



MARIA MERRITT hangs a towel at her home in El Sereno. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a group calling itself “Reclaimers” seized empty, Caltrans-owned homes in the L.A. neighborhood.

COLUMN ONE

# After losing a forever home, she reclaimed it years later

A publicly owned house in El Sereno gives Angeleno strength to carry on after addiction, homelessness and other tragedy

BY LIAM DILLON

Every few months after she left the narrow white cottage on Poplar Boulevard, Maria Merritt would slink back to the tree-lined street in El Sereno, find a secluded spot and stare at her old house.

No one had lived there since 2007, when Merritt gave up trying to pay the monthly rent to her landlord, the California Department of Transportation. The state agency had left the house — one of hundreds that Caltrans had acquired for a contentious, on-again, off-again extension of the 710 Freeway — vacant and deteriorating, covering the windows with plywood and “No Trespassing” signs.

Two weeks before Merritt lost her home, she’d lost her job as a secretary in L.A. County’s Department of Mental Health. Once the house was gone, she lost her four children. On and off the streets, suffering from depression and addicted to methamphetamine, Merritt eventually lost her hair when, she suspects, another homeless person poured Nair into her shampoo. [See Home, A9]



MERRITT first moved into the Poplar Boulevard home in 1995. Caltrans acquired it as part of a freeway project.

# Boba Fett, blue fish: How drug sales boomed on Craigslist

Fentanyl dealers use code words to openly sell their illicit goods

BY CONNOR SHEETS AND KERI BLAKINGER

At first glance, the items listed for sale on Craigslist seemed benign: Blue socks. A fancy china set. A collectible action figure.

But there was odd lingo slipped into the otherwise mundane posts. The socks were “pressed.” Buyers could “try” a plate from the china set “to guarantee quality.” And the action figure was “pure.”

The phrasing was one giveaway they were advertising illicit fentanyl, according to several drug market experts who reviewed dozens of suspicious posts identified by The Times.

The open sale of drugs has been a long-standing problem on Craigslist. Over the last decade, a handful of people have overdosed and died after buying fentanyl through the site, yet until recent months The Times found ads for them remained commonplace, especially in Southern California.

“People have been able to buy drugs on Craigslist for a long time,” said Chelsea Shower, a UCLA researcher who studies drug use. “But these ads seem qualitatively different in how brazen a lot of them are.”

Craigslist founder and namesake Craig Newmark declined to comment, deferring to the site’s current leadership and noting that he has not been involved for many years. Craigslist and [See Craigslist, A8]

# Trump nets millions from Silicon Valley

Some wealthy donors in largely Democratic tech region now lean Republican for 2024.

BY ANABEL SOSA, SEEMA MEHTA, ASHLEY AHN AND FAITH E. PINHO

If California is the political fundraising powerhouse of the nation, Silicon Valley has grown into one of the increasingly dominant forces of campaign cash. And while Northern California tech entrepreneurs overwhelmingly support Democratic

candidates, a small but powerful group of defectors has moved rightward in recent years.

A gathering of tech’s conservative cohort enjoyed a visit from former President Trump on Thursday evening at a tony fundraiser held at venture capitalist David Sacks’ San Francisco home.

The estate, nestled on Billionaires’ Row in Pacific Heights, welcomed about 80 elites to the sold-out event. Cost of admission: up to \$300,000 per person and \$500,000 per couple, according to an invitation obtained by The Times. [See Silicon Valley, A11]

# Newsom’s gun amendment call goes unanswered

In the year since he urged a constitutional convention to address firearms, no other state has stepped up.

BY TARYN LUNA AND LAUREL ROSENHALL

SACRAMENTO — On NBC’s “Today” show last June, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced a proposal that seemed politically impossible from the start: to convince two-thirds of state legislatures in America to officially call for a constitutional convention to adopt national gun safety laws.

Newsom didn’t see it that way.

“It’s possible because their constituency demands it,” Newsom said when the

interviewer pointed out that more than half of the states are controlled by Republicans, who generally oppose gun restrictions.

One year later, no other state has joined Newsom’s fight.

The inability to advance the gun safety proposal beyond California, even in other Democratic-controlled states, suggests that — so far at least — Newsom’s plan was more flash than substance.

The governor’s pitch inspired a round of media coverage last year that elevated his national profile as a Democrat trying to do something about mass shootings and other gun violence. Newsom pointed to a Fox News poll that found overwhelming voter support for such restrictions.

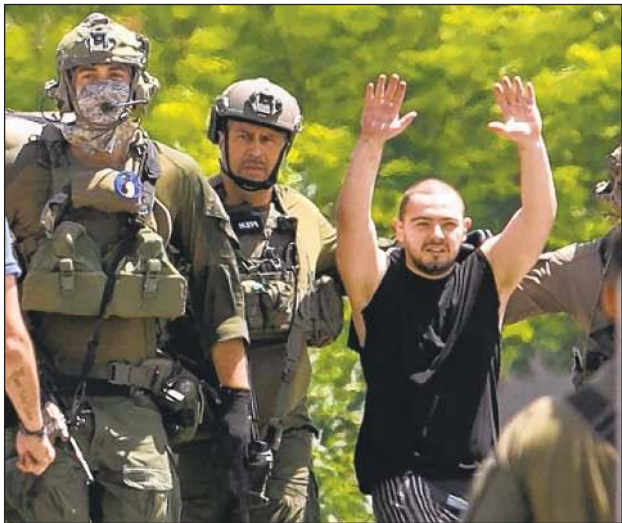
The gun initiative has [See Gun safety, A10]

# Israel rescues 4 hostages in heavy assault

A Gaza health official says 210 Palestinians were killed in the operation at Nuseirat.

BY WAFAA SHURAF, SAM MEDNICK AND JACK JEFFREY

DEIR AL BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israel on Saturday carried out its largest hostage rescue operation since the war with Hamas began, taking four to safety out of central Gaza amid the military’s heavy air and ground assault. The bodies of at least 210 Palestinians, including children, were brought to local hospitals, a



FREED HOSTAGE Almog Meir Jan, 21, arrives Saturday at Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, Israel.

health official said.

Israelis were jubilant as the army said it had freed Noa Argamani, 25; Almog Meir Jan, 21; Andrey Kozlov, 27; and Shlomi Ziv, 40, in a daytime operation in the heart of Nuseirat, raiding two locations at once while under fire. The hostages were taken by helicopter for medical checks and reunions with loved ones after 246 days in captivity.

Argamani, one of the most widely recognized hostages, was taken, like the other three, from a music festival in southern Israel. The video of her abduction, among the first to surface, showed her seated between two men on a motorcycle as [See Hostages, A6]

**Thailand attracts LGBTQ+ emigres**  
Nation’s gay-friendly culture has caught the attention of Chinese people facing pressures back home. **WORLD, A4**

**Box office wilts on dearth of films**  
Hollywood’s hollowed-out release schedule is doing the expected damage, with “Furiosa” the latest flop. **BUSINESS, A12**

**Dornoch upsets at Belmont Stakes**  
Racehorse with 17-1 odds holds off Sierra Leone to win Triple Crown finale on a shorter course in upstate N.Y. **SPORTS, D1**

**Weather**  
Low clouds dissipate. L.A. Basin: 75/58. **B10**

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PERSPECTIVES

# Republican ‘IVF Protection Act’ is a scam

Plan would let states prosecute families who use the method to have a child.

MICHAEL HILTZIK

Ever since the Supreme Court upended reproductive health rights in its 2022 Dobbs decision, antiabortion activists have been trying to make the case that the decision won't have the dire effect on women and their families that its critics foresaw.

They've been wrong, as has been demonstrated by the rising tide of incidents in which pregnant women have been exposed to severe injury or near-death experiences for want of a therapeutic abortion.

But the case also opened the door to legal predicaments throughout the healthcare universe — most recently via a ruling on two cases by the Alabama Supreme Court in February, effectively outlawing in vitro fertilization in that state.

Opinion polls show that giving people a route to parenthood via IVF is immensely popular, so even conservative lawmakers have scurried to enact laws to protect the method.

The most recent initiative comes from Republican Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Katie Britt of Alabama, who introduced their “IVF Protection Act” on May 20 and have been touting it as a measure that “protects both life and IVF.”

Their bill does nothing of the kind. It's a scam. More on that in a moment.

First, a brief primer on the IVF method. IVF isn't abortion. Quite the contrary, it's a means of creating, not terminating, a pregnancy.

IVF aims to help couples achieve pregnancy when medical issues prevent them from conceiving or they have concerns about heritable genetic mutations that might affect the health of their prospective offspring.

Celebrities including the Obamas, Paris Hilton and Brooke Shields have used IVF to conceive.

The procedure begins with the harvesting of unfertilized eggs from a woman's ovaries. Subsequently, they're fertilized by sperm from the woman's partner. A few days later, an embryo — in some cases more than one — is placed in the woman's uterus and is allowed to continue gestation nor-



**SENS. KATIE BRITT** (R-Ala.) and Ted Cruz (R-Texas), second from left, are lying when they say their bill protects IVF nationwide. It says that nothing can block states from implementing their own standards on IVF.

mally. That Alabama Supreme Court decision says almost nothing about the procedure that most laypersons think is the alpha and omega of IVF — the implantation of manually fertilized embryos into the uterus. But of course there's more to IVF than that. IVF clinics typically produce multiple embryos but only implant one or two at a time. The idea is to give the parents further options if an implantation fails. In roughly half of all cases, the embryos are subjected to pre-implantation genetic testing to identify potentially troublesome mutations.

“If this genetic mutation is discovered in an embryo, the embryo is usually discarded,” says Joanne Rosen, an expert in public health at Johns Hopkins. She asks whether the Alabama ruling means that “genetic testing should no longer take place because you can't discard the embryos?”

The Alabama decision was concerned almost entirely with the legal status of the unused or discarded embryos. The court ruled that they fell within the protection of the state's 1872 Wrongful Death of a Minor Act — largely because that antique law didn't explicitly provide “an exception ... for extrauterine children,” as Justice Jay Mitchell wrote for the court majority.

By some estimates, more than 1 million embryos are currently in cryogenic storage across the U.S. The

Alabama ruling “raises a huge question about what the obligations are for these frozen embryos,” Rosen said on the Johns Hopkins website. “Does this mean that they cannot be destroyed and have to be preserved into perpetuity?”

The Cruz/Britt measure purports to guarantee Americans access to in vitro fertilization by forbidding states to outlaw it, but defines IVF simply as “the practice whereby eggs are collected from ovaries and manually fertilized by sperm, for later placement inside of a uterus.”

Nothing there about how to treat the stored embryos. Their proposal, moreover, says that nothing can block states from “implementing health and safety standards regarding the practice of in vitro fertilization.”

Abortion rights advocates will recognize that provision as a poisoned chalice, because even before the Supreme Court overturned Roe vs. Wade with its Dobbs ruling, numerous antiabortion states were imposing onerous regulations on abortion clinics in the name of “health and safety” — everything from dictating corridor widths to requiring that providers have admitting privileges at local hospitals.

These pernicious regulations are known as “TRAP laws,” for “targeted restrictions on abortion providers.” They're “often pushed by antiabortion politicians under the guise of ‘women's health,’” in the

Alabama's high court ruling ‘raises a huge question about what the obligations are for these frozen embryos.’

— JOANNE ROSEN, public health expert at Johns Hopkins University

words of Planned Parenthood, but their real purpose “is to shut down abortion providers and make it more difficult for people to access abortion.” In their bill, Cruz and Britt explicitly encourage more of this in relation to IVF.

One more point: The bill's guarantee of rights even to its narrowly defined IVF is nothing like absolute. It's tied to a state's participation in Medicaid — states would be required to keep IVF legal as a condition of their receiving Medicaid payments.

How big a cudgel is this? In some states, almost none at all. We know this because 10 GOP-led states, mostly in the deep South, still have not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, even though the federal government pays 90% of the cost of covering the eligible residents.

In those states, an estimated 1.5 million residents fall into the “coverage gap” — their incomes are too low

to be eligible for ACA subsidies, but even though they live below the federal poverty line, their incomes are too high to be eligible for Medicaid in their states.

Those states include the home states of Britt and Cruz: Alabama (174,000 in the coverage gap) and Texas (1.2 million).

The reaction of congressional Republicans to a proposal that would actually have protected IVF providers and patients from legal peril gives the game away. That measure, the “Access to Family Building Act,” was introduced by Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), who had her two children with the help of IVF.

Duckworth's bill would have given Americans a legal right to access IVF. More to the point, it explicitly granted IVF patients “all rights regarding the use or disposition of reproductive genetic materials,” which would preempt any state from undertaking the same interference with the process endorsed by the Alabama court.

Republicans blocked Duckworth's bill in the Senate.

The cases before the Alabama Supreme Court were brought by two couples whose embryos were accidentally destroyed by an intruder at the Mobile clinic where they were frozen and stored. (Both couples had had healthy babies conceived via IVF.) The court made clear in its 8-1 decision that its ratio-

nale had nothing to do with science, and much more to do with religion.

“The theologically based view of the sanctity of life adopted by the People of Alabama,” wrote Chief Justice Tom Parker in a concurring opinion, is that “human life cannot be wrongfully destroyed without incurring the wrath of a holy God.”

The justices adopted the doctrine of legal “personhood” beloved of the anti-abortion camp. “All members of this Court,” Mitchell wrote, “agree that an unborn child is a genetically unique human being whose life begins at fertilization and ends at death.”

As for how the 1872 law applies, the court employed the “originalist” doctrine that a law must be interpreted the way its original drafters understood it to mean.

“Unborn children are ‘children’ under the Act,” Mitchell wrote, “without exception based on developmental stage, physical location, or any other ancillary characteristic.” Yet the idea that 19th century lawmakers contemplated that unborn children could survive outside the womb as were the frozen embryos, and granted them legal rights is plainly absurd.

The IVF centers serving the bulk of patients in the state shut down in the immediate wake of the decision.

After Gov. Kay Ivey signed a protective law in March purporting to give IVF providers legal immunity, two resumed operations, but not the Mobile clinic connected with the case. And many experts are unsure whether the new law is as effective as its sponsors claim.


That's the legacy of the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs decision. Antiabortion agitators have signaled that they'll use any means they can persuade religiously inclined judges to accept, even outlawing contraceptives. Granting “personhood” to cryogenically frozen embryos that can't be seen without a microscope is just one step on the path to the legal chaos they believe works in their favor.

In their Wall Street Journal op-ed, Cruz and Britt shed crocodile tears over the fact that, following the Alabama decision, “confusion and misinformation has spread, inflamed by partisan commentary.” Their own bill demonstrates that “partisan commentary” had nothing to do with the confusion. The Alabama decision was its cause. Their own bill would only make things worse, and you can be sure that they know it.

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THE WORLD

# U.S. and France celebrate ‘unwavering’ alliance

Biden is feted at state visit to Paris. At the top of the agenda are Ukraine and ways to ease trade tensions.

By Chris Megerian, Zeke Miller and Sylvie Corbet

PARIS — President Biden said France was America’s “first friend” at its founding and is one of its closest allies more than two centuries later during a state visit Saturday in Paris with President Emmanuel Macron, aimed at showing off their partnership on global security issues and easing trade tensions.

“United we stand, divided we fall,” Macron said in toasting Biden at a state dinner. “Allied we are, and allied we will stay.”

Biden and Macron on Thursday attended ceremonies marking the 80th anniversary of D-day and met separately the following day in Paris with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Biden and Macron used those engagements to underscore the need to support Kyiv’s fight against Russia’s invasion.

Macron and Biden have chafed at the pace of support for Ukraine, especially as the U.S., by far the largest contributor to the country’s defense, was forced to pause shipments for months while congressional Republicans held up an aid package.

The state visit, which began with a ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe, included a wreath-laying at France’s tomb of the unknown soldier and a military parade along the Champs-Élysées leading to the Elysee Palace, where the two held meetings and delivered public statements.

Macron and his wife, Brigitte, hosted a state dinner at the palace for the U.S. president and First



**THE ARC** de Triomphe is the site of a ceremony Saturday attended by, from left, First Lady Jill Biden, President Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron and Brigitte Macron. France later hosted a state dinner.

Lady Jill Biden.

Biden followed Macron’s toast by saying the U.S. and France have been “unyielding as well as unwavering in our partnership.” He added, “That’s what democracies do.”

Biden and Macron put the war in Ukraine at the top of Saturday’s agenda, but it was the strength of the countries’ alliance, fortified 80 years ago at Normandy, France, but with roots far deeper, that was the centerpiece of the weekend.

Calling himself a student of French history, Biden said the visit was a “great honor” and noted that America’s ties to France date to the Revolutionary War.

“France was our first friend,” Biden said. “It remains one of our best friends.”

Macron praised Biden for bringing the “clarity and loyalty of a partner that loves and respects the Europeans.”

It appeared to be a subtle criticism of former President Trump, whose “America first” foreign policy shook European leaders. They are now contending, gingerly, with the possibility of Trump’s return to power next year.

Macron hosted Trump for Bastille Day in 2017, and the French president went to Washington for a state visit in 2018 before their relationship soured.

Later on Saturday, in a statement of principles that Biden and Macron called a “road map,” they cited the legacy of the U.S.-French relationship and “the price for peace and freedom” paid by past generations in reaffirming their commitment to “a Europe whole, free and at peace.”

Despite disagreements over whether to send trainers to Ukraine to support its defense against Russia, Macron insisted Saturday that “we see eye to eye on this war.”

He tempered his previous concerns about U.S. commitment to Europe — which have led him to argue

more to get humanitarian assistance into Gaza.

Macron said he supported a Biden-promoted cease-fire proposal that would allow a surge of humanitarian assistance into the Gaza Strip and allow for the release of more hostages. The U.S. has said it is awaiting Hamas’ formal response to the proposal.

The French leader raised the issue of U.S. trade practices that he has often criticized, including the Inflation Reduction Act, which favors American-made climate technology such as electric vehicles. Macron said the U.S., like China, has “decided not to respect the rules of global trade” by shoring up protections and subsidies, while Europe’s industry remains open and is stuck in overregulation.

As the pair met outside the palace, Biden appeared to suggest to his host that the U.S. and Europe could “coordinate together” and was heard telling Macron about his most recent conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping, who was objecting to steep U.S. tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles.



Biden hosted Macron in December 2022 at the White House for the first state visit of his presidency, as the pandemic receded.

Among the attendees at Saturday’s dinner were World War II veteran Harold Terens, 100, and Jeanne Swerlin, 96, who were married Saturday inland of the D-day beaches in Normandy.

“Congrats to the newlyweds,” Macron said, leading the crowd in cheers.

As Biden’s trip draws to a close, the far right is likely to emerge as one of the biggest winners in Sunday’s European Parliament election, while Macron’s pro-European Union movement is flagging.

Megerian, Miller and Corbet write for the Associated Press.



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# LGBTQ+ emigres find other side of the rainbow

Thailand’s gay-friendly culture has caught the attention of Chinese people facing the pressures back home

By STEPHANIE YANG

BANGKOK — In 2019, business was booming for Owen Zhu. He was one year into his new career in real estate, showing Bangkok properties to Chinese investors.

Then the pandemic halted travel and spending. Even now, Chinese buyers are slow to return.

The exception has been one group that has since become Zhu’s specialty: LGBTQ+ clients looking to build a new life for themselves outside China.

“Most of them are buying to live in or to retire in — not like many straight people or friends, who are prioritizing investments,” Zhu, 40, said.

Before the pandemic, Zhu estimates, about one-fourth of his clients were LGBTQ+. Now they make up two-thirds of his customer base.

As China has clamped down on queer representation and advocacy, Bangkok, long the “gay capital” of Asia, has offered visitors a reprieve from the conservative culture back home.

Here, the thriving nightlife of gay bars and clubs draws many potential buyers to look for apartments near the city center, Zhu said.

Zhu, who is also gay and from China, bought an apartment in Bangkok in 2017 for his eventual retirement. As friends started asking his advice on how to make their own purchases, he quit his job in Chinese media to help them find properties full time.

As his clientele has changed, so has Zhu’s marketing on Chinese social media. In between property listings, he now shares updates on efforts to legalize same-sex marriage and surrogacy in Thailand.

With demand growing, Zhu said he hopes to start a housing complex catering to gay Chinese in the next few years.

The growing LGBTQ+ community means Zhu runs across more business opportunities in his daily life in Bangkok.

That’s how he met Danny Dong, 29, who moved from China’s Suzhou province in October 2022.

A year ago, Zhu overheard Dong speaking Chinese at a gay bar and struck up a conversation. Now as



JEFFREY HU, right, hugs his boyfriend, Wilfred Wu, in Bangkok. The slogan “Go Thai, be free” affirms Thailand’s culture of openness.



DANNY DONG, left, tours an apartment complex in Bangkok with real estate specialist Owen Zhu, whose client base is made up of two-thirds LGBTQ+ people.

