer with the New York City Street Memorial Project. "These improvements alone do not resolve things." She'd like New Yorkers to think about cycling holistically, to create a sense that "everyone should be safe, that everyone should be respected on the road, that everyone does have a responsibility to be cautious and look out for others."



Selecting the Sounds That Transport Harried Commuters

Musicians who seek official approval to perform in subway stations must pass an audition.

By LOLA FADULU

A throng of New Yorkers stopped to gawk as a tall violinist bounced from one foot to the other, at times using his bow to tap the body of his instrument for effect. Nearby, a man sat banging on a neon yellow drum. Together, they made music that was fun to listen to and difficult to categorize — a mash-up of hip-hop, dance, house, classical, Greek and country.

The musicians, Adrian Jusdanis and Alan Zavodsky, who make up the band New Thousand, were performing at the Grand Central Madison terminal on a recent morning as part of an audition for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Music Under New York program, which brings talented performers across several musical genres to dozens of locations within the city's subway system.

While anyone can perform in the subway, only those who make it through the auditions can play or sing under the pink Music Under New York banner.

"It's advantageous as subway performers to have spots that you know are yours at certain times," Mr. Jusdanis said after the audition. "A guarantee of a good spot is unheard-of in the world of street performing."

This year, the transportation authority received 147 applications for the program and invited 52 of those musicians to audition. The numbers are slowly creeping back up after plummeting amid the coronavirus pandemic. The program returned in 2021 after a 14-month halt; before the pandemic, the authority received hundreds of applications each year.

"It's no surprise that there's such a demand to perform for the greatest and most diverse audience," Sandra Bloodworth, the director of the authority's Arts & Design program, said in a statement after the auditions. "A chance encounter with live music is a highlight of the transit experience."

The musicians who auditioned played not only for the dozen judges who had gathered, many of them performers themselves, but also for the commuters who were passing by. They had five minutes to make their mark.

Nadya Esenyay, 64, was on her way to work when she heard the salsa beat of one of the auditions. "Now I don't want to go to work," she said. "I just want to stay here."

Jean-Marie Cineus, 81, was also captivated by the music. He was on his way to visit a cousin in Brooklyn when he heard the auditions. He stopped and cheered on the musicians, at times clapping and stomping his feet.

"You have great artists in New York, and I love it," Mr. Cineus said with a smile.

Not everyone who passed the makeshift stage was a willing listener. Some passersby never looked up from their phones. Others had earbuds in, glanced at the performers and kept moving.

The musicians knew what they were up against.

Mr. Jusdanis and Mr. Zavodsky were already street performers, including at subway stations. Mr. Jusdanis, who previously performed in New Orleans, met Mr. Zavodsky in Washington Square Park in 2022. He said they loved playing at the Times Square subway stop because of its high ceilings and general vibe. They have drawn crowds there who stayed to listen and dance.

"I'd say my experience in New Orleans is that people will fairly readily surrender themselves to the moment of dancing with music," Mr. Jusdanis said. "For New Yorkers, it takes a little bit more to get them to that place. And so when we do it's a big honor, but it's also harder work."

Performing underground also has its challenges.



cellist was attacked during rush hour. A woman was caught on video grabbing the performer's metal water bottle and hitting him in the back of the head with it.

"This marks the second attack I've endured in less than a year while performing for New Yorkers in subway stations," the musician, Iain S. Forrest, who goes by Eye-glass, wrote in a social media post, adding: "I don't think I can do this anymore. I'm suspending subway performances indefinitely."

Mr. Forrest said in a recent interview that he had since returned to performing in the subway system, but only at the Union Square and Penn Station stops, because each has a Police Department transit bureau on site.

Mr. Jusdanis recalled an intoxicated man who became aggressive during a New Thousand subway performance before the police quickly escorted him away.

"We've been pretty lucky," Mr. Jusdanis

said. "But I often wonder if I was a woman, if I was a smaller person, if I wasn't white, would I have been hassled more? And I think the answer is yes."

Joya Bravo, a performer turned judge who started playing the violin at 9 years old, has had her fair share of skirmishes. She said that people with mental illnesses had sometimes called her names, including racial slurs.

"Every day there is a challenge, and it's kind of a beautiful thing because it helps you to develop a very thick skin and an ability to perform and be great," said Ms. Bravo, who was born in New York and learned to play the violin in Georgia. Her favorite stations to perform in are 54th Street-Herald Square, Union Square and Jay Street-MetroTech.

"I've seen beautiful things and terrible things in the subway, and it's all shaped me," she said.

Ms. Bravo initially resisted joining the

Among the musicians who recently tried out for a spot in the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Music Under New York Program were, clockwise from top: the band New Thousand, with Alan Zavodsky on drums and Adrian Jusdanis on the violin; Doha Lee, who performed with a Korean harp called a gayageum; Band of Brothers; and Joya Bravo, another violinist.

Stiff competition for the M.T.A.'s imprimatur, and some critics are brutal.

transportation authority's program but changed her mind after being arrested for using speakers that were too loud and for selling CDs. She joined Music Under New York in 2018.

"The police protect us and M.T.A. protects us," she said of the program.

"We're not worried or skittish about being moved by the police," she said. "We're able to kind of plant and have our merch and have our performance and our presence really felt properly."

The program has more than 350 performers, and it schedules more than 7,500 performances in the transit system each year. The authority recently announced that New Thousand was among the 25 performers accepted this year.

"Street performance just livens our daily lives," Mr. Jusdanis said. He noted that the performances were free to listeners with no barriers to entry. "It can be a unifying and joyful experience."

PHOTOGRAPH BY BENJAMIN NORMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



The New York Times
Games

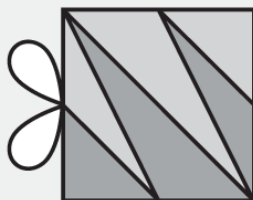


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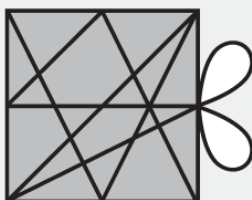
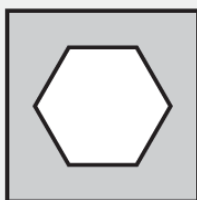
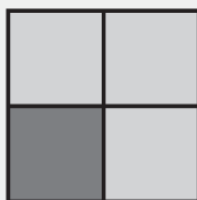


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