Dong makes plans for his next three to five years in Thailand, he’s toured several apartments with Zhu, looking for one he might like to buy.

In May, Zhu took Dong to a luxury complex in the central business district. Between several one- and two-bedroom apartments ranging from \$163,000 to \$438,000, Dong paid close attention to the balconies, where he liked

to stand and look out at the bustling city below. After a few hours, he decided he would keep looking.

Dong moved to Thailand in part because he was depressed at home. He had become a dance instructor — he had started learning ballroom dance at age 8 — but didn’t like teaching much. There was little in the way of activities or entertainment to occupy him, and no LGBTQ+ community.

“I’ve always felt that my hometown is an extremely boring place,” he said.

In Bangkok, he feels that more is possible, with an abundance of choice in food, work and nightlife.

“More options in boyfriends too,” Zhu added.

Dong agreed. He had heard that Bangkok was a hub for queer tourists, but hadn’t sought out the scene during his first visit a few years ago. Nonetheless, at the hotel pool he met another gay Chinese man who eventually introduced Dong to his first boyfriend.

“Thailand has brought me a lot of positive things,” Dong said. “So I trust that it will bring me more positive things in the future.”

..

Thailand’s famed acceptance of LGBTQ+ visitors stems from the prominence of gay and transgender representation in the country’s popular media and culture since the 1950s.

Those depictions weren’t always positive, and locals still face discrimination and prescriptive gender roles. However, the country’s officials began to embrace its LGBTQ-centric image more strongly in the late 20th century in order to boost tourism and the economy.

Thailand also waived visa requirements for Chinese citizens last year, in a bid to revive a cornerstone of its tourism industry that was heavily curbed by the pandemic. Thailand’s Tourism Authority said it expects 7.3 million visitors from China this year, twice last year’s figures, but far short of the 11 million peak in 2019.

While the country does not collect tourist data on gender or sexual orientation, the authority’s deputy governor of tourism products and business, Apichai Chatchalermkit, told Thai media last year that the country should court “high-potential” LGBTQ+ tourists with tours, advertising and events specific to their interests, such as pride parades.

Eleven years ago, the authority adopted the slogan “Go Thai, be free,” to emphasize Thailand’s openness toward LGBTQ+ visitors. For some Chinese visitors, both tourists and those with work and residence visas, that appeal has been heightened by an increasingly oppressive environment for LGBTQ+ people back home.

China has long had a conservative culture that stigmatizes homosexuality, though it was decriminalized in 1997. Gay rights advocates achieved minor successes in the decades that followed, such as workplace protections for LGBTQ+ employees and the ability to register same-sex partners as legal guardians.

But in the past five years, the tide has turned. Under President Xi Jinping, government pressure on activists has ramped up, shutting down gay pride events as well as LGBTQ+ advocacy groups in major cities.

LGBTQ+ resources and events “were like a counterforce to the examples of homophobia and transphobia that would pop up,” said Darius Longarino, senior fellow at the Paul Tsai China Center at Yale Law School. “Even though the [current] crackdown hasn’t reached down to all kinds of expression, it’s changed the balance of forces.”

Adisak Wongwaikankha,

who opened the gay bar Silver Sand Silom in October 2021, said that 70% of his patrons are foreigners, and about half of those come from China.

He estimates that percentage jumps as high as 90% during major holidays, such as Thai New Year, also known as Songkran Festival, in April, or the Pride Festival in June. Some recent visitors have been Chinese businessmen asking how to open or invest in gay entertainment venues such as his.

On a Friday evening, Heath Yu, 38, strolled past Wongwaikankha’s establishment in the heart of Bangkok’s gay bar district, the windows adorned with neon lights and rainbow flags. Yu, who fell in love with Thailand on a vacation, quit his job at a Chinese TV station last year and moved here to pursue a doctorate in education and psychology.

“China is getting tighter on these LGBT, so more of them want to leave and come to Thailand,” Yu said. Feeling liberated in Thailand, Chinese tourists go a bit wild in Bangkok, he said. “As it gets more repressive there, it just gets more crazy here.”

Hawkers called out to Yu and his friend Summer Gao, 38, to come in from the heat for a drink.

Maybe later. Still, Gao quietly nudged Yu, alerting him to another pedestrian who seemed to be checking him out as they walked by.

Yu whipped his head around, and the two joked about chasing the man down. But Yu said he’s less preoccupied with finding a boyfriend than he is with finding work after his studies.

Yu was enticed by the idea of living in Bangkok ever since his first visit 10 years ago, when he encountered the Buddhist culture, the friendliness of locals and the affordability of food and rent.

And even though he rarely visits LGBTQ+-specific spaces, he feels more at ease in Bangkok than in his small hometown, where he has yet to come out to his parents.

He also grew tired of low pay and censorship at the TV station, and worries that the suppression of information could increase hostility toward queer people.

“I really don’t want to go back,” Yu said wistfully. “I’m doing everything I can to stay here.”

..

The first time Yamato Sasuki visited Bangkok a decade ago, he discovered a life that was unimaginable growing up gay in Beijing. Acceptance. Freedom. He returned to the city in 2017, then bought an apartment three years later.

But Chinese citizens can-

not naturalize, so the 35-year-old teacher has been considering a move to Japan, where he might eventually marry his Chinese partner.

“I would want to continue to live in Thailand, but it’s just not an immigrant country,” said Sasuki, who has gone by his Japanese name since he left China in 2015 to study in New Zealand.

In Japan this year, two courts ruled same-sex marriage bans unconstitutional, and Sasuki is hopeful that it may be legalized in his lifetime.

Thailand is also on the verge of legalizing same-sex marriage. The lower house of Parliament passed the bill in April, which still needs Senate approval and royal endorsement from the king. Currently, the only places in Asia that recognize same-sex marriage are Taiwan and Nepal.

..

Drawn by his first boyfriend, a Thai man he met online, Jeffrey Hu first visited Thailand in 2011. He lived and worked there for eight years after.

But in 2020, the 34-year-old freelance translator was ensnared by China’s strict pandemic controls on a visit to see his mother, and unable to leave the country. During that time, he met his current boyfriend Wilfred Wu, 28, in a Chinese LGBTQ+ group chat.

Last August, they moved to Bangkok — Wu’s first time setting foot in Thailand. Through friends they found an apartment near the Victory Monument memorial, close to a small park where they like to walk, exercise and feed stray cats and squirrels.

Hu said that a few years ago, he had hoped China would become more open-minded, not just to LGBTQ+ people but in all aspects. As Christians, he and Wu also worried about religious repression in China.

But the government’s draconian response to COVID-19 made clear it’s not ready to give up its authoritarian ways.

Even if same-sex marriage does become legal in Thailand, Hu and Wu would be ineligible as Chinese citizens. Though the lack of marriage and naturalization prospects means their time in Bangkok will be limited — they dream of someday moving to California — for now they can reflect on the freedom they have found here.

“It made me think, this is the society that I want,” Hu said. “Compared to China, I feel like Thailand gives me a better sense of identity and belonging.”

Special correspondent Yu-chen Lai in Taipei contributed to this report.

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## FOR THE RECORD

**Airbnb income:** In the May 26 Section A, a story about a lawsuit claiming a renter turned a home into an illegal Airbnb said the property generated \$215,954, according to Airbnb records. The figure represents the gross amount received for the property, not profit.

**Warehouse project:** In the June 8 A section, the secondary headline over a story about a warehouse development in Bloomington described the project as proposed. The complex is under construction.



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# Israeli rescue operation leaves heavy casualties

[Hostages, from A1] she screamed, “Don’t kill me!”

Her mother, Liora, has brain cancer and had released a video pleading to see her daughter. Israel’s Channel 13 said Argamani was moved to the hospital where her mother is being treated.

In a message released by the government, an elated Argamani tells Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by phone that she is “very excited,” saying she hasn’t heard Hebrew in a long time.

Netanyahu in a statement vowed to continue fighting until all hostages are freed. The operation was “daring in nature, planned brilliantly and executed in an extraordinary fashion,” Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said.

Israeli aircraft hummed overhead as the bodies of 109 Palestinians, including 23 children and 11 women, were taken to Al Aqsa Hospital. Spokesperson Khalil Degran told the Associated Press that more than 100 wounded had also arrived at the hospital. He said that in total, 210 bodies had been taken there and to Al Awda Hospital. Al Awda’s numbers couldn’t immediately be confirmed.

“The horrific massacre committed today by Netanyahu and his fascist government against the Palestinian people in Gaza, which led to the slaughter of 210 and more than 400 wounded so far — under the pretext of liberating those detained by the resistance — confirms what the resistance has said repeatedly: that Netanyahu doesn’t plan to reach an agreement to stop the war and free the captured Israelis peacefully,” said Bassem Naim, a senior Hamas official based in Lebanon.

AP reporters saw dozens of bodies brought from the Nuseirat and Deir al Balah



**ANDREY KOZLOV**, left, kidnapped in Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack, arrives Saturday in Israel. The U.S. provided support throughout the rescue process, a source said.

areas, as smoke rose in the distance and armored vehicles rolled by.

A baby was among the dead. Children wailed, covered in blood. Bodies were placed on the ground outside, feet bare, as more wounded were rushed in.

“My two cousins were killed, and two other cousins were seriously injured. They did not commit any sin. They were sitting at home,” one person said amid the chaos at the Nuseirat refugee camp.

As Palestinians explored the newly destroyed buildings, a child sat on a collapsed metal door, overwhelmed.

Egypt condemned “with the strongest terms” Israel’s attack on the Nuseirat camp. The Egyptian foreign ministry called it a “flagrant

violation of all rules of international law.” Jordan also condemned the attack.

“The bloodbath must end immediately,” the European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said on the social media platform X, noting reports of civilian deaths.

Israel’s military said it had attacked “threats to our forces in the area.” The military said one commando died from his wounds.

Israel’s military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, told reporters that intelligence determined some time ago that the hostages were being held in two apartments, about 220 yards apart, in the heart of the Nuseirat camp. He said the forces had trained repeatedly on a model of the apartment buildings.

Hagari said the forces moved simultaneously on the apartments, believing this would ensure the element of surprise. But the rescuers came under heavy fire as they moved out, he said, including rocket-propelled grenades shot from within the neighborhood.

“A lot of fire was around us,” he said, adding that the military responded with heavy force, including from aircraft, to extract the rescuers and hostages.

A multi-agency U.S. hostage recovery team provided advice and support throughout the process of locating and rescuing the hostages, according to a Biden administration official who was not authorized to comment and requested anonymity.

Hamas took some 250

hostages during the Oct. 7 attack that killed about 1,200 people. About half were released in a weeklong cease-fire in November. About 120 hostages remain; 43 of them have been pronounced dead. Survivors include about 15 women, two children under the age of 5 and two men in their 80s.

Saturday’s recovery brings the total of rescued captives to seven. Two were freed in February, and one was freed in the aftermath of the October attack. Israeli troops have recovered the bodies of at least 16 hostages, according to the government.

The latest rescue was expected to lift spirits in Israel as divisions are deepening over the best way to bring hostages home. Many Israelis urged Netanyahu to embrace a cease-fire deal President Biden announced last month, but far-right allies threaten to collapse his government if he does.

Netanyahu, whose support has fallen, rushed to the hospital to greet the freed hostages.

But thousands of Israelis again gathered Saturday evening for anti-government demonstrations and calls for a cease-fire deal.

“It’s time to pay the price of a political deal. One deal that will bring them all back without risking soldiers,” said Omri Shtivi, whose brother Idan marked his 29th birthday Saturday while in captivity.

It was unclear what effect the rescue might have on apparently stalled cease-fire efforts. U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken will return to the Middle East next week, seeking a breakthrough.

“The hostage release and cease-fire deal that is now on the table would secure the release of all the remaining hostages together with security assurances for Israel

and relief for the innocent civilians in Gaza,” national security advisor Jake Sullivan said in a statement.

International pressure is mounting on Israel to limit civilian bloodshed in its war in the Gaza Strip, which reached its eighth month Friday. More than 36,700 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between fighters and civilians.

Palestinians also face widespread hunger because fighting and Israeli restrictions have largely cut off the flow of aid.

Israel is intensifying attacks across central Gaza, where the hostages were rescued. On Thursday, an Israeli airstrike hit a U.N.-run school compound in Nuseirat, killing more than 33 people, including three women and nine children. Israel said some 30 militants were inside at the time and on Friday released the names of 17 it said were killed. However, only nine of those names matched records of the dead from the hospital morgue.

One of the people Israel described as a militant was an 8-year-old boy, according to hospital records.

Israel’s military on Saturday asserted that “Hamas is a terror organization that often uses fake documents disguising terrorists as women or children.”

Meanwhile, Benny Gantz, a popular centrist member of Israel’s three-member war Cabinet who had threatened to resign from the government if it didn’t adopt a new plan by Saturday for the war in Gaza, postponed an expected announcement.

Netanyahu urged Gantz not to step down.

Shurafa, Mednick and Jeffrey write for the Associated Press.

# Populist, far-right parties seek gains in EU races tainted by violence

Italy’s hard-right prime minister, who is expected to win big, tells center parties that their time is up.

By GIADA ZAMPANO, KAREL JANICEK AND RAF CASERT

ROME — Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni joined voters in Italy and a half-dozen European Union nations in casting a ballot during the penultimate day of European Union parliamentary elections on Saturday. The bloc’s premier hard-right politician threw down the gauntlet to the traditional center parties, telling them their time to run the EU as they liked was up.

Populist and far-right parties were looking to make gains across the 27-member bloc in the wake of the strong showing by Geert Wilders in the Netherlands on Thursday.

And Meloni, the leading hard-right politician governing a key founding nation of the bloc, left no doubt about what was at stake when she went to vote in her suburban



**ITALIAN PRIME** Minister Giorgia Meloni casts her ballot in the EU parliamentary election in Rome.

neighborhood in Rome on Saturday afternoon.

“This vote will decide our next five years,” she said, echoing her campaign theme that time had come to pull back powers to national capitals and curtail the reach of the EU institutions that have been dominated by Christian Democrat, Socialist and pro-business Liberal politicians.

As the third-most populous nation in the bloc, Italy wields considerable influence. It will send 76 legislators to the 720-seat parliament, which has extended its powers in recent years.

Only Germany and France, which vote on Sunday, have more seats.

At the same time, the election campaign was tainted by violence.

In Slovakia, the election was overshadowed by an attempt to assassinate populist Prime Minister Robert Fico on May 15, sending shockwaves through the nation of 5.4 million and throughout Europe.

Analysts say the attack could boost the chances of the premier’s leftist Smer, or Direction, party, the senior partner in the governing coalition, to win the vote.

And in Denmark it was Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen who called off her last day of campaigning across the country after suffering whiplash when she was assaulted in Copenhagen on Friday.

Details of the attack remain unclear, but local media reported that a man seems to have forcefully walked toward Frederiksen and pushed her hard while she was passing Kultorvet Square, one of Copenhagen’s main plazas. The man was arrested.

The attack was the latest in a series of incidents over the last weeks, in which the assassination attempt on Fico stood out.

Fico, who took office last fall after campaigning on a pro-Russian and anti-American platform, has been recovering from multiple wounds after being shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters in the town of Handlova.

He recovered in time to address the nation in a pre-recorded video, his first public statement since the attack, just hours before the start of the pre-election silence period on Wednesday. He criticized the European Union, suggesting he was a

victim because of his views that differ sharply from the EU’s mainstream.

Fico strongly opposes support for Ukraine in its war against Russia’s full-scale invasion. He ended Slovakia’s military aid for Ukraine after his coalition government was sworn in on Oct. 25. He also opposes EU sanctions on Russia and wants to block Ukraine from joining NATO.

His party is in a close race against the main opposition Progressive Slovakia, a pro-Western liberal party.

Fico’s government has made efforts to overhaul public broadcasting — a move critics said would give the government full control of public television and radio. That, along with his plans to amend the penal code to eliminate a special anti-graft prosecutor, has led opponents to worry that he would lead Slovakia down a more autocratic path.

Fico claimed mainstream media, nongovernmental organizations and the liberal opposition were also to blame for the assassination attempt, an allegation repeated by politicians in his governing coalition.

Sona Szomolanyi, a political science professor at Co-

menius University in Bratislava, said Fico’s message “only confirms that the ruling coalition has been using the assassination [attempt] expediently and apparently effectively,” she said.

The whole EU campaign has been cast in the light of the center and left forces seeking to hold off a surge of the far right and a fight between those who seek closer EU unity with greater powers against those like Fico, Meloni and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán who seek to swing the pendulum back to the member states.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who hopes to use Sunday’s results as a launchpad for a second term at the head of the EU, has especially been stressing the respect for the rule of law as a quintessential requirement for those seeking power.

Meloni is expected to be the big winner in Italy, reflecting her far-right Brothers of Italy’s growth, mostly at the expense of her coalition partners, the populist, anti-migrant League and the center-right Forza Italia. The result could expand Meloni’s influence in the EU, as Von der Leyen has not ruled out a coalition with her group.

Voters in Latvia, Malta, and the Czech Republic were also casting ballots Saturday. Final results will not be released until Sunday night, once every country has voted. The main voting day is Sunday, with citizens in 20 European countries, including Germany, France and Poland, casting their ballots for the 720-seat European Parliament.

Seats are allocated based on population, ranging from six in Malta or Luxembourg to 96 in Germany.

In Malta, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, Von der Leyen’s ally in the Christian Democrat center-right European People’s Party, proudly proclaimed “Duty done” and urged EU citizens to go vote, “or others will decide for you.”

In 2019, barely half the eligible voters went out to the polling booths while predictions have shown turnout could exceed 70% this year.

Associated Press writer Zampano reported from Rome, Janicek from Prague and Casert from Brussels. Colleen Barry from Milan contributed to this report.

# Putin says he sees no threat warranting use of nuclear arms

Russian president repeats that Moscow could arm countries or groups to strike Western targets.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia — President Vladimir Putin says he sees no current threat to Russia’s sovereignty that would warrant the use of nuclear weapons but has again warned that Moscow could send arms to countries or groups to strike Western targets.

Speaking at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on Friday, Putin said that the use of nuclear weapons is only possible in “exceptional cases” and that he does not believe “such a case has arisen.” The Russian leader has repeatedly raised the specter of a nuclear attack since he sent

troops into Ukraine in 2022.

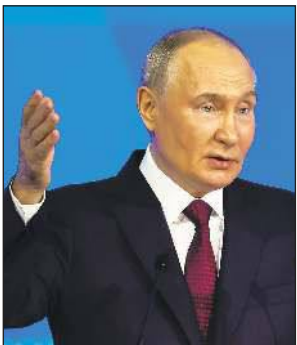
In St. Petersburg, he repeated a warning made days earlier that Moscow “reserves the right” to arm Western adversaries as a response to some NATO allies allowing Ukraine to use their weapons to strike targets inside Russia.

“If they supply [weapons] to the combat zone and call for using these weapons against our territory, why don’t we have the right to do the same?” Putin asked.

“But I’m not ready to say that we will be doing it tomorrow, either,” Putin added, suggesting that it might affect global stability.

He didn’t specify where such arms might be sent. The U.S. has said that Russia has turned to North Korea and Iran to beef up its stock of relatively simple weapons, but Moscow could dip into its stock of high-tech missiles to share with adversaries of the West if Putin decides to fulfill his threat.

The United States and



**RUSSIAN** President Vladimir Putin speaks Friday at an international economic forum.

Germany recently authorized Ukraine to hit some targets on Russian soil with the long-range weapons they are supplying to Kyiv.

On Wednesday, a Western official and a U.S. senator said Ukraine has used American weapons to strike inside Russia under newly approved guidance from President Biden that allows American arms to be used to

defend Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city. The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly on the sensitive matter, spoke on condition of anonymity.

Putin also said he sees no need for a new round of mobilization to beef up Russia’s forces in Ukraine because, he said, “people come voluntarily and go to the front lines to defend the motherland.”

Russia mobilized 300,000 reservists in the fall of 2022 amid a series of military setbacks in Ukraine, an unpopular move that prompted hundreds of thousands to flee the country to avoid being drafted.

Putin made the comments during a question-and-answer session with a pro-Kremlin moderator at the forum, which has been used by Russia for decades as a showcase for touting the country’s development and to woo investors.

Earlier in a speech, he said the Russian economy is



THE NATION

ANALYSIS

# Biden’s border plan could help where he needs it

## Immigration order proves he will risk dissent within his party to court moderate voters

By DAVID LAUTER

WASHINGTON — President Biden’s move this week to close the border to most migrants seeking asylum sent an important signal about what he and his top aides view as their biggest problem in the presidential race. And it’s not opposition from his left.

That’s a critical point because a lot of news coverage gives disproportionate attention to progressives attacking Biden.

### Opposition from the left gets noticed

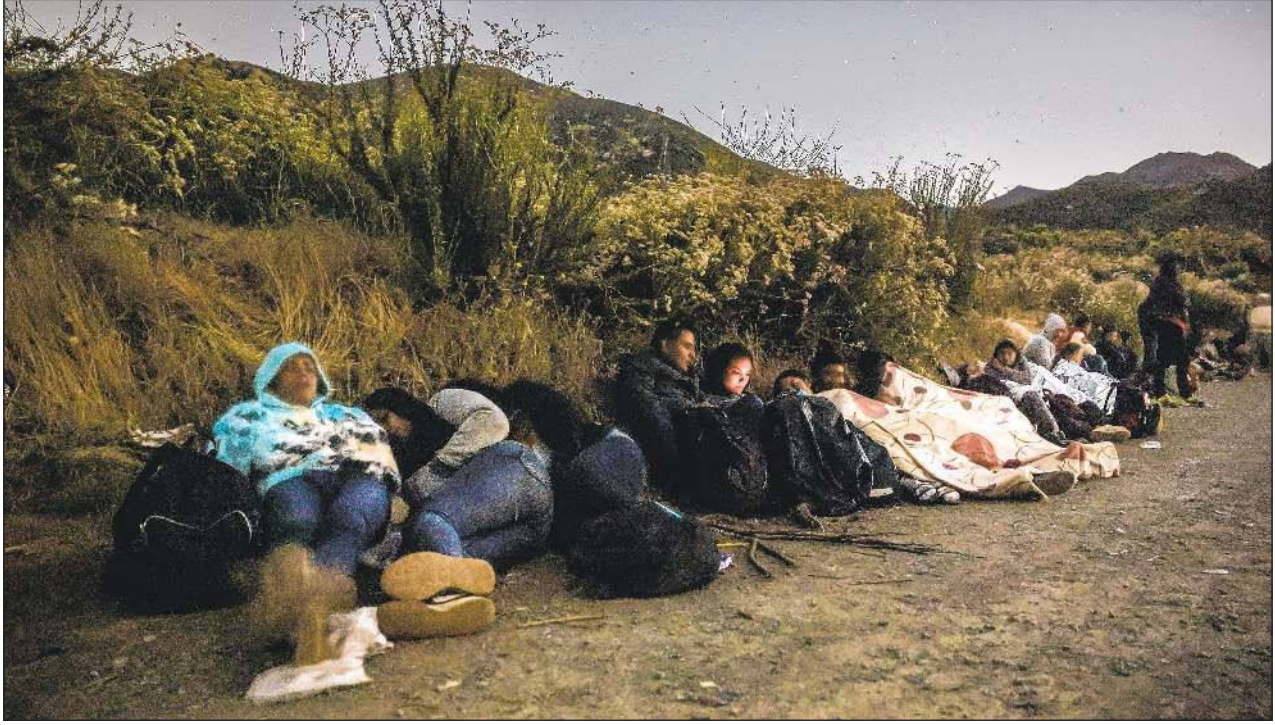
When Biden ran for the Democratic nomination in 2020, he was the moderate candidate facing multiple candidates to his left, including Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders of Vermont. So it’s natural for people to think of the most liberal wing of the party as the locus of his opposition.

Moreover, Biden has lost ground with young people, especially Black and Latino voters. A lot of people incorrectly think of those groups as being mostly on the left. In fact, most Black and Latino voters identify as moderates, and, as the most recent Harvard Youth Poll showed, the current generation of young men, in particular, are notably less liberal than were their predecessors.

Left-wing advocates engage in high-visibility actions that attract coverage — campus demonstrations against Israel’s war on Hamas in Gaza, for example, or climate activists protesting Biden’s approval of some fossil-fuel projects.

And activists have strong incentives to say that if only Biden would embrace their issues, his situation, especially with younger voters, would improve. News stories often repeat those claims without much skepticism.

Yet, poll after poll has shown that Biden has held onto the support of the vast majority of voters who iden-



**MIGRANTS** rest in Barrett Junction, Calif., after hiking for over nine hours to cross the border with Mexico in search of asylum. President Biden’s tougher rules on the asylum process have upset many Democrats.

tify themselves as liberal or very liberal. It’s among those who identify as moderate that he’s suffered serious declines, and the immigration order provides further evidence that the president is willing to risk significant dissent within his party to woo back those voters.

### A sharp shift in public opinion

Immigration provides a perfect example of what political scientists call the thermostatic nature of public opinion — a fancy way to say that the public often reacts against the excesses of whichever party holds the White House.

During the Trump years, the public strongly rejected his restrictive immigration policies. Trump’s separation of children from their families at the border was one of the most politically damaging actions he took during his presidency, according to a detailed polling analysis by political scientists Lynn Vavreck and Chris Tausanovitch of UCLA and

John Sides of Vanderbilt University.

The reaction against Trump led to a spike in support for both legal and illegal immigrants.

At this point in 2020, for example, 74% of voters said immigrants in the U.S. without proper documents should be allowed to stay, the nonpartisan Pew Research Center found.

That surge in pro-immigrant sentiment strongly colored the Democratic primary race in 2020. Calls to “abolish ICE” or decriminalize the border were common.

Biden never embraced those slogans, but the sentiments helped shape the first year of his administration, in which he revoked several of Trump’s immigration orders, and administration officials stressed efforts to address what they referred to as the “root causes” of migration, especially from Central America.

Those moves on immigration were part of Biden’s largely successful effort to keep unity in Democratic

ranks by forging policy agreements with Sanders and other leaders of the party’s left.

As border crossings soared to record levels, however, public opinion quickly began to reverse.

Today, the share of U.S. adults who favor allowing undocumented immigrants to remain in the U.S. has fallen to 59%. Pew found as part of a new study of public opinion on culture-war issues the group released on Thursday.

Republican and independent voters have shifted most notably to the right on that question — immigration issues are a much higher priority for GOP voters than others. Even among Democrats, opinion has moved.

The perception of chaos at the border has weighed down the public’s view of how Biden does his job: Only about 3 in 10 U.S. adults approve of how he’s handled immigration issues, according to YouGov polls for the Economist.

The border crisis has become a prime element of

Trump’s effort to persuade voters that he, not Biden, is the candidate of stability. A poll released last month by ABC News showed Trump leading Biden 47% to 30% when voters were asked which candidate they trust more to fix the border.

### Biden’s proposal on asylum seekers

Biden’s plan aims at asylum, the legal right adopted after World War II to protect people fleeing persecution.

In theory, the process is straightforward: A person fleeing their home country can arrive at the U.S. border, present themselves to a border officer, state that they fear persecution at home and receive a hearing. If their claim for asylum is found credible, they can stay legally in the U.S. If not, they can be deported.

In practice, the system has been overwhelmed by huge numbers.

In 2006, immigration courts had a pending caseload of roughly 170,000 asylum cases, according to ad-

ministration figures. By last year, that number had swelled to almost 2.5 million. The caseload more than doubled during Trump’s four years in office and has doubled again so far during Biden’s tenure.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service now has a backlog of more than a million asylum cases. The wait for a hearing lasts years.

The government has nowhere near the ability to detain even a small fraction of the migrants claiming asylum, so most are released and told to show up in court when their hearing date comes.

Not surprisingly, migrants have taken advantage of the situation. Smugglers tell people that if they claim asylum, they’ll be able to enter the U.S. and remain for at least a couple of years, perhaps longer, while their cases wend through the system.

Last fall, Biden split with the left by backing a bipartisan immigration bill in the Senate that would have significantly curtailed asylum rights. Biden supported it despite impassioned opposition from immigrant advocates, including California Sen. Alex Padilla.

In addition to limiting asylum applications, the Senate bill would have added millions of dollars to hire additional border patrol officers, immigration judges and hearing officers in an effort to resolve the backlog and create a system in which asylum claims could be adjudicated swiftly.

The bill ultimately failed after Trump told Republicans to oppose it.

The executive proclamation Biden issued this week mimicked some of that bill’s enforcement provisions but without the additional financial resources, which can only be provided by Congress.

“This action will help us gain control of our border, restore order into the process,” Biden said during a news conference Tuesday. The goal, he said, is to shut off new entries until the “number of people trying to enter legally is reduced to a level that our system can effectively manage.”

Once again, Padilla was outspoken in his opposition, calling Biden’s plan ineffective and saying it “undermined American values and abandoned our nation’s obligations to provide people fleeing persecution, violence and authoritarianism with an opportunity to seek refuge in the U.S.”

Padilla, however, isn’t going to vote for Trump, and neither will the vast majority of voters who agree with him. The downside risk for the president is limited.

How much upside his move has — either substantively or politically — remains to be seen. Biden’s order faces legal challenges from the ACLU and other immigrant advocacy groups. If it survives court scrutiny, it may not have the impact Biden hopes. And even if it does, some Democratic strategists are skeptical that many voters will give Biden credit.

But, at minimum, the move gives the administration something to point to, a plan of action to deal with a problem that ranks high on the agenda for many voters, especially in important swing states like Arizona and Nevada.

The best scenario for the president is that the order will give his campaign an opening to turn the debate to which plan voters prefer — Biden’s or Trump’s.

Trump’s plan, which he has repeatedly touted, centers on a massive effort to deport the more than 10 million immigrants currently in the U.S. without legal authorization. That idea has gained traction among Republicans — more than 6 in 10 say they support a “national effort to deport” the undocumented, Pew found.

Among the wider public, however, Trump’s idea gets an emphatic thumbs down — 63%-37%. The more Biden can turn the immigration debate to focus on that, the better off he will be. If it works, angering advocates on the left will have been a small price to pay.

# Attorneys gear up for more election certification battles

Disputes are expected, especially in swing states where the victory margins are predicted to be tight.

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI AND JOEY CAPPELLETTI

In Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, two Republican members of a county canvassing board last month refused to sign off on the results of an election that led to the recall of three GOP members of the county commission. They did so only after state officials warned them it was their legal duty to record the final vote tally.

In Georgia’s Fulton County, which includes the Democratic-leaning city of Atlanta, a group run by members of former President Trump’s administration last month sued so a Republican member of the local elections board could refuse to certify the results of the primary election.

And in Arizona, GOP lawmakers sued to reverse the state’s top Democratic officials’ requirement that local boards automatically validate their election results.

The last four years have been filled with battles over all sorts of election arcana, including one that had long been regarded as an administrative afterthought — little-known state and local boards certifying the results.

With the presidential election looming in November, attorneys are gearing up for still more fights over election certification, especially in swing states where the victory margins are expected to be tight. Even if those efforts ultimately fail, election officials worry they’ll become a vehicle for promoting bogus election claims.



**IN PHOENIX**, a woman protests in 2022 outside the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors auditorium.

Trump and his allies have tried to use the tactic to stop election results from being made final if they lose. In 2020, two Republicans on Michigan’s state board of canvassers, which must certify ballot totals before state officials can declare a winner, briefly balked at signing off before one relented and became the decisive vote. Trump had cheered the delay as part of his push to overturn his loss that ultimately culminated in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

During the 2022 midterms, some conservative rural counties tried to hold up their state election results, citing the same debunked claims of voter fraud that Trump has made.

In New Mexico, rural county supervisors refused to certify the state’s primary vote until they were threatened with prosecution. In Cochise County in southeastern Arizona, two Republican supervisors who refused to certify the local vote totals said they had no doubt their own county’s tally was accurate but were protesting the counts in other counties that gave Democratic candidates for governor, attorney general and secretary of state their victories.

Responding to the certification controversies, Mich-

igan’s Democratic legislature passed a law making clear that state and local canvassing boards must certify election totals. The two Arizona county supervisors are facing criminal charges filed by the state’s Democratic attorney general.

Democrats and nonpartisan groups say that the thousands of local election oversight boards across the country aren’t the place to contest ballot counts, and that state laws make clear they have no leeway on whether to sign off on their staff’s final tallies.

“Election authorities don’t have the discretion to reject the results of an election because of their vibes,” said Jonathan Diaz of the Campaign Legal Center, adding that lawsuits and recounts are the proper recourse. “They’re there to perform a function. They’re there to certify.”

But some Republicans don’t agree. Kory Langhofer, the attorney suing to overturn the election procedures manual’s directive in Arizona that was issued by the Democratic attorney general and secretary of state, said he didn’t support the effort to block certification in Cochise County in 2022. But, he argued, locally elected boards of supervisors have to have some discretion to police elections.

“It seems to me the system is stronger when you have multiple eyes on it,” Langhofer said. Of the efforts to block certification in 2020 and 2022, he added, “I hope that’s behind us.”

Democrats doubt that’s the case. They note that the America First Policy Institute, a pro-Trump organization run by former officials from his administration, filed the lawsuit in Georgia to let Fulton County Elections Board member Julie Adams vote against certifying elections. Four other board members voted to certify last month’s primary, but Adams abstained, contending she couldn’t accept the results given prior election administration problems in the county.

“This action will reestablish the role of board members as the ultimate parties responsible for ensuring elections in Fulton County are free from fraud, deceit, and abuse,” the institute wrote in its release announcing the lawsuit. The group did not respond to a request for comment.

Fulton County is the heart of the Democratic vote in Georgia, and anything that holds up its totals in November could help make it look like Trump has a large lead in the state.

“Trump and MAGA Republicans have made it clear they are planning to try to block certification of November’s election when they are defeated again, and this is a transparent attempt to set the stage for that fight,” Georgia Democratic Party chair and U.S. Rep. Nikema Williams said in a statement.

In Michigan’s Delta County, clerk Nancy Przewrocki, a Republican, said the two GOP canvassers had requested a hand recount of the votes, which is beyond the scope of their position. The canvassers eventually voted to certify the May election after receiving

a letter from State Elections Director Jonathan Brater reminding them of their duties and warning them of the consequences of failing to certify.

Still, Przewrocki said she’s concerned about what could happen in November if a similar situation arises.

“I can see this escalating, unfortunately. I’m trying to keep our voters confident in our voting equipment, and this is completely undermining it when there’s really nothing there,” Przewrocki said.

After the Delta County incident, Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson and Atty. Gen. Dana Nessel, both Democrats, issued a reminder to local canvassing boards throughout the state warning them of their legal obligation to certify election results based solely on vote returns.

If they don’t, there will be “swift action to ensure the legal certification of election results,” along with “possible civil and criminal charges against those members for their actions,” Benson warned.

Michigan is an example of the futility of the tactic. The new state law makes it clear that canvassing boards can’t block certification, but Benson said in an interview that she still worries such an effort, even if legally doomed, would help spread false allegations about the November election.

“Misinformation and talking points emerge that enable others — particularly politicians — to continue to cast doubt on the accuracy of election results,” she said.

Associated Press writers Riccardi and Cappelletti reported from Denver and Lansing, Mich., respectively. AP writers Jeff Amy in Atlanta and Morgan Lee in Santa Fe, N.M., contributed to this report.



# Coded ads for fentanyl common on Craigslist

[Craigslist, from A1] its lawyers did not respond to multiple requests for comment. The site's terms of use bar the sale of prescription pills and illegal drugs. Until April, typing certain letters into Craigslist's search bar would prompt predictive text suggestions for a variety of drug terms. After reporters began asking questions, the search function stopped offering many of those suspicious keywords, and the number of posts in the L.A. area that appeared to be openly selling fentanyl sharply declined.

Several other sites and apps almost eliminated drug postings years ago after scrutiny by law enforcement, yet drug dealers on Craigslist seemingly remained active, using a colorful assortment of code words to operate in plain sight.

"If you know, you know," Shover said. "And if not, it might not create a suspicion."

**Frosting and Fetty Wap**

The features that have made Craigslist appealing for drug dealers and buyers are some of the same reasons the low-tech site has endured for so long: It's free, easy to use, and anonymous, with no account needed to post and reply to listings.

Law enforcement officials say the convenience has enabled people to buy drugs more easily than in years past. There's no need to find someone who knows a dealer, or take the risk of making a buy on the street. All it takes is a phone or computer, and a few seconds to type some terms into a search bar.

"All those barriers that kept a lot of people away from drugs, those have been removed," said Bill Bodner, former special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Los Angeles field division. "You can live in Brentwood and get heroin delivered to your house in 20 minutes."

Users caught selling items prohibited by Craigslist's terms of use can have their listings removed and potentially face fines of \$4 per post, although it's unclear how that penalty is collected or how frequently people are actually asked to pay.

Posts that violate the rules can be flagged — either by other users, Craigslist staff or the platform's automated systems.

As a result, the academic and law enforcement experts said, dealers tend to get creative with coded language to evade detection.

Because heroin is sometimes referred to as China white, Shover explained, some dealers post ads offering "fine china." A 30-milligram blue oxycodone pill, she said, becomes a 30-piece blue tool set.

A list of "Slang Terms and Code Words" released by the DEA in 2018 includes "china, chinese food, and chinese buffet" as known heroin terms, along with "blues" for oxycodone.

Crystal meth becomes Christina Aguilera tickets, the UCLA researcher said. The singer's name has been used as a meth code word for decades, with a New York Post article from 2005 noting its use even then by Craigslist dealers.

"One giveaway is the number of ads," Shover said. "If someone is actually selling their blue china plates, they probably haven't put up 30 ads. Another tell is concert tickets for a concert that isn't happening."

Fentanyl — sometimes known as fetty or fet — has its own colorful array of code words: Confetti-flavored frosting, fettuccine or fettty, like the rapper Fetty Wap, according to the experts.

When three drug and law en-



Zurkow family

**HENRY ZURKOW** died of an overdose of fentanyl that he bought on Craigslist in 2022.

forcement experts reviewed a series of recent Craigslist listings containing those and other keywords, they confirmed the posts were almost certainly covert drug ads.

One L.A. Craigslist ad that raised eyebrows was posted in February, titled "White Boba Fett Action Figure." The seller did not respond to an inquiry, but there were red flags that Shover and Bodner said indicated a toy was not for sale.

"This is pure Boba Fett, before any influence of the Sith or other contaminating forces," the ad stated, probably using Star Wars references to tout the purity of the drugs on offer. "Serious fans only."

The seller noted the merchandise was "made in China" and warned that buyers would face "security checks." Approved customers could expect "consistent and fast" delivery, but the deals "must be in person."

Other sellers warned of similar security screenings for seemingly ordinary items. One titled "Fettucini Box — (6) fine china," promised buyers: "once you pass the verification process, you won't need another bulk supplier."

Another ad titled "Fish that are blue for sale" included a picture of a fish with "M30" scribbled over it. The shorthand has no obvious connection to undersea creatures, but Shover and Bodner say it's a common slang term for blue 30-milligram oxycodone pills and fentanyl-laced counterfeit versions of them.

Three people who posted suspicious ads on Craigslist this year confirmed in online messages that their thinly veiled listings for other goods were in fact offers for fentanyl.

One told The Times he'd been selling drugs through Craigslist for about five years. He said he considered it a reliable way to build his customer base without selling on a street corner.

The dealer — who requested anonymity because he feared arrest — said the ads he's used have also changed over time, usually in response to whatever terms get flagged as suspicious. He used to post Fetty Wap concert ticket listings, for example, but had to shift to other phrases.

"I've seen an ad for roofing tar," he said, explaining that it was actually a reference to black tar heroin. "They're trying to say they have fetty without being too blunt."

Another dealer who operates out of the San Fernando Valley and also requested anonymity, citing fear of police, said he had similar experiences on Craigslist. In one ad, titled "funFETti cupcakes w/ fun fet frosting," he offered "several delicious batches of cupcakes ready to go, of course the most popular flavor funfetti is always on hand!" and directed potential buyers to "Call or text anytime day or night."

The dealer who said he'd been

using the site for five years told Times reporters that he insists on meeting potential buyers in a public place and screens for law enforcement, in part by asking first-time customers to use drugs with him.

Getting high together, he said, also allows him to look for new users who might be more prone to overdose. He won't take on those sorts of clients, he said, adding that he always brings the overdose-reversing drug naloxone.

He said he's tried selling through other popular platforms — including Telegram, where large group chats have become a common venue for drug sales — but he keeps coming back to Craigslist.

"On Craigslist, you just have to know what to type for," he said. "Or you're not going to find it."

## 'Roxy board shorts'

Henry Zurkow was an honors student at the University of Colorado in Boulder, a mecca for two of his passions, mountaineering and snowboarding. A native of Scarsdale, N.Y., he had climbed all 46 peaks of the Adirondacks four times, according to his father, Peter Zurkow.

The elder Zurkow described his son as resilient and driven. But he said Henry had repeatedly battled sports injuries and was eventually prescribed painkillers. For a time, he struggled with addiction — to opioids and Xanax — but he went to rehab and his parents said they believed he'd stopped using.

But on the night of July 16, 2022, the 23-year-old had been having trouble sleeping and was in pain from an old snowboarding injury, according to his mother, Erica. Messages recovered from his phone show he texted a dealer seeking pills — it's unclear what type — and set up a buy that investigators believe took place in the Bronx, not far from his parents' home, where he spent much of that summer.

"We know he said to the person, 'I got your name and information off Craigslist,'" Peter Zurkow said.

The following morning, he found his son dead in his bedroom, folded over his desk with his head on his computer keyboard. According to the medical examiner, the cause of death was fentanyl intoxication — an overdose.

Now, Peter Zurkow thinks Craigslist should be doing more to keep dealers from using the platform as a digital billboard.

"I believe there is a burden on them to try to regulate content," he said.

Erica Zurkow agreed. If Craigslist had cracked down harder on drug-dealing, she said, "maybe our son and a lot of other people would be alive."

Today, the Zurkows try to temper their sorrow by doing what they can to help others avoid a similar fate.

"One way we deal with grief is we find ways to talk about Henry," Peter said. "We tell people to test their drugs, make sure Narcan is available, make sure there's friends around."

It's unclear whether Craigslist made any changes to crack down on drug sales in response to Henry's death — or any of the handful of others Times reporters identified through a review of news articles, medical examiner reports and court records.

A Costa Mesa man, Tobin Oliver Wood, 49, who prosecutors said posted a Craigslist ad offering "Roxy board shorts," was sentenced to more than five years in federal prison in 2022 for selling counterfeit oxycodone pills — also known as "roxys" — that caused the 2018 fentanyl overdose of a 32-year-old San Clemente man.



Photo illustration by JIM COOKE Los Angeles Times; photos via Getty Images; screenshots via Craigslist

Another Craigslist dealer, Andrew Madi, 25, of Hollywood, was sentenced in 2022 to more than 10 years in prison after the DEA said he used an ad for "roofing tar" to sell fentanyl to someone who died of an overdose afterward.

In response to questions about ongoing drug sales on Craigslist, Matthew Allen, special agent in charge of the DEA's L.A. division, said the agency "works to educate social media platforms and e-commerce companies about how their platforms are being used for the sale and distribution of deadly and dangerous illicit drugs."

Posts on Craigslist indicate some users are aware of drug slang being actively blocked on the site — while others are confused when their innocuous posts get inadvertently flagged as suspicious.

In August 2022, a seller made a posting with the title "wetsuit listing keeps getting flagged. Why?" in a Craigslist help forum.

"It makes no sense to me that this is repeatedly flagged for removal," the seller wrote before pasting the text of the ad, which included the following: "Roxy wetsuit toddler size 3T. Short legs. I'm reliable and pickup is easy."

Another forum user responded: "Don't say Roxy," adding, "It's a drug term. You used it multiple times in your ad, I bet that killed it."

## 'A lot of drug sales'

Craigslist has been around nearly as long as the public internet. Launched in 1995 as a small email list of local events in the Bay Area, there were concerns about illicit activity almost from the beginning.

Jessa Lingel, author of "An Internet for the People: The Politics and Promise of Craigslist," said the site "has a long-standing reputation for facilitating different kinds of problematic behavior, partly because it got its start in San Francisco and it reflects the countercultural vibes of San Francisco in the 1990s."

Today, Craigslist is one of the most-visited sites on the internet and generates more than \$600 million in revenue a year, by some estimates.

Much of that revenue comes from fees charged to post certain types of ads. Despite Craigslist's outsize popularity, the site has a small staff of around 50 people, which could be part of why it has struggled to rein in drug sales, Lingel said.

Yet in contrast to former competitor Backpage — which clashed with law enforcement over ads for sex work — Lingel said that Craigslist developed a "pretty solid track record of working with law enforcement" to fight such things as fraud and human trafficking. Whatever the reason, despite occasional busts and efforts by prosecutors to crack down, drug dealers still use the platform.

In a study published in 2020, an international team of university researchers who surveyed more than

1,200 Americans who bought drugs online found Craigslist was the third-most popular site, after Instagram and Facebook.

In Los Angeles, Craigslist was first identified as "a major new marketplace for illicit fentanyl" more than five years ago by the journalist Sam Quinones.

Bodner, the former DEA official, said the agency investigated in some cases, but there's only so much authorities can do given constraints on time, resources and law enforcement priorities in a metropolis such as L.A.

Unless someone dies, he said, it's not always worth the time and money involved in finding the ads and setting up an undercover buy for a small amount of drugs. Pushing site operators to crack down has been more effective, he said.

Around 2021, Bodner said, OfferUp — an app for selling used goods and clothes — became "the spot" for online drug sales.

"We wrote them a letter saying here's what's going on on your platform: There's a lot of drug sales," Bodner said.

The listings Bodner's investigators found featured a lot of the same slang that still peppered Craigslist ads this year: Roxy shorts, China sets and blue clothes with a 30-inch waist.

"We had a Zoom with OfferUp, and they kind of got on their people and tightened things up," he said.

Federal agents checked the platform before and after OfferUp's clampdown, Bodner said, and found that there were around 70% fewer ads featuring suspicious search terms.

Timothy Mackey, a professor at UC San Diego who studies the intersection of the illicit drug trade and social media, said the "relatively static and legacy system" on Craigslist could limit what data the company is able to collect, making it harder to block illicit activity than on an app such as OfferUp.

Until Times reporters contacted Craigslist last month, the site's search function still suggested a range of drug terms, including "pain pills" and "M30s," along with common slang such as "Roxy blue shorts" and "fine china white."

At the same time, other problematic keywords, such as "heroin" and "prostitute" were not suggested when the first few letters were typed.

Craigslist did not respond to questions about its predictive text and search functions, so it's unclear exactly what recent changes the site has or hasn't made — but many of those slang words for fentanyl have now stopped showing up as search suggestions.

Casey Fiesler, a tech ethics professor at the University of Colorado in Boulder, said regardless of why things changed, it's a sign the site is capable of taking action.

"You can't assume they know it's a problem," she said, "but you can say this is the kind of thing that a website should test for."



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# Woman regains home, wants to stay forever

[Home, from A1]

But even as the years passed, the house in El Sereno continued to remind her of a better life.

When she looked at her former home, she'd envision her Christmas decorations on the windows and her daughters running down the sidewalk. She'd imagine the smell of the albondigas and pozole she'd cooked on Sundays.

"All the big things that I've done. With my job. With my citizenship. With me making the right choices and doing the right things," recalled Merritt, 57. "Everything happened in that house."

Then, in March 2020, at the start of a global pandemic, a group of people decided to seize empty, Caltrans-owned homes in the northeast Los Angeles neighborhood. They called themselves "Reclaimers," arguing that their law-breaking was justified by the scandal of public property left vacant while political leaders ordered residents to stay at home and tens of thousands of people slept on the streets of Los Angeles.

On a drizzly Saturday morning, Merritt, who was living in an encampment nearby, looked on in astonishment as a man and two women occupied a Caltrans house a half-mile from where she'd lived 13 years earlier. Dozens of supporters carried in food and furniture to help them. Maybe they would help me too, she thought.

The next evening, she returned to the cottage on Poplar Boulevard. She saw a half-dozen activists, none of whom she knew, who were there to encourage her and prevent the police from stopping what they were about to do. She witnessed someone hop the fence by the driveway. She heard the crash of glass from the back window of the white cottage. She watched the front door open. She thanked God.

"The home always said, 'I'm waiting for you,'" Merritt said through tears. "The home said, 'Come back. Get well. Come back. Get well.'"

When Merritt moved into the house in December 1995, it seemed unlikely she'd be there for long. After 40 years of debate, during which Caltrans acquired 460 homes, apartment buildings and other properties in El Sereno and neighboring South Pasadena and Pasadena, the 710 Freeway was on the road to completion.

The route, which aimed to connect L.A.'s ports to the 210 Freeway, had a 4½-mile gap at the northern end. Then-Gov. Pete Wilson, calling the expansion "years overdue," forged ahead, and it looked like the houses Caltrans had purchased would be demolished.

But Merritt wasn't bothered by the freeway plans. She was used to moving.

Born in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, Merritt and her four younger siblings were raised in cardboard shelters with dirt floors and no electricity. Her father would be gone for months at a time, working in the fields in the United States, and her mother would disappear for days, leaving Merritt to beg neighbors for food. When she was 10, her mother paid someone to swim her through the Rio Grande and across the border into El Paso.

Nine years later, Merritt came to Los Angeles with a husband and two children. It was an abusive relationship that she eventually escaped, but there were others fueled by partners' violence and drug use.

When she was in her late 20s, Merritt entered another relationship and was living in an apartment in San Gabriel with her new partner, her two older children and a third born in 1992. She got a job with L.A. County's mental health department as a temp doing community outreach. It paid better than the housecleaning and fast-food jobs Merritt was used to, and the work gave her the confidence that she could make big decisions on her own.

Merritt was driving to a nearby Target when she first noticed the snug two-bedroom on Poplar Boulevard with a "For Rent" sign posted in the yard. She remembers peering inside the front windows.

"I don't know what it was," she said, but "I knew that was going to be my house."

When Merritt learned that Caltrans owned the house, she also found out that if the freeway wasn't built, Caltrans tenants would get the first opportunity to buy the properties. Her heart swelled at the thought that Poplar Boulevard might be her forever home, and she convinced her partner to move, provided that they could easily afford the \$715-a-month rent.

Ten months after they'd arrived on Poplar Boulevard, Merritt gave birth to her fourth child, a daughter named Kianna.

Merritt still marvels that, as a toddler, Kianna made one corner of the living room her own, always bringing her Legos and Polly Pocket toys there to play.



Photographs by GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

**MARIA MERRITT** says she enjoys the small pleasures of life, such as having a meal in her dining room at home in El Sereno.

"I still have dreams to this day of being in that house," said Kianna, now 27. "That just goes to show how many good memories I had in there."

A few years after Merritt's family arrived, the 710 Freeway expansion became mired in litigation once again, buying them more time. Merritt's relationship ended and her partner moved out, but she remained there with her four children, making memories.

Poplar Boulevard is where her kids helped her study to pass her U.S. citizenship exam. It's where she was promoted to a full-time job with the county and then promoted again to an executive secretary. It's where she grilled carne asada by the tall, shady tree in the backyard. It's where her son, Merritt's eldest child, learned to play "Pretty Woman" on the guitar in their garage, just because Merritt told him she loved the song.

His band serenaded her once they'd perfected the sound.

Despite her efforts, the life Merritt worked so hard to build started to disintegrate. She began falling behind on her rent, according to Caltrans' records, and a horrific accident sent her life into a spiral.

Her former partner and their daughter were involved in a head-on collision in 2004, and Kianna, then 7, was thrown against the dashboard. She fractured her pelvis, and her scalp was ripped from her forehead. It took 62 stitches to close the wound.

During her daughter's month-long hospital stay, Merritt didn't leave Kianna's side. Afterward, Merritt continued to miss days at work. In a deep depression, she began using methamphetamine.

Her sporadic rent payments stopped, and in the spring of 2007, Caltrans filed an eviction lawsuit against her. Agency records showed she owed nearly \$37,000. According to case filings, Merritt negotiated a settlement that would allow her to stay in the house if she repaid \$15,000 over a few months. But soon after she made the agreement she lost her job.

Two weeks later, Merritt left Poplar Boulevard before Caltrans could send sheriff's deputies to remove her.

Her children scattered. Her eldest daughter, by then a teenage mother herself, moved in with her boyfriend and took her middle sister with her. Kianna went with her father. Her son moved to Texas, smashing his guitar on the front door of the house before leaving.

"They lost their mother," Merritt said of her children. "I lost myself."

Her life became a cycle of drugs, violence and deprivation. She said she was sexually assaulted and ate stale food from trash containers. Mostly, she stayed around El Sereno, even though she was ashamed to walk into the stores where she used to shop. One year blurred into the next. Merritt ended up on the Island, a long-standing encampment on a dirt-filled median in the neighborhood.

Only when the rest of the world was shutting down was Merritt able to seize an opportunity for change.

In November 2019, a group of homeless mothers in Oakland took over an empty house owned by a house-flipping developer.



**MERRITT** holds a photo of her younger self that she found when she returned to her old home after 13 years away.

"The home always said, 'I'm waiting for you.' The home said, 'Come back. Get well. Come back. Get well.'"

— MARIA MERRITT, resident of El Sereno neighborhood

Inspired by their actions, Roberto Flores, a 76-year-old former Caltrans tenant, decided to organize a similar protest in El Sereno. Flores, who operates a private community center, said Caltrans' neglect of its homes was unconscionable, especially when vacancies piled up, the freeway project was finally canceled in 2018 and the Island continued to grow.

"Our sense of frustration and indignation was at its limit," Flores said.

Merritt approached Flores amid the chaos as the first Reclaimers were moving in. She haltingly explained that she used to live on Poplar Boulevard and asked for help getting into a house. Flores looked at Merritt, who by her own account was dirty, drunk and high, and told her that if she cleaned up and came back the following afternoon he'd see what he could do.

Merritt walked for hours to clear her head and strengthen her resolve. She found Flores at the appointed time the next day. He asked her what house she wanted, and Merritt didn't hesitate.

As the crowd around her cheered, Merritt stepped back into the home on Poplar Boulevard. Flores handed her a set of keys and new locks for the doors.

"Thirteen years," Merritt said. "Then *en un abrir y cerrar de ojos* — in a quick second — I'm here."

But once she was inside and looked past the graffiti in the front room and the smell of mold and mildew, she discovered that in her haste to leave 13 years earlier, she hadn't collected all her belongings.

Merritt pulled open a kitchen drawer and saw her old spoons. She opened the hallway closet to find a bigger surprise: a Polaroid photo of a long-ago Easter, all of her children gathered with baskets, colored eggs and broad smiles taken in the house's living room. Kianna, 5 months old, stood in a bouncer chewing a teething ring. At the bottom, Merritt had written their names and the date, March 28, 1997.

Merritt hugged the picture and sobbed.

She was alone and suffering through withdrawal, with no electricity or running water. The chill

of the night whipped through gaps in the windows and walls. The stench from the toilet she couldn't flush became overwhelming. When police banged on the windows and threatened to arrest her, she considered leaving. But the draw of Poplar Boulevard remained too strong.

A month into her stay, Merritt felt stable enough to invite a new partner, Darrel Eckhart, a 58-year-old Army veteran she'd met on the streets, to live with her. Those first days together were among the happiest she'd felt in years. He figured out how to turn on the water and electricity, and helped her find furniture.

But after three months together, Eckhart was killed when a drunk driver slammed into his car parked near the Island. The loss was devastating, and Merritt thought of taking her life.

At her lowest, she would retreat to the same corner in the living room where Kianna used to play as a toddler.

"With my eyes open, I would strive to look for the presence of my daughter and go back to those moments," Merritt said. "And it worked. It uplifted my heart. It uplifted my soul."

When her children learned that she was living on Poplar Boulevard again through news reports, Merritt said they were angry she'd broken the law, especially in such a public way.

"They were like, 'Mom, how dare you? You always taught us you work for what you have. We left the house when you knew that we weren't able to pay rent. You left to honor yourself, your values. And you went back? Leave,'" Merritt recalled.

Over time, however, some of the resistance softened. One of her daughters left a self-stick note on the front door congratulating her for escaping homelessness. Right before Christmas in 2020, Merritt spent time with Kianna and another daughter, the first time they'd gathered around the holidays in years.

They also celebrated the news that Merritt was going to be allowed to remain in El Sereno, albeit not in the house on Poplar Boulevard, which Caltrans had deemed unsafe.

Under pressure from activists, the state agency had arranged for the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles to allow the Reclaimers to live — temporarily — in publicly owned homes that had been renovated.

Merritt and 11 others signed rental agreements that would last for up to two years. In January 2021, she moved a half-mile away, holding out hope that she could go back to Poplar Boulevard once the

house had been repaired.

While Merritt was navigating the highs and lows of her return to the white cottage and subsequent move to another Caltrans property, the Reclaimers were hitting a wall.

On the night before Thanksgiving in 2020, a second coordinated effort to take over more Caltrans-owned homes in El Sereno failed. Police clad in riot gear used battering rams to enter properties and drag out occupiers while helicopters flew overhead and crowds spilled into the streets. More than 60 people were arrested.

The incident was the last straw for many neighbors, already fed up with drill-wielding outsiders peering into their windows searching for vacant homes. Elected officials came out definitively against the occupations, saying enough was enough. There's been no organized attempt at house seizures in the more than three years since.

And now, with their temporary rental agreements long since expired, Merritt and the other Reclaimers are facing eviction.

Tina Booth, an executive with the housing authority, said she's heartbroken that the Reclaimers did not accept Section 8 vouchers offered when they were living in the homes legally. With those subsidies, Booth said, they could have found apartments of their own and ended their housing insecurity.

Caltrans officials say the group has no right to remain. In recently filed court papers, agency lawyers referred to the Reclaimers as "criminal trespassers" and added that any harm that might befall them because of the evictions would be "self-inflicted."

But Merritt says the enduring connection to her home is too great for her to leave willingly.

She feels stable and has kicked her drug habit. She takes medicine for her depression, her application for Social Security payments has been approved, and she and Kianna have been working on their relationship.

Kianna has harbored years of hurt over her mother not being there for her. Her voice still breaks when remembering that Merritt missed her high school graduation.

Now they talk nearly every day. "Any time she can get with me, she loves that," Kianna said. "It's helping her a lot. It's healing me as well."

Meanwhile, Merritt vacillates between despair at the prospect of her eviction and elation when she dreams of returning to Poplar Boulevard. She remembers what she learned 29 years ago — if the freeway expansion was canceled, Caltrans tenants could buy their homes. That process has now begun. Under the rules outlined in the contracts, low-income families are allowed to purchase them at a discount, the only way they'd be able to afford property in El Sereno, where median home values top \$800,000.

According to Caltrans, Merritt doesn't qualify for the deal, but she's pleading with the agency for the opportunity to buy her old home. Merritt thinks she and her children could pool their money, and even pay back the rent she owes from 2007.

"I want to leave that house to my grandkids," Merritt said. "I want them knowing that Grandma didn't quit on them."

If she's able to move into the white cottage on Poplar Boulevard for the third time, Merritt is certain it would be hers for good.



# Other states balk at call for a gun amendment

**[Gun safety, from A1]** given him another opportunity to reach out to voters outside of California, widening his national appeal for a potential White House run in the future and creating an opportunity to expand his database of political supporters before his time as governor ends in two years.

Yet Newsom must still contend with the stubborn politics of the 2nd Amendment. Many lawmakers at the national and state level are reluctant to buck a powerful gun lobby and risk being accused of trying to dilute the constitutional right to bear arms.

The governor said he expected the slow progress, adding that support for a constitutional amendment on gun control could take 20 years to catch on.

“Come on, no one was naive about this,” Newsom said in a recent interview with The Times. “This has been done before, but not recently. It will have its fits and starts. It will have its champions and will have its setbacks.”

So far, the setbacks have been easier to spot.

Newsom’s plan would require two-thirds of states to pass resolutions supporting a constitutional convention. Through the convention, new constitutional gun safety measures would have to be ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures.

Newsom is seeking an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that requires universal background checks on gun purchases and raises the minimum age to purchase a firearm from 18 to 21. The governor wants the gathering of states to also result in a “reasonable” waiting period for all gun purchases and a prohibition on the sale of assault weapons to the public.

California lawmakers passed a resolution in September calling for a constitutional convention to consider the proposal.

The governor and his po-

litical aides began reaching out to other states after the California Legislature acted, hoping to find lawmakers around the country with compelling personal stories to lead the effort.

Some states have part-time Legislatures that meet for only a few months annually or every other year, and their lawmakers told Newsom’s aides it wasn’t feasible to pass a resolution this year, an advisor to the governor said.

In other states, legislators who advocate for gun control had already committed to their bill packages for 2024.

“And others specifically said, ‘Not right now; I mean, there’s electoral issues,’” Newsom said.

The governor said he’s had “dozens of conversations” on the proposal, but he and his political staff declined to name any states or individuals they have spoken with.

Newsom said he has discussed the constitutional amendment in every state he’s visited through his Campaign for Democracy, a political action committee that he formed to raise money for Democrats and to fight Republicans nationally in the 2024 election.

“So we’re talking to legislative leaders in all those red states,” he said.

Last year, a few weeks after his call for the constitutional convention, Newsom went to Idaho to meet with Democrats and raise funds through his PAC for President Biden’s reelection campaign.

Democrat Melissa Winthrow, the minority leader in the Idaho state Senate, said she never heard from the California governor.

“No, I have not spoken to Gov. Newsom,” Winthrow said. “I’m not aware of if he’s been in communication with anybody. I have not.”

Winthrow doesn’t see how Newsom’s proposal has a chance of passing in Idaho.

“This is a supermajority red state, probably one of the most conservative in the country, with the strictest abortion bans and so forth,” she said. “So you’re not going to see any movement to restrict anything with firearms.”

Winthrow said she’s not sure she could support Newsom’s resolution, because if a constitutional convention were to take place, her state would be represented by Republicans who would gut any amendment to restrict guns.

In California, some Democrats declined to back the measure after legal scholars warned that states might take up other issues at a constitutional convention.

There also are political realities in states like Idaho, where gun culture is so ingrained that Democrats largely avoid campaigning on the issue. Winthrow has introduced legislation to keep firearms from people convicted of domestic abuse and another bill to keep firearms from convicted pedophiles. Both failed.

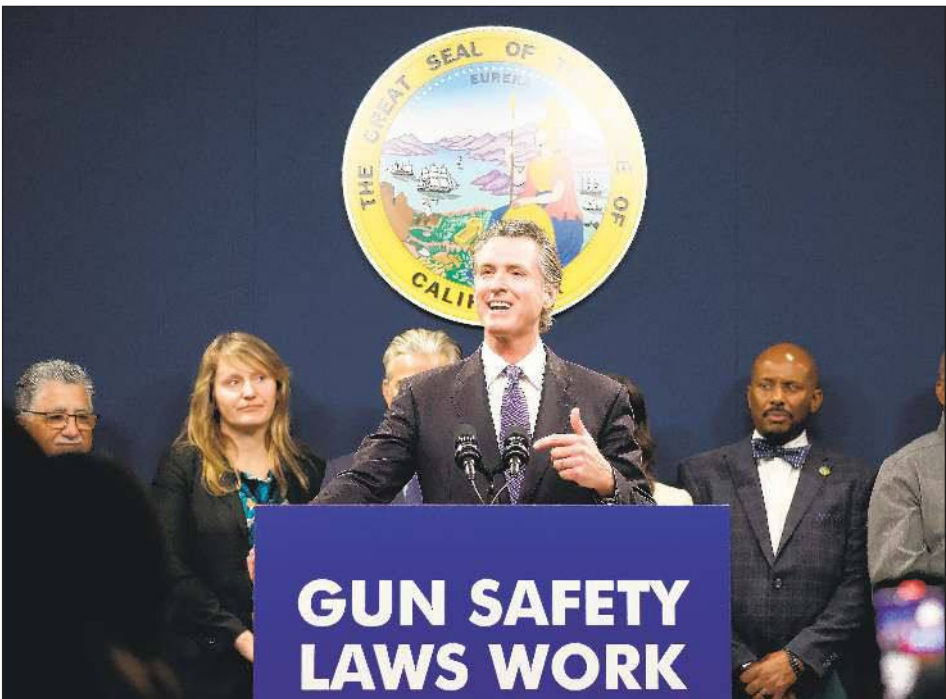
She can’t imagine a scenario in which Newsom’s proposal gains traction.

“There’s just no way the state is going to agree to that. It just isn’t going to happen. As I’ve described, the political climate here is such that it just wouldn’t even be on the table,” Winthrow said. “They would laugh.”

Newsom said he knew his proposal might not play well in some GOP-controlled states. But there are no signs it’s taken off in blue states either.

Despite Newsom’s cooperation with the Democratic leaders of other West Coast states on abortion access and curbing climate change, neither Oregon nor Washington has picked up the mantle of his gun control amendment.

“There has been no talk here of doing something similar,” said Aaron Wasser, a spokesman for Washing-



JUSTIN SULLIVAN Getty Images

**GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM**, seen at a 2023 news conference, has failed to get other states to support his proposal to amend the U.S. Constitution with new gun limits.

ton state Senate Democrats.

The state’s House Speaker Laurie Jinkins “has not had any discussions with Gov. Newsom about this topic,” said her spokesperson Jen Waldref.

“This is not a concept that has been considered by the Oregon Legislature,” said Lucas Bezerra, spokesman for Oregon House Democrats.

Newsom did not directly answer questions about whether a nationwide campaign to restrict guns could hurt Biden’s reelection bid if Republicans responded by claiming Democrats are out to take away firearms.

The governor said other issues, such as inflation, the cost of living and the economy were more top-of-mind to voters.

Newsom reiterated that his proposal would preserve the right of Americans to bear arms, and would focus strictly on gun safety that most Americans support. He was inspired by inaction in Congress and California’s own efforts to pass gun control laws that have been struck down by federal courts.

“This was done very thoughtfully in the context of where things actually are, and where the American people are in every state,” Newsom said.

Newsom’s political advisors said lawmakers in many

states are focused on their own elections or the presidential race this year, forcing the governor’s team to re-evaluate their strategy and timetable.

Newsom’s team shifted focus to building support on the local level this year before ramping up their effort in 2025.

“Since California passed the amendment last year, the campaign has been building a grassroots army of activists who will support a national right to safety in states across the country and working with legislators on bill introductions for 2025 when states begin a new legislative session,” said Nathan Click, a spokesperson for Newsom.

Click said the campaign has “signed up over a million Americans to support the right to safety in their states.” More than 1,500 have completed volunteer training to help in their states and 10,000 volunteers will be trained by early 2025 when the bill introductions begin, he said.

Newsom’s Campaign for Democracy PAC sent out an email to its fundraising list in early May seeking volunteers.

The goal for volunteers laid out in the email was twofold: to turn out voters across the country who will elect Democrats and to get the Right to Safety amend-

ment introduced in more states next year.

But the odds of Newsom building a successful movement are slim, because it’s so difficult to amend the Constitution, said University of Texas law school professor Sanford Levinson.

“He’s swimming upstream in terms of trying to persuade people that a constitutional amendment regarding guns is going to be a very fruitful way of spending their time,” Levinson said.

“No knowledgeable person about contemporary politics could really believe that that proposal is going to take off nationally with other state legislatures,” he said.

Newsom’s pitch echoes a similar move the governor of Texas once made from the opposite end of the political spectrum.

In 2016, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott called for a convention of the states to make nine amendments to the U.S. Constitution. They included a slew of conservative goals to limit federal power and require a balanced federal budget, which Abbott detailed in a 92-page plan.

The Texas Legislature passed the resolution the next year. But not much happened after that.

“He obviously thought that it might give him some political mileage,” Levinson said. “And it clearly didn’t.”

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Los Angeles Times



# Wealthy Silicon Valley donors switch to Trump

[Silicon Valley, from A1]  
“It was a couple hours of high-quality networking in a very beautiful private home,” said Harmeet Dhillon, California’s Republican national committee-woman and a San Francisco-based attorney who acts as an official legal surrogate for the Trump campaign. “The seats were all filled. It was totally packed.”  
The gathering raised \$12 million, Dhillon added.

Across the country, tech leaders and employees have poured millions into politics. People who work in the communications and electronics sector, which includes technology companies, have given \$18.1 million to Biden and groups supporting his campaign, and \$1.4 million to Trump and organizations backing his effort this year, according to campaign finance data released May 21 by the Federal Election Commission.

The analysis of the contributions was conducted by Open Secrets, a nonpartisan group that tracks electoral finances. The total donated to candidate committees and outside groups supporting the campaigns amounted to \$25.8 million, with 71.7% going to Democrats and 22.1% to Republicans.

In Silicon Valley itself — the geographic area that is considered the hub of the tech industry and includes San Jose, Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Mountain View, Cupertino, Santa Clara, Redwood City and Sunnyvale — about



JOSH EDELSON AFP/Getty Images

**TRUMP SUPPORTERS** rally in San Francisco before a Thursday night fundraiser that an organizer said netted \$12 million for the ex-president’s campaign.

3% of donors who gave to a Democratic nominee in 2016 or 2020 donated to Trump in the following cycle, a Times analysis of FEC data found. While many tech leaders and workers live in these cities, many other residents of this region do not work in the industry.

“Silicon Valley and the Bay Area are the beating heart of the global innovation ecosystem. Given the region’s economic dynamism, as well as its cultural, technological and social impact, it should come as no

surprise that more candidates are engaging with our business leaders,” Ahmad Thomas, chief executive of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, said in a statement.

While a sliver of the population is growing attracted to Trump’s friendliness toward emerging technologies such as crypto, Silicon Valley remains reliably Democratic. The region’s tech world is known for its penchant for disruption, with a historic libertarian streak.

“Obviously there’s been some defection, but the reality is the vast majority are still supporting the president,” said Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Fremont), who represents Silicon Valley in Congress.

On Wednesday, Vice President Kamala Harris attended a fundraiser in Oakland Hills and another in San Francisco with about 250 to 300 attendees, organizers said. During a 13-minute speech, she called for a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war, and for Hamas to return the remaining hostages to Israel.

Her remarks did not satisfy the crowd of protesters outside the San Francisco venue, who shouted “Shame on you!” as Harris arrived.

Khanna recently convened 100 tech leaders for a retreat in Napa to inspire them to stick with the Biden administration.

“Democrats need to have a clear vision on celebrating entrepreneurship,” Khanna said. “Yes, there needs to be guardrails and smart regulation, but we need to be for innovation. We need to be for entrepreneurship. We need to be for wealth generation.

We need to be future oriented.”

But for some Silicon Valley tech executives, being future-oriented means campaigning for Trump.

In the latest episode of their podcast, “All-In,” Sacks and his co-host for the fundraiser, Chamath Palihapitiya, emphasized that they had previously hosted fundraisers for independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Trump’s former Republican opponent Vivek Ramaswamy.

Palihapitiya, a self-described “apolitical” person, said he had donated to Democrats in the past, even as he joined Sacks for the Trump fundraiser Thursday. The two podcasters joked about the flak their other two co-hosts, Jason Calacanis and David Friedberg, were getting for associating with Trump supporters.

“I think you guys are getting more blowback, and that’s an indication of just sort of the cowardly response to it. It’s like a cancellation tactic,” Sacks said. “And I think the reason why they’re doing that is because, quite frankly, there’s a lot of preference falsification going on in Silicon Valley.”

Cian O’Brien, an entrepreneur and former vice president for a Sunnyvale tech company, said he has become a pariah in Silicon Valley since pledging his allegiance to Trump. He said he had supported Democrats throughout his life, though he did not vote for President Obama.

After donating to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s campaign in 2016, O’Brien, 57, said he switched his support to Trump after he saw how “the apparatus” — media and other governmental institutions — went against him.

Nibbling on sliders with American flag toothpicks, mini lobster rolls and a desert buffet, attendees to the Sacks fundraiser included the Winklevooss twins, famed for their feud with Mark Zuckerberg about the creation of Facebook; Coinbase executives; and some AI

leaders. Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance and North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, who are reportedly being vetted as Trump’s potential running mates, also attended.

Trump spoke for about an hour on a wide range of topics, including AI, cryptocurrency and being the victim of deepfakes, prompting a young AI executive to give a detailed explanation about using encrypted keys. He also argued that the world was safer under his administration, the border more secure, and he railed against transgender women being allowed to play in women’s sports.

The former president did not directly address the 34 felony counts he was convicted of May 30, but he spoke broadly about the judicial system, Dhillon said.

“He was in great spirits. He said that there were some terrible judges out there. He didn’t get specific; he knows he’s under a gag order,” she said. “He said Republican judges go out of their way, bend over backward to look like they’re being fair, to be fair to the other side. And that Democrats are salivating, can’t wait to get their hands on the gavel and do what they want politically.”

Outside Sacks’ multimillion-dollar residence, police barricaded six city blocks surrounding the Pacific Heights residential enclave. Some attendees rolled up inside black Escalades, while other Trump supporters came on foot or motorcycle. Many arrived in pickup trucks waving large flags that read “Trump 2024.” One driver exchanged fist bumps with a bystander while at a stop sign. A group of middle school-aged girls stood nearby, donning Trump baseball caps.

“It’s a historical event,” said Jen Kelly, 60, of Sacramento, who called herself a lifelong Republican. “I know it’s a private fundraiser, but the fact that Trump is in California is very rare.”

Sosa reported from San Francisco. Ahn, Mehta and Pinho reported from Los Angeles.

## Businessman testifies he promised big bribe for Sen. Menendez’s help

ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — A New Jersey businessman took his star turn on the witness stand in the bribery case against Sen. Robert Menendez, telling a jury on Friday that he believed he had a \$200,000-\$250,000 deal in 2018 for the Democrat to pressure the New Jersey attorney general’s office to stop investigating his friends and family.

Jose Uribe testified in the afternoon in Manhattan federal court, providing key testimony against Menendez and two other businessmen charged in a conspiracy along with the senator’s wife, Nadine Menendez. In the coming week, Menendez’s lawyers will get to cross-examine Uribe, a naturalized U.S. citizen.

“Next week we get the truth,” Menendez said Friday just before stepping into a car that carried him away from Manhattan federal court, where he has been on trial for the last month. Although he generally speaks briefly in Spanish each day as he leaves court, he made the comment about truth in English.

Uribe, 57, who pleaded guilty to charges in a March cooperation deal, was the star witness for the government in its bid to win a conviction against the senator, who once held the powerful post of Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair. He was forced out of the post af-

ter charges were lodged against him last fall.

Menendez, 70, has pleaded not guilty to charges that he accepted gold bars, cash and a luxury car in return for doing favors for the businessmen. Two businessmen and Nadine Menendez also have pleaded not guilty. Nadine Menendez’s trial was postponed until at least July after she was diagnosed with cancer.

Uribe testified that he was close friends with Wael Hana, who is on trial with Menendez, when Hana told him in early 2018 that New Jersey state criminal investigations swirling around a trucking business owned by Uribe’s friend and around Uribe’s own insurance business could be largely put to rest if he were willing to spend \$200,000 to \$250,000.

Uribe said Hana told him that he would go to Nadine Arslanian, who had begun dating Menendez that year, and then “Nadine would go to Senator Menendez.”

Uribe said he held a July 13, 2018, political fundraiser for Menendez, which the senator attended, raising \$50,000. Uribe attended an afterparty with Menendez and Arslanian but said there was no mention of the work he expected Menendez to do on his behalf. “It was a crowded and loud place,” he said.

He said his confidence that the deal was working faded in the fall when an investigator from the attorney general’s office asked to in-

terview his employee. “I was not happy,” Uribe said.

Assistant U.S. Atty. Lara Pomerantz showed jurors a series of text messages between Uribe and Hana in which Uribe pressed his friend to get the senator to stop the criminal probes.

Hana arranged for Uribe to have dinner with Menendez and Arslanian at a restaurant in October 2018, but Uribe testified there was no mention of the deal, saying: “It was a pointless, a pointless meeting.”

Uribe said he began communicating directly with Arslanian in March 2019 and promised that he would buy her a car if she delivered on the deal to get the senator to shut down New Jersey criminal probes. “She agreed to the terms,” he said.

On Thursday, former New Jersey Atty. Gen. Gurbir Grewal testified that Menendez, in an early 2019 call and in a September 2019 meeting, tried to talk to him about a criminal probe. Grewal said he refused, telling Menendez to contact defense lawyers so they could reach out to trial-level prosecutors or the judge.

Menendez is also accused of accepting bribes in exchange for using his international clout to help associates get lucrative business deals with the governments of Egypt and Qatar.

Uribe pleaded guilty in March, saying he gave Nadine Menendez a Mercedes-Benz in return for her husband’s help.

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# BUSINESS

A Hollywood movie can be two things at the same time: It can be a great piece of art and also a poor business decision.

It often takes years to find out if the first designation applies. With the second, people generally know right away.

“Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga” is a commercial bomb. There’s no way around it.

The George Miller-directed prequel opened to a disappointing \$32 million during the long Memorial Day weekend. In its second go-around, it dropped 59%, coming in third place behind Sony Pictures’ animated “The Garfield Movie” and Paramount Pictures’ John Krasinski-directed hybrid “If.”

The box office tally so far of \$50 million domestic (\$114 million worldwide) for “Furiosa,” which had a \$168-million production budget, is just plain bad, adding to the summer woes that have the movie exhibition industry in a spiral of existential dread once again.

The numbers for theater chains are worrying overall, and May did nothing to quell the trepidation that kicked off in April with the sluggish “The Fall Guy.”

According to David A. Gross’s FranchiseRe newsletter — a reliable source of level-headed box office analysis — May domestic grosses were down 43% from the average of the three years before the COVID-19 pandemic. Ticket sales so far this year have fallen nearly 25% from the same period in 2023.

The reasons for the decline are fairly straightforward. I tend to agree with Gross’ perspective: For a variety of reasons, including production delays induced by last year’s writers’ and actors’ strikes and a general pullback by cost-conscious studios, there haven’t been enough movies, and the ones that have been released aren’t hitting the way they need to.

The hollowed-out release schedule is doing the expected damage. There were no new releases in the domestic top five last weekend. This week, Sony is trying to liven things up with “Bad Boys: Ride or Die.”

“Moviegoing thrives on momentum and rhythm: one strong movie after another bringing fans to the multiplex once or more per month,” Gross wrote. “Right now, the schedule is thin, several big releases fell short, and the original stories are not breaking through



Los Angeles Times photo illustration; Warner Bros. Pictures; Unsplash

## THE WIDE SHOT

# With tragic box office returns, Hollywood reaps what it sowed

‘Furiosa’ is the latest bomb in a hollowed-out theatrical release schedule

By Ryan Faughnder

(with the exception of ‘If’).”

It’s clear to me that there are broader structural issues at work. The combination of the pandemic theater closures, the six-month production disruption and the age of post-streaming-wars austerity has conspired to constrict the supply of studio films in theaters. But there’s also the increasing consumer mind-share taken up by streaming, video games, social media and cheap, free, short-form online content.

Add to that the entertainment giants’ self-sabotaging strategy of shortening the theatrical window in a way that has trained some viewers to wait at home for any-

thing other than a “Barbenheimer”-level cultural phenomenon. There’s also the fact that consumer motivations have changed in a fundamental way. If seeing a movie in theaters doesn’t have social media cachet, why bother paying a babysitter?

But these issues don’t explain the failure of “Furiosa,” which was fairly predictable. Prequels are a tough sell for audiences. How many have actually succeeded in recent years? Certainly not “Solo: A Star Wars Story.” (By the way, maybe stop putting “a so-and-so story and/or saga” in movie titles. That formulation doesn’t appear to be enticing consumers.) Para-

mount will test the audience’s appetite for prequels again this month with “A Quiet Place: Day One,” an extension of its successful horror franchise.

The struggles of “Furiosa” have inspired think pieces positing that Hollywood has fallen victim to its own sky-high, irrational box office expectations. My own reaction to the “Furiosa” performance is narrower and more basic: The movie just didn’t work as a commercial product.

“Mad Max: Fury Road,” which grossed \$380 million globally, wasn’t a big hit in the first place, though its reputation has grown massively since its 2015 debut. So

yes, betting on a prequel was a gamble, banking on the hope that people outside the core demographic of men over 35 would care. Generally speaking, they didn’t.

A big-budget bomb is undoubtedly bad news for Warner Bros. But it says something about the state of the film business that the fate of Warner Bros. Discovery hinges more on whether Chief Executive David Zaslav can hold onto the NBA rights for TNT.

So yes, film fans can be grateful that “Furiosa” exists and disappointed that it flopped. But while the film depicts the aftermath of a terrifying apocalypse, it needn’t be, by itself, a sign of one.

# Pros and cons of Netflix weighing the TV news business

The streaming giant’s embrace of live sports and ads makes it look like broadcast, cable. Could agenda change?

By Stephen Battaglio

When Netflix announced last month that it had acquired the rights to two NFL football games to stream on Christmas Day, TV news agents were buzzing.

If the streaming behemoth is getting into sports — after saying for so long that it wouldn’t — could live news shows be far behind as the Los Gatos, Calif., streaming giant diversifies its programming roster?

Think of the ease of a button on the Netflix home screen that could take users to a breaking story, such as last month’s guilty verdict in former President Trump’s hush money trial in New York. Or consider how Netflix, which has 270 million users worldwide, could send out an alert to get viewers to watch coverage of the State of the Union address or a presidential debate.

Nielsen data for April show that Netflix is the second most-watched source for television viewing, accounting for 7.6% of all TV consumption behind YouTube’s 9.6%. Live news would give users another reason to log in at a time when they are looking to consolidate the number of streaming services they pay for each month.

Also, it would expand on what Netflix is doing with live broadcasts in other gen-

res, such as the company’s star-studded “The Roast of Tom Brady” and the Netflix Slam tennis tournament.

Last year, Netflix added a subscriber tier where users who sit through sponsor messages pay a lower monthly fee. Live content such as the NFL and the WWE’s weekly “Raw” show (coming to Netflix next year) will have commercials, bringing Netflix ad revenue in addition to subscriber fees. The company demonstrated its commitment to capturing a share of the TV ad market with its first glitzy, in-person upfront sales presentation in New York last month.

Live news is an effective way to get audiences to sit through ads. After diving into sports, news could be a logical next step for the company as it seeks to become viewers’ one-stop shop for TV viewing.

It would certainly be a welcome development for people who represent on-air news talent. The traditional TV networks that pay their clients handsomely are losing audience and revenue. Some agents fear significant downsizing and cost-cutting after the 2024 presidential election in November and nothing would lift their spirits more than having a new, deep-pocketed bidder enter the playing field.

The company has internally discussed the opportunities in news, just as it has for many formats on traditional TV that attract audiences. But when asked about any plans along those lines, a Netflix representative cited a recent interview with Netflix Chief Executive Ted Sarandos in which he



RICHARD DREW Associated Press

**SOME** doubt Netflix would want to take on the pressures of entering a crowded, competitive news field.

said the platform has no plans to pursue breaking news.

But what the TV industry has learned about Netflix is that it can quickly change its mind.

“Netflix also said they were never going to do sports, right?” said Bill Hague, executive vice president for Magid, a media consulting company. “And they said they were never going to do advertising and they’ve done that. These are not firm lines in the sand.”

Still, veterans of the TV news business have some advice for Netflix: Don’t do it.

“I think it would be ill-advised for Netflix to get into live news,” said Andrew Heyward, a former president of CBS News who now is a strategic advisor to local TV stations. “There are excellent players doing it now who are struggling.”

One reason is that news is not quite like sports. League media rights fees have esca-

lated in recent years, because live game telecasts are the most reliable way to attract large audiences for appointment viewing. The buyers of those rights have some degree of certainty of what they are getting when they sign the deal. Not so with news.

“In sports you know where the cameras are beforehand and everything is exclusive,” Heyward said. “The big difference between sports and news is having to pay to be prepared for the unexpected. It’s a very unattractive financial proposition.”

News is not only unpredictable but expensive to produce and perishable after it goes on the air. Breaking coverage is not exclusive to a single outlet. Live feeds of events are now ubiquitous in the streaming and social media era.

Internet-connected televisions give consumers the news through free, ad-supported streaming channels,

such as CBS News 24/7 or NBC News Now, without charging for a subscription.

As Heyward noted, there isn’t enough demand for the news content already available.

Cable news remains highly profitable, but cord-cutting is slowly depriving companies of the subscriber fees that have sustained the businesses for decades. Younger consumers are bypassing traditional TV and not developing the habit of news viewing (although many network news programs are repeated on their favorite platform, YouTube).

News sources across the media — from newspapers to podcasts — are suffering significant audience declines and downsizing after the heady years of the Trump White House.

Some legacy media executives probably have daydreams about exiting the news business as the path to profitability becomes more challenging. Last year, Walt Disney Co. Chief Executive Bob Iger publicly said the company’s linear TV networks, which includes ABC News, were not core to the company’s business and he could envision spinning them off.

He later backtracked and said ABC was not for sale.

The stir caused by Iger’s remarks demonstrates how news is ingrained in the culture of the broadcast business. In the early decades of TV, it was acceptable for news to be a financial loss leader. The news divisions were considered a public service necessary to maintain the networks’ right to use the airwaves for free.

They also built stature for their parent companies. Affiliate stations still depend on the national broadcast networks for news to supplement their own local coverage. News provides a brand identity for networks, right down to the logo painted on production trucks that show up for live shoots on a neighborhood corner. Networks became more cost conscious about news when the business matured and shareholders demanded better financial performance.

Veteran news executives doubt Netflix would want to take on the pressures of entering a crowded, competitive field that invites scrutiny, requires transparency and often creates controversy. “It’s a big expense and it’s a headache,” said one former broadcast network chief.

Netflix would be better off licensing programs produced by an existing news organization that already has a news-gathering infrastructure in place, several TV executives said. (Netflix carried original shows from CNN before Warner Bros. Discovery moved them over to its streaming service Max, which now offers a streaming feed of the channel.)

While news is not on Netflix’s agenda now, Magid’s Hague expects the company to respond if the need arises.

“If you’re going to try to reduce subscriber churn and increase lifetime value of your service, you have to really provide a very complete meal to your consumers,” said Hague. “I think they’re playing with what’s the right mix — and that mix will always change.”



PERSONAL FINANCE

# Thinking about trying a no-buy year? A few tips

Avoiding spending on nonessential items can be hard. For starters, consider taking it one month at a time.

By ADRIANA MORGA

NEW YORK — The rules of a no-buy challenge are self-imposed and simple: Make a list of the nonessential items you won't spend money on for a set period of time and stick to it. Easier said than done.

Many people start such challenges at the beginning of the year and commit to keep going until the end of it. But any time can be the right one for those looking to tackle their credit card debt, declutter their homes or to spend less time shopping. Some challenge participants begin with a no-spend month.

"I commend anyone who realizes they're just buying too much because North America is very consumer-focused and there's too much waste," said Carrie Rattle, the CEO of financial coaching company Behavioral Cents.

Thinking of what you would be better off living without? These are some recommendations from experts and people already participating in the challenge.

### Identify your weaknesses

Whether it's makeup, ordering takeout food or buying unnecessary trinkets in the \$1 section at Target, knowing your vulnerabilities will help you make a realistic plan for staying on track.

Before starting her no-buy year, Mia Westrap, a PhD student in Southamp-



GREGORY BULL Associated Press

**AMEA WADSWORTH** of San Diego pledged not to buy new clothing items and prioritized spending on experiences with her loved ones.

ton, England, took a close look at what she spent money on during the previous few months. She decided that unnecessary food and beverages were her weakness.

"I figured out that I was spending four figures on just carbonated drinks and Pepsi Max," she said.

### Make your own rules

One of the fun parts of a no-buy challenge is that

there are no set rules. Individuals choose what to include and exclude.

San Diego resident Amea Wadsworth, 22, used to love spending hours looking at clothes and quirky knick-knacks at Target and Goodwill. But when she moved back home after graduating from college, she realized how many things she had accumulated through the years.

"When I have those cluttering moments and I look through all my stuff, I

was finding things that I bought and spent a lot of money on and then never ended up wearing," Wadsworth said.

For her challenge, she chose to not buy new clothing items and prioritized spending on experiences with her loved ones. Wadsworth also started her challenge by doing it month by month.

Writing down the rules that fit your needs may help you stay on track. However, it's also fine to tweak some of

the rules as you move along in your experience.

### Rather than buying, write it down

Finances are very connected to emotions, and emotions sometimes can make you feel like buying something you don't need. When Wadsworth feels an impulse to get something she saw on social media or at a store, she writes it down instead of immediately purchasing the item.

At the end of the month, she reviews the list and decides what, if anything, still is worth buying.

"I look back and I see how many things I wrote, and I'm like, 'I'm glad that I didn't buy that because I really didn't need it,'" Wadsworth said.

If you impulse buy, it might be helpful to write down the things you want to purchase and take some time to think further about the utility of the item.

### Unsubscribe and unfollow

Between pop-up promotions and influencers swooning over new merchandise, social media can be a trigger for unnecessary shopping, according to Courtney Alev, a consumer financial advocate at Credit Karma.

If you think screen time is compounding your overspending habit, Alev recom-

mends taking a break from following accounts that bring on the urge to pull out a credit card.

### Be gentle on yourself

When Westrap began her no-buy year, she felt like the universe was conspiring against her. Her car broke down one month, and the next she received an expensive fine for an overdue parking ticket she was unaware of. Unexpected expenses or weak moments happen to everyone, and it's OK if you don't follow your no-buy year rules exactly as you had planned. The effort matters.

"If you fail, you probably need a bit more help. You are not a failure. You have simply failed at one method," Rattle said. "And that's really important because I don't want people to feel dejected."

Building a new habit and managing your finances can be difficult. Try to be gentle with yourself in the process.

Morga writes for the Associated Press.

MONEY TALK

## Ex-wife lent money. What can he do?

Man's options include asking for the funds back and going to small claims court.

By LIZ WESTON

**Dear Liz:** I recently found out that my ex lent one of her former bosses \$2,500 to get his brother out of jail on bond. My ex took the money out of a joint account that I had opened with the inheritance I got when my dad died. It's now been four years and I haven't received a penny of the loan back. I could really use the money now as I have medical bills to pay. Question is who do I go after? My ex or the boss?

**Answer:** You may have read in this column that inheritances can be kept as separate property, even in community property states where other assets acquired during marriage are generally considered jointly owned.

An inheritance can lose its status as separate property, however, if it's commingled with joint funds. That's what you did when you opened a joint account with the money: You gave your ex access to the funds.

You certainly can ask the ex and the boss to give the money back. You could try small claims court if that doesn't work. You also could hire an attorney, but the costs of trying to get the loan repaid may well exceed

the amount at stake.

### Making amends to child cut out of will

**Dear Liz:** My parents wrote my youngest daughter out of their will (my other children were left in). As both parents are now gone, I am in the process of settling the estate. I feel horrible that my parents did this.

My daughter is very upset with me and her siblings for not sharing the inheritance. I am under the impression that there is nothing we can do about the will.

Having said that, I would like to give my daughter a good amount of money but I believe I can't give more than \$18,000 a year. Am I correct in my two assumptions?

**Answer:** Yes and no.

Yes, as the executor of the estate, you're bound to carry out your parents' wishes as expressed in their estate planning documents.

But no, there's no limit to how much money you can give someone.

Gifts over a certain size — which is \$18,000 this year — have to be reported to the IRS. But you won't owe gift taxes until the amounts you give away over the annual limit exceed your lifetime limit, which is currently \$13.61 million.

That said, a large enough gift could have an impact on your own estate. Consider getting advice from your estate planning attorney before you proceed.

### Is old age reason to cancel credit cards?

**Dear Liz:** Recently, someone asked if closing a credit card would be worth the hassle and you responded that there is no compelling reason to do so and in fact, it might hurt your credit scores.

As an older person, I can think of two good reasons: theft and fraud. Many of us of a certain age no longer carry a mortgage or other debt. But, I am finding it harder to keep track of my finances. I would like to cancel three of my five credit cards for that reason.

**Answer:** You misquoted my response. What I actually wrote was, "If there's no compelling reason to close a card, you might consider leaving the account open and using the card occasionally to prevent the issuer from closing it."

Wanting to reduce your risk is reason enough to close a card account. All of us would be smart to consider simplifying our finances as we get older, says Carolyn McClanahan, a certified financial planner and physician in Jacksonville, Fla.

You also might think about who could help you manage your finances as the task gets more difficult.

A legal document called a power of attorney allows you to name a trusted person to take over should you become incapacitated. You can familiarize this person with your finances and

consider giving them online access to your accounts so they can help you spot fraud, theft or missed due dates.

Involving them now, when you can help guide them, is generally better than waiting for a crisis and hoping they can figure everything out on their own.

Liz Weston, Certified Financial Planner®, is a personal finance columnist. Questions may be sent to her at 3940 Laurel Canyon Blvd., No. 238, Studio City, CA 91604, or by using the "Contact" form at asklizweston.com.

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ELISE AMENDOLA Associated Press

**A PERSON'S** desire to reduce their risk of becoming a victim of theft or fraud is reason enough to close a credit card account, a certified financial planner says.



# School bond should include money for trees and grass

Replacing asphalt with greenery is important for children’s health — and a climate change investment.

SCHOOLS SHOULD be a refuge for children to learn and play. But many of California’s K-12 school campuses are the opposite: hot, barren, fenced-in and paved-over compounds that draw comparisons to parking lots or prison yards. Asphalt-dominated schoolyards are not only detrimental to learning, health and well-being, they’re inhumane.

Changing that is an urgent matter as climate change drives more frequent and severe heat waves into spring and fall when school is in session. Allowing kids to be exposed to sweltering conditions, whether they are inside the classroom or outside at recess, is unacceptable in a state that calls itself a climate leader.

That should be front of mind as California lawmakers negotiate a \$14-billion school facilities bond measure for the November ballot. Teachers, administrators, environmentalists and community groups are urging that \$1 billion, or about 7% of the money, be set aside for school greening projects to remove asphalt and replace it with green space. With this approach, schools would get more than just building improvements and repairs. They’d get shade trees and shrubs, play areas with grass, boulders and logs and cool, permeable surfaces including mulch and decomposed granite that let water seep into the ground.

Legislators and Gov. Gavin Newsom are still hashing out the details of the bond proposal, including whether any money should be allocated to community colleges and public universities. The amount is likely

to shrink over the next few weeks as they weigh it alongside another potential bond measure focused on projects to help communities adapt to climate change. They should make room in the school bond for campus greening projects.

The Assembly version of the school facilities bond would set aside a portion of the funds “for projects to address climate change impacts on school facilities.” But some lawmakers seem reluctant to earmark a portion of the bond for campus greening projects. They warn that doing so would take away from basic school infrastructure needs, such as upgrading antiquated plumbing, electrical and air-conditioning systems.

But the reality is that schools need to do both — modernize their facilities and green their campuses.

Newsom and lawmakers should see this as an opportunity to treat school campuses more holistically by funding improvements both indoors and outdoors to protect students and adapt to worsening extremes under climate change. They can show communities that they are taking meaningful action by setting aside a small percentage of this money to protect children where they spend the most time outside of their homes.

Advocates for the funding set-aside argue that school greening projects will help sell the bond measure and make voters more likely to support it at the ballot box.

They’re probably right. These projects are wildly popular with parents and the community, so much so that some schools have seen their enrollment go up after they replaced asphalt with shade trees, plants, grassy play areas, edible gardens and outdoor classrooms, according to LAUSD board President Jackie Goldberg. Other supporters include United Teachers Los Angeles and dozens of environmental justice and conservation groups.



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

**PARENTS** and community members demand LAUSD officials address sweltering school conditions during a historic heat wave in September 2022.

Voter support on a crowded ballot should be a concern. California voters rejected a similar school bond measure four years ago.

The desolate state of many schoolyards is an ongoing hazard to kids and an environmental injustice, hitting disproportionately in low-income communities of color that already suffer from a lack of shade and park space and more hard surfaces that expose them to higher temperatures.

Schoolyards with expanses of hard surfaces absorb and radiate heat throughout the campus, contributing to hotter classrooms that are linked to lower test scores and cause heat-related illnesses, dehydration, burns and other injuries. When it’s 92 degrees outside, a school’s asphalt can reach a surface temperature of 149 degrees and rubber mats around playground equipment can hit 165, hot enough to burn the skin within seconds.

The state already has a head start in addressing this. As part of its revamped ex-

treme heat response plan, more than 160 California schools have been awarded a total of \$121 million in state funds to design or build school greening projects. But dozens more were left out because of insufficient funding, and billions of dollars in proposed cuts to state climate efforts now cloud the future of those programs.

Years of severe heat waves and parent demands for action have forced school districts including L.A. Unified to finally get working on a problem they long neglected. Over the last few years the LAUSD board has set aside more money for these projects and set a goal of ensuring that 30% of every school’s hard-surface schoolyard space is converted to green space by 2035. But it will cost upward of \$3 billion.

Lawmakers should think expansively about modernizing schools in an era of rapidly increasing climate change. It doesn’t mean just installing air conditioning but also making campuses cooler so kids can learn and play in the face of worsening heat.

## LETTERS



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

**PRO-PALESTINIAN** demonstrators at their encampment at UCLA as police arrive to break it up May 2.

# Unrest exposes larger incivility

Re “Anxiety at UCLA: ‘Everywhere you turn there’s a security guard,’ ” June 5

PARTS OF YOUR ARTICLE about the tense situation on the UCLA campus illustrate a critical problem with the U.S. political situation now. Without taking a position on the issues, I note that striking graduate students reportedly were chanting, “UC, UC, you’re no good, treat your students like you should.”

Successful negotiations do not occur when the focus is put on the alleged character defects of the opponents rather than the issues to be discussed. “You’re no good” is a personal attack that says nothing about the validity of any grievances or desired changes, and these students are not little children who cannot understand the difference.

Similar demonizing of the political opposition keeps conservatives and liberals from having any productive discussions about the real issues facing our country.

Rather than “UC, UC, you’re no good,” perhaps try “UC, UC, do some good.” It fits the rhyme scheme just as well, puts issues at the center, and doesn’t start by asserting the other side is composed of reprehensible people. That would be a model for all of us.

JEFFREY BROWN, Yorba Linda

If UCLA “has essentially become a police state” after a failure to protect pro-Palestinian demonstrators on campus from attackers, how about a quick referendum of only UCLA students and employees. The question: Do you want security guards outside buildings and parking structures on campus?

Perhaps consideration should be given to including assumption of the risk options for new contracts for employees, and offers and acceptance provisos for students old enough to vote,

and the parents of students too young to vote.

BARBARA BURKE  
South Pasadena

⋮

If Hamas had not attacked Israel on Oct. 7, nearly 1,200 Israelis would not have been murdered, Gaza would not have been bombed by Israel, thousands of Gaza residents would not have been killed, and there would have been no protests against the war on the UCLA campus or anywhere else.

Why does The Times ignore these facts in some of its reporting on this issue? Hamas should be blamed for everything related to this crisis.

GREG SIRBU  
Redondo Beach

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### Silent treatment

Re “Trump’s dim, disrespectful claim,” column, July 6

It was appropriate that George Skelton’s column was published on the 80th

anniversary of D-day, which was a truly dark day for the United States and for Allied soldiers fighting in Normandy.

Former President Trump’s hyperbole and blatant lies have become tiresome and dangerous; perhaps we should be writing and reading columns that are not about him.

He is newsworthy because he has supporters and wants to become an American dictator. Perhaps if he had less media coverage, he would end up screaming into the void

about his persecution and what he feels was America’s darkest day (the day he was convicted in New York).

KAREN WILKINSON  
San Francisco

⋮

Re “How the verdict could cost Trump the election,” Opinion, June 5

Jonah Goldberg thinks an extended jail term for Trump is “indefensible, given the nature of the crime.”

Does he mean the conviction on 34 felony counts in New York, for which he has shown zero remorse? Those emanating from the same conspiracy for which his ex-attorney has already served an extended term despite demonstrating considerable remorse?

Is he suggesting a fine would be sufficient punishment for any person so convicted, much less a convict who can pull in more than enough to pay the fine with one campaign mailer?

I think Goldberg meant to say “anything but an extended sentence would be indefensible.” Or does he think that a politician engaged in a campaign should get a free pass when convicted? Because surely he doesn’t believe a thuggish threat of mass violence should deter consistency in punishment.

I await Goldberg’s clarification.

RICK GOLDFARB  
Sherman Oaks

## Mexico is no example for U.S.

Re “Poor Mexico? Hardly. The U.S. could learn a few things,” column, June 5

Gustavo Arellano extols the virtues of a country that actually had 37 candidates assassinated this election cycle, a beautiful country that many Californians will not even drive into for fear of violence.

Claudia Sheinbaum, the hand-selected candidate of the outgoing president, won in Mexico. Good for her. Truly.

But because some kooks here in our country filled

him “with dread” as he voted (without getting killed), here’s a question for Arellano: Of the many thousands of immigrants who passed through Mexico to get to this land, how many of them said, “Hey, let’s just stay here in Mexico?”

JEFF HEISTER  
Chatsworth

⋮

I enjoy Arellano’s columns, including his piece lauding Mexico for electing its first female president.

But wow, what a different interpretation he has of “poor Mexico,” the phrase attributed to the Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz.

I always thought the point of the full remark — “Poor Mexico: So far from God, so close to the United States” — was that Mexico was both far from God’s help and close to a bullying, arrogant neighbor to the north. Actually, Arellano’s column kind of lends itself to that view.

I congratulate the Mexican people for their progressive attitude toward gender equality in the presidential election. Maybe someday that could happen here.

SUSAN GUSTAVSON  
Portland, Ore.

## Best friend or best surgeon?

Re “Dismayed by focus on race,” letters

In the letters about diversity at UCLA’s medical school, a physician writes that it isn’t MCAT or medical board scores that make a good doctor; rather, it’s the interpersonal relationship between patient and provider.

If I need a heart or brain operation, I do not want to marry my surgeon. I want brilliance and skill with their brain and hands.

ELAINE VANOFF  
West Hollywood

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OP-ED

**A** MERICAN LOVE stories have a default race: white. If the love story is “interracial,” one person is white, and the other person is not. In a standard American rom-com, the only nonwhite characters are the white lead’s helpful best friends or underwritten colleagues.

Quincy, a Black man, and I, a South Asian woman, are none of these things.

“All I could think on the way here is when am I going to kiss you,” Quincy told me one day in 2009, three weeks after we had met. It was the “when” that got me; I was that impatient too.

More than 50 years earlier, on July 11, 1958, Richard and Mildred Loving woke up around 2 a.m. to find their local sheriff shining a flashlight over them.

“What are you doing in bed with this woman?” he demanded of Richard.

Richard was white, and Mildred was black.

The Lovings were charged with violating Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which criminalized marriage between people classified as “white” and “colored.” The Lovings took their case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which unanimously struck down Virginia’s law and ended race-based legal marriage restrictions nationwide on June 12, 1967.

The date is now recognized by cities, states and organizations across the country as Loving Day. It should be a national holiday.

I’m not sure how the authorities would have regarded Q and me back then — whether we would have been deemed an interracial couple or not. Would they have even cared about our union given that neither of us is white?

What I do know is that paranoia about interracial relationships is not unique to white Americans.

Early 20th century Indian immigrants to the United States, for example, invoked anti-miscegenation rhetoric as a way of establishing their claims to citizenship. Bhagat Singh Thind, a writer and World War I veteran, used the language of caste apartheid to make his own case to the Supreme Court in 1923: “The high-caste Hindu regards the aboriginal Indian Mongoloid in the same manner as the American regards the Negro, speaking from a matrimonial standpoint.” His argument was, in short, that as a person of high caste, he was practically white and therefore eligible for citizenship under federal immigration law, which limited naturalization to people of European and African descent.

Thind’s gambit — to weaponize one kind of discrimination against another — failed. The court ruled against him, and some 50 Indian Americans had their citizenship revoked over the next three years as a result.



**MILDRED AND RICHARD LOVING** in 1965. After they were arrested under a Virginia law that prohibited mixed-race marriage, they took their case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Associated Press

Richard but standing straight; maybe it’s her hair, not done up for the camera but in utilitarian bobby pins. It seems to capture a moment of embrace, of love, in the midst of a typical day.

Perhaps that’s what made me feel as if we could inhabit this photo. Quincy is always trying to scoop me up while I’m motoring about doing one of 10 million things in a day.

I think that’s the power of the photo. America doesn’t tend to read race as a love story. Race in America is seen as a story of pain and tragedy. But people are more than pain, more than tragic. Our lives together are ordinary as much as extraordinary.

That’s exactly what Richard and Mildred were fighting for: the right to an ordinary, kissing-amid-the-10-million-things-of-the-day kind of life.

The Lovings’ case would become a precedent for the Supreme Court’s ruling in Obergefell vs. Hodges, which legalized same-sex marriage in 2015. The court ruled that “the right to marry is a fundamental right inherent in the liberty of the person, and ... couples of the same sex may not be deprived of that right and that liberty.”

The Pew Research Center found a more than fivefold increase in interracial marriage in the half-century since Loving vs. Virginia, with about 1 in 6 newlyweds married to someone of a different race.

For me, Loving Day is a testament to the everyday-ness of some civil disobedience. It’s also a challenge to the anti-Blackness that addles South Asian communities. From Thind onward, complicity in racism against Black people has been one way South Asians have tried to claim citizenship in America, so anti-Blackness is forever bound up with both assimilation and caste-based oppression.

“When am I going to kiss you,” Quincy said. We waited out of politeness, for privacy and to freely express our passion for each other. But that freedom is fragile.

In their dissent from the 2022 decision overturning Roe vs. Wade, Justices Stephen G. Breyer, Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor warned that “no one should be confident that this majority is done with its work,” calling Roe and Obergefell “part of the same constitutional fabric, protecting autonomous decision making over the most personal of life decisions.”

Like the Lovings, we can’t be sure history won’t pluck us out of our 10 million things, threatening us with a flashlight from the edge of our bed. Loving Day is not merely to celebrate the past. It’s to ensure that a future of freedom for love in all its forms is not an “if” but a “when.”

**NINA SHARMA** is the author of “The Way You Make Me Feel: Love in Black and Brown.”

# How interracial marriage went from criminal to common

Named for a landmark case, Loving Day recognizes freedoms that seem especially vulnerable today

By **Nina Sharma**

Five years after Loving vs. Virginia, my parents, joined by the kind of inter-caste “love” marriage that Thind argued against, would come to the United States. Their passage was facilitated by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, with which the country opened its doors wider than ever to immigrants of Asian descent, though it prioritized skilled professionals who could contribute to the Space Race and other national priorities: scientists, engineers, doctors.

The U.S. government’s desire to beat the Russians may have played a role in the legislation, while schooling, class and caste privilege made medical and engineering degrees attainable for many Asian immigrants of the period. But it was the civil rights movement led by Black Ameri-

America doesn’t tend to read race as a love story. Race is seen as a story of pain and tragedy. But people are more than pain, more than tragic. Our lives together are ordinary as much as extraordinary.

cans that truly gave these newcomers a shot at a more humane, equitable life here.

And yet if it weren’t for Loving Day, I’m not sure I would have been aware of the Lovings as civil rights pioneers.

It was Quincy who pointed me to their story. In 2017, he — by then my husband — found a call for interracial couples to re-create an iconic 1965 image of Richard and Mildred Loving, shot by Grey Villet for Life magazine seven years after their arrest. I suggested we participate.

I always read the photo as showing Mildred in the course of doing something else when Richard scooped her into his arm. The husband’s face is tilted toward the camera as he leans in to kiss his wife. Mildred looks busy: Maybe it’s her posture, not leaning toward

# Call it junior high or middle school, I can’t wait to be done with it

L.A. went to a school model that tends to students’ needs at a delicate age. Sounds good in theory.

**ROBIN ABCARIAN**

GOOD RIDDANCE, middle school.

Goodbye to mean girls and clueless boys.

Goodbye to casual racism from kids of all colors.

And goodbye (I hope) to never having any homework.

On Tuesday, my 14-year-old niece, who moved in with me 5½ years ago, will graduate from eighth grade. Having raised a daughter who is now 31 and married, I never expected to shepherd a child through the middle school years again — especially not as a single parent.

When my then-8-year-old niece moved in with me in 2019, life as I knew it came to a screeching halt. And when the pandemic hit the next year, life as we *all* knew it came to a screeching halt.

During the lockdown, my niece and I worked genially at opposite ends of the dining room table in my one-bedroom, post-divorce apartment. Thanks to her 90 minutes a day of Zoom class, I got to repeat fourth grade. *Did you know there’s a species of jellyfish that’s immortal?*

By the time fifth-grade graduation rolled around, in 2021, kids were back in the classroom, and I was feeling misty-eyed about her move to middle school.

Now I can’t wait for her to move on. This is no reflection on her school’s teachers or support staff, who have been wonderful, good-humored and patient. (Talking to you, Ms. McNairy, Mr. Bloom



and Ms. Benson.) This is purely about the taxing nature of living with a middle schooler.

When I was my niece’s age, the L.A. school system had not yet adopted the concept of middle school. We still had junior high, which went from seventh to ninth grade, followed by high school, 10th to 12th.

That changed in the mid-1980s, when the district came around to the idea, first propounded in the early 1960s, that young adolescents were not well served by the junior high/senior high setup.

Junior high, the argument went, was simply a mini-version of high school that did not address the unique needs of adolescents who are neither young children nor fully formed.

Whatever the impulse behind replacing junior highs with middle schools, it really does make sense to corral everyone going through puberty behind the same high fence.

“I really don’t understand how you can stand to be around these kids all day,” I recently told a counselor at my niece’s school. “You really must be crazy.”

“Oh,” she replied smiling, “we are.” Middle schoolers need space to grapple with social issues that are presumably smoothed out by the time they get to high school. This is where the maddening lack of homework comes in.

“The lack of academic pressure allows kids to be a little more carefree,” said Nancy Geshke, a science teacher at Mark Twain Middle School in Venice. “What’s negative about middle school is just, in general, ev-



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times

**AN EMPTY** classroom at a Los Angeles middle school. It really does make sense to corral everyone going through puberty behind the same high fence.

eryone is a hot mess. If you can not be affected by their mood swings, though, you get some real gems.”

Middle schoolers can be terrible to one another. They have spent a lifetime learning that teasing is bad and bullying is worse, and yet they are unable to control their worst impulses. My niece has come home with stories about being called a “cracker,” about Black kids being told to “get back to work,” about American-born Latino kids being called “illegal.”

Add to their impulsivity the instantaneous communication afforded by cell phones, and you have a pretty toxic mix.

“In sixth grade, they are still babies,” Geshke said. “Seventh grade is the worst of the worst. They don’t know who they are. By the end of eighth grade, they start to find their people, and they rule the school.”

(Indeed. As my niece lamented the other day, “I can’t believe I am going back to the bottom of the food chain.”)

And oh, my God, they are such unreliable narrators.

I was furious when my niece told me that a sixth-grade classmate had been saying really awful things to her. It sounded like serious harassment to me. I didn’t call the counselor with guns blazing, mind you, but I did imply that my niece was being victimized.

The counselor told me very calmly that the girl was saying mean things to my niece because my niece had taken one of the girl’s books and hidden it.

“Did you do that?” I asked her. “Oh, yeah, I did,” she replied. “I guess I forgot.”

I applauded the approach her middle school has taken to these sorts of squabbles. My niece has spent any number of hours in adult-supervised conflict resolution sessions (thank you, Mr. Chaka) working out issues with her frenemies. “Afterwards, Auntie, we all hugged,” she would say. And peace ruled the middle school — at least until the next fight.

@robinkabcarian



OPINION

BOOKS & IDEAS

# Seeing the genius of Joni Mitchell from both sides now

By Rebecca Keegan

LAST YEAR SOMEONE I WAS talking to snorted that an older, lefty, white woman we both know seemed “like the kind of person who goes to Joni Mitchell concerts.” I had just gotten back from a “Joni Jam” the then-79-year-old Canadian American singer-songwriter had put on with Brandi Carlile and a coterie of musicians at the Gorge in Washington state, eight years after a brain aneurysm had robbed her of her ability to speak and walk. Huddling with some 20,000 devotees under a pink sky at Mitchell’s first ticketed live performance in more than 20 years is a night I consider a peak life experience, and the snide comment reducing the artist and her fans to a stock type annoyed me. But having neither a smart response nor the energy to clap back, I kept my mouth shut.

Happily, Ann Powers’ book, “Traveling: On the Path of Joni Mitchell,” has prepared me for my next such encounter, both intellectually and energetically. Better than that, it has helped me understand my own fandom and the brilliant but flawed, relatable but unknowable woman who inspires it. Powers writes about those who callously dismiss Mitchell, but she also describes the way some of Mitchell’s fans have held onto the influential singer-songwriter over the years as a “smothering hug,” a kind of adoration that leaves the receiver no room to maneuver, no space to breathe.

By contrast Powers, who is NPR’s music critic and the L.A. Times’ former critic, came to the subject of Mitchell reluctantly. The author writes that “all the Joni worship freaked me out, frankly,” and she was recruited to the book by an editor. This makes Powers the perfect writer for her subject, and she shows us a far more interesting way to regard Mitchell than the fan’s smothering hug. Hers is a loose embrace with the respect for craft that comes from truly understanding what it takes to write a song like “Woodstock” or “A Case of You” or “Come in From the Cold,” as well as a healthy dose of skepticism about the myth of Joni.

Mitchell is one of a handful of women in her era who were invited into the music world’s clubby little definition of genius, and Powers has the chops to explain exactly why that was so, both through her virtuosic writing on Mitchell’s musicianship and creativity and through a sophisticated interrogation of the gender and race politics of the era. She shows us how we can love an artist like Mitchell and let her be



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

human, too, how we can understand her genius from — forgive me, Joni — both sides now.

For many Mitchell fans, the basic beats of her life are well known, from a defining childhood bout with polio, to the daughter she bore and gave up for adoption at age 21, to her romances with male muses like Leonard Cohen and Graham Nash, as she traveled from Saskatoon, Canada, to Laurel Canyon to Greece. Powers takes us to those places with Mitchell but finds a way to make the journey new, in part by gracefully interweaving her own history with Mitchell’s, including their shared status as mothers in adoptive triads — Powers adopted a baby daughter.

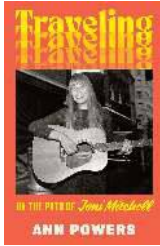
Both women have resisted the attempts of their male-dominated industry to pigeonhole them as female artists and metaphorical mommies, and both have grappled, in their own ways, with what it means to be a “real” mother. Rather than reach for easy answers to the questions about Mitchell’s maternity story, Powers manages to make a deeper point by accepting every woman’s essential fluidity on the topic of motherhood. “To ask whether Joni Mitchell ever wanted to be a mother is to assume that she, like any woman, could only hold one desire within her body at any given time, much less over time,” she writes.

Powers isn’t a biographer, she asserts on Page 2, she’s a critic, and she didn’t ever interview Mitchell for this book. That status frees her to write in a way that doesn’t trade creative independence for access. This approach is especially helpful when she’s tackling Mitchell’s uncomfortable history on the subject of race. A white songwriter who collaborated with Black artists such as Charles Mingus and Herbie Hancock and who has counted Stevie Wonder and Prince among her fans, Mitchell took great pride in crossing musical boundaries. But over her life and career she also made choices that feel cringey at best and racist at worst.

She seemed to think her appreciation of Black music entitled her to use the N-word in conversation and don blackface in a pimp-inspired persona she created named Art Nouveau, a character she posed as on the cover of her 1977 album “Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter.” She has never apologized nor fully explained. Lesser writers would tread lightly here — zipping past an issue that doesn’t fit neatly into the laurel-collecting stage of Mitchell’s career with an “it-was-the-’70s” dismissal. Or they might make canceling Mitchell the point of their book.

Instead, Powers does the hard work of exploring what motivated Mitchell and why she has so often gotten a pass for her judgment when

**AT HER** home in Bel-Air around 2004, the singer Joni Mitchell.



Dey Street Books

**Traveling: On the Path of Joni Mitchell** by Ann Powers

it comes to the Art Nouveau character. The music industry’s sister evils of sexism and racism have something to do with Mitchell’s adoption of this misguided muse. Powers enlists other thinkers to help her tackle the question, such as Queens College scholar Miles Grier, including a transcript of their conversation that begins with the author confessing, “Miles, I really need help here.”

As a critic, Powers works in a field where confidently taking a side is the game — thumbs up or thumbs down. But she’s especially insightful and fun to read when she gives herself permission not to know things. What a relief in this era of passionate intensity! It’s also a fitting approach to Mitchell and her work, which has always been about inquiry, about the journey of understanding, not about getting to the moment where we finally have life all figured out.

Reading Powers is like hearing one of Mitchell’s signature open tuning chords, an adaptation she developed because of polio’s effects on her left hand. The book, like the chord, doesn’t resolve neatly — it asks questions that ring on.

REBECCA KEEGAN is the senior film editor at the Hollywood Reporter, author of “The Futurist: The Life and Films of James Cameron” and co-author of “Young Frankenstein: The Story of the Making of the Film.”

# What Questlove means when he says hip-hop is ‘history’

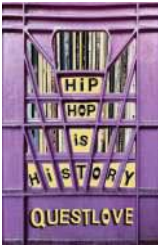
By A.D. Carson

QUESTLOVE, THE accomplished musician, filmmaker and author, most recently of “Hip-Hop Is History,” is no doubt aware that his title cuts more than one way. It indicates both that hip-hop is a significant musical genre and that some of its significance is located in the past.

I read Questlove’s 2013 memoir, “Mo’ Meta Blues,” as I was starting the doctoral program that I would finish by submitting a hip-hop album as my dissertation. Part of the history he writes about in his latest book carved out space for my current career.

I’ve written that “hip-hop is dope” as a way of saying the United States is addicted to, abusive of and deeply invested in the exploitation and sanctioning of Blackness and Black cultural products, including but not limited to hip-hop and rap. So I appreciate the way Questlove anchors each section of “Hip-Hop Is History” to specific drugs, beginning in “the bright light of disco’s cocaine years”; proceeding through “the forty-ounce era (1982-1987),” “crack (1987-1992),” “weed (1992-1997),” “ecstasy (1997-2002),” “sizzurp (2002-2007),” “molly (2007-2012),” “pain pills (2012-2017)” and “opioids (2017-2022);” and ending with what he calls “the tragic fentanyl present.” He could have accurately subtitled the book: “What I’ve watched the world get high on for the past 50 years.”

It’s a trip worth taking. Questlove’s embedded narration of the infamous 1995 Source Awards, which inflamed tensions between regional factions of the genre, shows the author at his storytelling best, de-



Farrar, Straus and Giroux

**Hip-Hop Is History** by Questlove with Ben Greenman

tailoring the historical stakes without pretending he isn’t personally interested in the outcome. Questlove is documenting a Great War within what he views as an established Hip-Hop Nation, and the mightier weapon — the pen that records hip-hop history — ultimately prevails. Wielding it, Questlove ascends to the sort of lofty perch where one should be warned to, as the Wu-Tang Clan put it, “Protect Ya Neck.”

Last month, amid back-and-forth diss records from Drake and Kendrick Lamar, Questlove wrote on Instagram that “Hip Hop Is Truly Dead.” Because Questlove, the six-time-Grammy-winning, Oscar-winning co-founder of the Roots, is so many things to hip-hop, what he says matters to people. It matters to people who identify with the culture and the genre, and it matters to people who don’t know much about hip-hop and look to experts for guidance. His death declaration created waves because to some people, this Hip-Hop Nation is a real place, and that place is worth defending.

If you listen to certain folks tell it, it’s a nation in desperate need of governance, regime change or a return to a past when things were much simpler and better. Even if hip-hop’s coordinates lie beyond any map, figures such as Questlove become cartographers, tour guides, ambassadors and, well, historians.

To me, it’s a difficult metaphor to maintain if all the nation’s presidents face impeachment and all its kings have to worry about their necks. The maintenance of such a nation would necessitate a pen mightier than any sword to do the work of structuring and saving that might be necessary for the nation’s future. A pen that powerful could

easily write its way into revisionist, right-wing hip-hop discourse.

An authoritative pen with less sinister intentions could just as easily slip into a solipsistic curation of the past. This might happen when the historian is writing a history that he is very close to and in which he plays a significant part. This may account for Questlove’s occasional informal shifts from objective and omniscient narration of “important events” that sound like traditional history to incredibly personal and subjective opinions.

The first half of the book describes and takes place in what might be considered typical hip-hop-historical settings — Philadelphia, New York City and California-but-really-Compton. If this Hip-Hop Nation worked like the sidewalks in Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean” video — its squares lighting up only when Questlove steps on them — most of the U.S. would remain dark through the first 150 pages.

Later, he admits that he couldn’t comprehend the importance of Southern rap until it made its way to him through his hometown of Philadelphia. DJ Drama’s “Gangsta Grillz” mixtapes were popular enough that they were famously the target of a 2007 police raid in Atlanta. Questlove’s Roots bandmate Black Thought informed him that “DJ Drama is Tyree [Simmons] from Philadelphia.” This was almost two decades after the release of Southern rap pioneers 8Ball & MJG’s debut album, but the significance of the group and their confederates registered with Questlove only because of this incidental connection.

There are other dissonances in Questlove’s history. He describes the inspiration for A Tribe Called Quest’s “Bonita Applebum” as the woman to whom the “pretty apple-shaped derriere belonged.” He calls singer-songwriter Solange Knowles a “young jawn,” or “thing,” and wonders whether she “really knew

her stuff.” Then he unironically criticizes the “questionable treatment of women” in Dirty South rap.

Questlove makes his musical likes and dislikes known with little reservation throughout, dismissive of anything that isn’t directly related to the nation as he knows it. He saw the nation as it was coming into being, erected around him in his formative years, and through his development as an artist and emergence as an elder statesman and historian. By the end of the book, he’s writing from a future somehow-still-United States and a future somehow-still-extant Hip-Hop Nation.

As I arrived at the future he envisions as a reader, it was a wonder to me that imagination hasn’t pushed us past the fictions we know all nations to be. It’s not only the arbitrariness of borders but also the map’s inability ever to truly represent all we know the world to encompass. Histories can claim to be definitive, but they will always raise questions about what was left out and why.

I hope Questlove’s “Hip-Hop Is History” is not an invitation to repeat history by recording the genre in U.S. history’s prescribed molds. Instead, it should be a challenge to seize opportunities to make history more hip-hop. In this regard, the indices containing Questlove’s playlists are perhaps the book’s most instructive and representative parts.

We haven’t yet reached the point where archives of songs are seen as full texts that do all the telling we need to call them history. The hip-hop that made a career like mine possible makes way for new horizons, though, so perhaps we are on our way.

A.D. CARSON is an associate professor of hip-hop and the Global South and a Shannon Center fellow for advanced research at the University of Virginia.



OPINION

BOOKS & IDEAS

# BLACK AMERICANS SHAPED THE U.S. BY SAYING ‘NO’

This month, as we celebrate Juneteenth and Pride, it’s worth remembering the power of drawing the line

By Kellie Carter Jackson

**R**EFUSAL IS A POWERFUL political act. Acting in defense of themselves, Black people and Black women in particular have consistently refused the terms of oppression, discrimination and dehumanization. Refusal is a forceful no, packed full of energy and meaning. “We refuse” is similar to Black colloquialisms such as “nah,” “nope,” “not today, Satan” or my personal favorite: “Oh he’lllllllll no.” Resistance is *how* one responds to white supremacy; refusal is why. In America, we tend to focus more on how resistance is manifested or performed. Not nearly enough emphasis is placed on why resistance is so crucial to the American story.

**We Refuse: A Forceful History of Black Resistance**  
by Kellie Carter Jackson

My great-grandmother Arnesta helps tell that story. In 1915, Arnesta was 9 years old in rural Alabama when she stepped on a rusty nail. Not long after,

infection set in and Arnesta became very ill. She most likely suffered from tetanus, which can be deadly if untreated. Her mother, Mary, was frantic.

Mary took Arnesta to the only doctor she knew, a white man who lived in a big house on the other side of town. The doctor agreed to help Arnesta, but on one condition — after he healed her, she would have to live in his home and work for his family for the rest of her life. Slavery had been abolished 50 years prior, yet the doctor felt entitled to Arnesta’s life and labor in perpetuity.

For a Black girl living during one of the worst periods of race relations in America, these were the detestable but sadly predictable terms of engagement. Built into the deal the doctor offered was a lifetime of servitude and perhaps worse — a far cry from the physician’s oath to “first do no harm.” Mary was panic-stricken. Not wanting to lose her daughter and only child to death, she agreed.

Thankfully, my great-great-grandmother, who was formerly enslaved, intervened. She refused the doctor’s unconscionable offer, picked up her ailing granddaughter and took her home. There, she administered every natural remedy at her disposal. Arnesta survived, but for the rest of her life she walked with a limp.

This story to me has always



SAIT SERKAN GURBUZ Associated Press

summed up the power of white supremacy: Choose a life of bondage or refuse and limp. What has shaped me is not the doctor’s proposal but my ancestor’s refusal. Her response was not no, but never — a response that denied white supremacy its authority.

Refusal establishes boundaries and has defined unacceptable human interactions as those denying dignity, respect and decency. It is not apathy or cynicism, but an insistence on fully lived human experience. It is not forgoing one’s vote or checking out on the world. Refusal requires activism through traditional or creative methods, the

**HARRIET TUBMAN**, one of the Americans most famous for refusing to accept the status quo.

kinds acknowledged and celebrated by LGBTQ+ communities in June, the month of Pride, and by Black Americans on Juneteenth, to champion freedom for everyone.

Such activism has created countless programs that fed, educated, healed and cared for Black communities. Many pivotal steps to end slavery were acts of refusal: The Underground Railroad was created because abolitionists refused to be complicit in oppression and abuse. Black leaders and white allies formed protection societies and published newspapers, pamphlets and personal narratives to set an abolitionist national agenda based

on intellectual, rhetorical, political and physical refusal. When some 250,000 Black soldiers fought during the Civil War, they were refusing slavery on American soil.

In a similar spirit, during the 1960s and ’70s, the Black Panther Party refused second-class citizenship, creating national breakfast programs, health clinics, ambulance services, legal aid, schools and care programs to reject the void of public services available to Black Americans.

In a period of racial and political unrest, the Black Power movement centered on joy and solidarity, invoking hope, happiness and kinship as a shield against the demoralizing and degenerative effects of racism. James Brown’s “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” was a refusal to let white supremacy determine what is beautiful, inspirational or good.

Although it can be enacted by an individual, at its heart, refusal is collective. That’s why the sentiment behind the phrase “we refuse” persists among subjugated people. It has been a key refrain in Black feminist and Native American politics, reiterating that oppressed people can and should refuse to be made invisible, silenced or denied. From the slave ships coming to the New World, through slavery, segregation and persistent structural racism, Black people have always fought back.

And Black culture refuses to be defined by oppression. Refusal has been our anthem, a way of being, present in the novelty and genius of our vernacular, in the newspapers and literature we created to tell our stories in the face of attempts to deny us literacy.

It’s present in the drum, banjo and bass permeating our music that refuses to be replicated or erased, in the vocals that refuse to be timid or diluted. It is even present in our traditions of forgiveness and hospitality in societies that are often unwelcoming to us.

The revolutionary culture, art and community that have grown from these traditions are proof that like my ancestors, we can carve out a new trail and reject the choice between life in bondage or a limp. Now and forever, we can refuse and insist on creating our own destinies.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON is chair of Africana studies at Wellesley College and author of “We Refuse,” from which this piece is adapted. @kcarterjackson

# Are the women of OnlyFans victims or savvy capitalists?

By Lauren LeBlanc

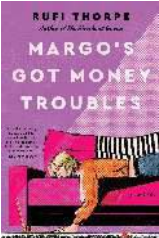
**D**OES THE PUBLICATION of “Margo’s Got Money Troubles” mean it’s finally Rufi Thorpe’s moment? Ever since her gripping debut novel “The Girls From Corona Del Mar,” Thorpe has enjoyed a cult following among writers and critics for her fiction grounded in the California landscape. However, despite years of enthusiastic buzz, award nominations and glowing word-of-mouth praise, the general reception for her work has remained subdued.

Now, Thorpe’s literary hum has translated into a resounding roar. Long before publication, the Hollywood Reporter announced that A24 had acquired the rights to the author’s fourth novel, “Margo’s Got Money Troubles,” with David E. Kelley slotted to write the television adaptation as well as Nicole Kidman’s and Elle and Dakota Fanning’s production companies on board to executive produce.

What caught their eyes? I’d argue that beyond Thorpe’s strong characters and tight plots, what sets her apart from her peers is the gnawing philosophical tension that rests at the center of her books. “Margo’s Got Money Troubles” seizes upon the conundrum of the virgin-whore paradigm, using the boom of OnlyFans to explore if the women building followings on the site are pitiable victims or savvy capitalists working the system.

Margo Millet was a 19-year-old student and part-time waitress when she stumbled into an affair with Mark, her English professor at Fullerton College. Their six-week fling wasn’t particularly noteworthy. She reflects that, “He was a wind chime in human form, dangling dorkily from the glorious tree of higher education.” Without the money to attend New York University, alongside her best friend, Becca, Margo found herself untethered, an all too familiar state.

She grew up with Shyanne, her single mother, who worked in retail and waited with unfounded hope for Margo’s dad, Jinx, to leave his wife and kids for her. Jinx was a profes-



William Morrow  
**Margo’s Got Money Troubles**  
by Rufi Thorpe

sional wrestler who traveled the world, making it easy to conceal his affairs and breeze in and out of Margo’s life. After drug addiction led to a bout in rehab, he retired from the profession, his marriage dissolving. As Jinx’s life shifts into a new chapter, Margo finds herself unexpectedly pregnant with Mark’s baby.

Reconciling the aftermath of a flashy wrestling career is a fitting crisis for Thorpe’s novel that’s fraught with people who are always something more than they appear to be. Teachers are lying cheaters, wrestlers are performers, and unwed mothers aren’t so easy to pigeonhole. Curiously, it’s in Mark’s classroom that Margo first begins to distinguish the power of perspective and narration. Distinguishing between fictional and real characters, Mark stresses that fictional characters “are only interesting because they aren’t real. The fakeness is where the interest lies.” It’s a kernel of truth that Margo holds onto.

Thorpe latches onto the ideas of perspective and circumstance as well as delusions of fantasy and reality throughout the book. Deploying a structural twist that also helps expand the way we understand her lead character’s experience, Thorpe gives Margo the liberty to shift from first to third person: “It’s true that writing in the third person helps me. It is so much easier to have sympathy for the Margo who existed back then rather than try to explain how and why I did all the things that I did.”

The grace of sympathy is also largely absent from blanket generalizations regarding women’s sexuality. Frustratingly, it’s Mark who tells his class, “The way you look at something changes what you see.” If only it were so simple. This lack of perspective and sympathy explains why it’s easier for Thorpe’s charac-

ters to shape-shift rather than to try to explain themselves to people who fail to acknowledge complexity.

Mark doesn’t practice what he preaches. Adoration sours, and faced with her pregnancy, he ceases all communication. Margo recognizes that “the things Mark liked about me never felt like they really had anything to do with me. They were more his fantasy of me.” In spite of logical arguments (Becca lays it bare: Raising a child “is not a philosophical question. It’s a financial decision.”), Margo decides to go ahead and have the baby.

However, once Bodhi is born, she loses her job as a waitress. Two of her three roommates, understandably, leave for a baby-free apartment. Margo is stuck: Her mother is no help; she’s too busy courting a prudish suitor. And with no available — much less affordable — child care, Margo can’t hold down a job. Reconciling “how sacred the baby was to her, and how mundane and irritating the baby was to others,” Margo found herself “so raw and leaking, so mortal, and yet stronger than she’d ever been.”

Conveniently, in fiction, solutions have a way of presenting themselves once you find your confidence. Rootless Jinx takes up residence as a roommate and unlikely home chef, providing for Margo in a way he never did when she was a child. The question of employment is resolved by what a person might imagine to be one of the easiest opportunities available to a stay-at-home mom: developing a following of clients on OnlyFans. Anxious about what it means to participate in consensual and voyeuristic but entirely virtual sex work, Margo’s roommate Suzie points out: “It seems weird to say a celibate person is a slut. Like, you’re just pretending words have meaning at that point.” With that, and the income the site provides, Margo gives herself over to the work.

The bawdy, playful way that Margo constructs and flaunts her online persona, Hungry Ghost, is a total lark. At each step, she remains

in control of her image and engagement. Lest you think that Thorpe has opted to shower Margo’s work with the cliché of empowerment, think again. The work is depicted without phony glamour, but also without the taint of shame. Margo’s gift for language and penchant for the absurd flourishes as she distinguishes herself from other women on the site.

The work becomes a puzzle of professional networking and optimization, aided by Jinx, who sets his protective, paternal hesitations aside when he sees that OnlyFans isn’t too far removed from WWE. Together, they forge new friendships and create an unlikely family for baby Bodhi. In what feels like a fairy tale twist, Margo finds an unlikely kinship with a client who pays her for endearing personal stories rather than provocative photographs or videos. Complications arise and the antics halt when outside forces raise realistic and harrowing stakes. Thorpe allows her characters to remain flawed but bent toward redemption in this wholly entertaining, utterly endearing and thought-provoking novel that asks, “What kind of truth would require this many lies to tell?”

Thorpe’s novels defy easy categorization. Her characters’ radiant energy and her books’ knotted plots don’t align with the moody atmosphere and tone poem quality of most contemporary literary fiction. Yet, these novels remain more intense and rigorous than most upmarket women’s fiction. It’s exhilarating to find an author who wants to tell you a good yarn, but also ask a lot of complicated questions. While she’s been deemed a beach read, perhaps because of her California roots, Thorpe deserves to break past the limited vision that marketing places on female writers.


LAUREN LEBLANC is a board member of the National Book Critics Circle.

## FOR THE RECORD

**June books:** An article on June 2 about fiction and nonfiction coming out this month incorrectly stated that “Devil Is Fine” was John Vercher’s second novel. It is his third. The article also misstated the date of D-day. It was June 6, 1944, not June 4.

California writer Rufi Thorpe’s novel examines virtual sex work without phony glamour, but also without the taint of shame.






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*Author of six investment books including the award winning Advanced Portfolio Management: Strategies for the Affluent. The book was noted in a Barron’s article titled “The Best Investment Books of 2002.” Stuart’s latest book, Investor’s Guide to Buffer ETFs, was published in 2024. Stuart Chaussée has over \$325 million in assets under management.*

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# CALIFORNIA

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024 :: LATIMES.COM/CALIFORNIA



**ACADEMIC WORKERS** strike May 28 at UCLA, joining United Auto Workers 4811 members who walked out at other UC campuses. One legal expert said an Orange County judge's ruling Friday was not "the final word."

## Judge pauses UC walkouts over 'damage to students'

University system prevails after failing twice at state level

By JAWEED KALEEM

An Orange County judge Friday ordered the union representing UC academic workers to halt its strike at six campuses, ruling that the walkout appeared to be causing "damage to students' education" during the critical end of the term when finals are taken.

Orange County Superior Court Judge Randall J.

Sherman said the University of California had made its case for a temporary restraining order to stop the strike, which the university contended was causing "irreparable harm" to students and university operations.

The next hearing on the case was scheduled for June 27, which could effectively end the walkout that was approved by union membership through June 30. Sherman alluded to

that fact at the end of a roughly hourlong hearing, telling both sides to notify the court if "the strike will expire on its own terms."

Sherman's decision does not resolve the long-term question of whether the strike is an illegal breach of "no strike" contract clauses, the allegation at the center of UC's lawsuit filed against the union that represents 48,000 academic workers at 10 campuses and the

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

UC officials celebrated the decision.

"We are extremely grateful for a pause in this strike so our students can complete their academic studies. The strike would have caused irreversible setbacks to students' academic achievements and may have stalled critical research projects in the final quarter," [See **Strike**, B5]

## Arrest made in 2019 Mexican Mafia killing

Suspect is accused of drive-by shooting of member Eduardo 'Eddie Boy' Castro.

By MATTHEW ORMSETH

The pickup truck circled the block in Boyle Heights, as if the driver were searching for someone, then stopped next to a man riding a bicycle.

A gunman stuck a .45-caliber handgun out the passenger-side window and shot Eduardo "Eddie Boy" Castro six times.

Castro, 59, had been a member of the Mexican Mafia since the early 1990s, and law enforcement officials and underworld sources said there were plenty of possible motives for his murder.

He had refused to take sides in the prison-based syndicate's perpetual wars and incurred resentment from imprisoned members of the organization who noted that he was rarely locked up himself.

But there was also his brother Ernesto — perhaps the most damaging witness in the history of the Mexican Mafia, responsible for helping prosecutors convict a dozen members in the first racketeering case brought against the organization.

On May 31, five years after Eduardo Castro was shot, detectives arrested his alleged killer.

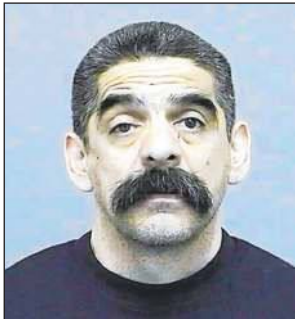
Vincent "Spanky" Armendariz, 60, was charged Monday with murdering Castro.

A reputed member of a small East Los Angeles gang called Winter Gardens, Armendariz didn't enter a plea at a court appearance. His lawyer referred questions to the Los Angeles County Public Defender's media office, which didn't respond to a request for comment.

As a teen, Eduardo Castro followed his older brother Ernesto into Varrio Nuevo Estrada, a gang based in the Estrada Courts housing project in Boyle Heights.

Built in 1942, the project's two-story buildings are painted with scenes from Mexican and Chicano history. One mural shows two hands holding the letters "VNE," an eagle alighting atop them with a banner in its beak that reads, "In memory of a homeboy."

Ernesto, whose nickname was Chuco, was different from his brother, said Richard Valdemar, a retired



California Department of Corrections  
**EDUARDO CASTRO**, 59, was shot six times.

Los Angeles County sheriff's sergeant who ultimately convinced him to defect.

"I would say Chuco was more, well, intellectual — more about the ideas of the Mexican Mafia. Chuco was about making money, doing business. Eddie was more the gangster, the enforcer."

In 1993, Ernesto Castro was arrested after police found a cache of guns beneath his Alhambra home. Tired of the Mexican Mafia's infighting and unwilling to [See **Mafia**, B5]

## Homeless count result is cheered, doubted

Some question 29% drop in Sacramento, saying it doesn't fit firsthand observation.

By RUBEN VIVES

Sacramento officials were elated last week when the results of a biennial point-in-time count showed that the observed local homeless population had declined by a whopping 29% — the biggest decrease city and county leaders had seen in more than a decade.

Although homelessness in the region is still higher than it was five years ago, the county's homeless population plunged from 9,278 in 2022 to 6,615. The region also saw a 41% decline in the number of people living outside in tents and makeshift shelters, from 6,664 to 3,944.

Officials applauded the progress and expressed optimism in social media posts, news releases and at a news conference.

"There are still too many people who are homeless for us to declare victory, but maybe homelessness is not so intractable after all," said Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg. "The 41% reduction in unsheltered homelessness is dramatic and affirms that the steady course we set seven years ago to address this state and national crisis is working."

"These results are truly outstanding and, undeniably, reflect Sacramento city and county 'all in' approach to addressing this crisis," said Lisa Bates, chief executive of Sacramento Steps Forward, the nonprofit that administers the region's continuum of care and coordinates the homeless count and the region's homelessness response.

But the decline was so dramatic that one of the largest nonprofit homeless services providers in the region questioned the count's accuracy.

"These numbers are incredibly difficult to believe and further highlight the trust issues with local government that our guests have consistently expressed over our many years of service" [See **Sacramento**, B6]

BILL ANDERS, 1933 — 2024

## Apollo 8 astronaut took iconic photo

By IAN JAMES AND CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS

Bill Anders, the Apollo 8 astronaut who was one of the first humans to orbit the moon and who took the iconic first photo of Earth rising over the lunar surface, died Friday when a plane he was piloting crashed near the San Juan Islands off the coast of Washington state. He was 90.

He was flying alone when the plane, a Beechcraft T-34 Mentor, crashed into the water near Roche Harbor, Wash., about 11:40 a.m., the Federal Aviation Administration said.

"The family is devastated," his son,



BILL ANDERS NASA  
**'EARTHRISE'**  
Anders' photo became a symbol of the environmental movement.

retired Air Force Lt. Col. Greg Anders, told the Associated Press. "He was a great pilot and we will miss him terribly."

After a search with helicopters and boats, a state dive team recovered the pilot's body, said Petty Officer Annika Hirschler, a U.S. Coast Guard spokesperson.

The crash is under investigation by the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board.

On Dec. 24, 1968, Anders and two other astronauts aboard Apollo 8, Frank Borman and Jim Lovell, became the first people to orbit the Moon. Anders famously read from the Book of Genesis on a live Christmas Eve broadcast from space.

[See **Bill Anders**, B9]

## A homophobic's repentance into LGBTQ+ ally

Like many, I had to unlearn the bigotry I was taught. But work remains

GUSTAVO ARELLANO

I remember him well: his toothy smile. His spiky shag haircut. His high cheekbones and ringing laugh.

I also remember what I called the teenager. Queer. Fairy. Even worse names.

We attended Anaheim High in the mid-1990s. I was a senior; he was a freshman. He was one of the few out students on a campus that was overwhelmingly Latino. He endured taunts, epithets and bullying, while cutting down his antagonists with withering insults more often than not.

It didn't stop me and others.

I learned my homophobia from macho cousins and a father so anti-gay that when my classmate came over to our house for my



**PROTESTERS** prayed and rallied last year against the Dodgers' inclusion of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in their Pride Night program at Dodger Stadium.

sister's party, my dad forbade us to go in the pool, lest something infect us. Homosexuality, my thinking went, was not just an abomination. "They" were a threat to the people I loved — Americans, Mexicans, Catholics, good people — by merely existing.

When my best friend, Art, told me to check my prejudice, I'd spout off a litany of biblical verses — Leviticus this, Genesis that, a hell of a lot of Paul. Nothing could convince me that I should stop my nastiness, let alone accept gay and lesbian people as normal.

An HBO movie changed everything. In Mr. Elder's biology class, we watched "And the Band Played On," based on the bestselling book by Randy Shilts about the early days of AIDS. I turned away in disgust at any hint of same-sex affection. But the story — about how the Reagan adminis- [See **Arellano**, B10]







CITY & STATE

# Deputies in suit won't be charged

By Keri Blakinger

Two years after a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy was seen on camera appearing to bash a handcuffed inmate's head into a concrete wall, prosecutors have decided not to charge either of the jailers involved.

The district attorney's office explained the move in a memo last month, saying prosecutors couldn't tell whether the violence was intentional since one of the deputies alleged it was the inmate's "own momentum" that "caused his head to make contact with the wall."

The decision comes one year after video of the incident at Men's Central Jail was made public by the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, which posted a 15-second clip of it online. The graphic surveillance video showed two deputies chatting as an inmate emerged from his cell with his hands cuffed behind him.

One deputy appeared to grab the inmate from behind and slam him into the wall, seemingly without provocation. Photos of his injuries show the man sustained a deep 3-inch head wound.

Last week, Peter Eliasberg, the ACLU chief counsel involved in two long-standing class-action lawsuits against the jails, denounced the district attorney's decision not to prosecute the deputies.

"Standing alone, it is nothing short of pathetic," he told The Times. "But it's outrageous when you tie it back to the history of the D.A.'s office coddling criminal behavior by the Sheriff's Department."

He said the ACLU plans to ask the U.S. Department of Justice to take up the case, noting that federal prose-



IRFAN KHAN Los Angeles Times

**PROSECUTORS** say they could not tell whether the inmate violence shown in a jail video was intentional.

cutors have previously obtained convictions against other jail deputies prior district attorneys declined to prosecute.

The Los Angeles County district attorney's office told The Times in an email that it "takes allegations of misconduct by jail deputies extremely seriously" and reviews each case based on the evidence.

"This office thoroughly reviewed the allegations in this case," the email said, adding that prosecutors "concluded that the allegations could not be proved beyond a reasonable doubt."

The Sheriff's Department said in a statement Friday that both deputies are still with the department. Now that the district attorney's office is done with the case, sheriff's officials will decide whether the deputies violated any policies or procedures.

"The department expects that custody personnel will perform their responsibilities in a professional manner with integrity and compassion," the statement said. "Any individuals who fail to uphold our standards of care and violate Department policy will be held accountable."

The deputies did not respond to emailed requests for comment, and it was not immediately clear whether they had attorneys.

The 2022 incident took place in a high-security unit at Men's Central Jail, where all prisoners are handcuffed through a door slot before they're allowed to leave their cells. Whenever they come out, policies dictate that they be escorted by two deputies "who are required to maintain a firm grip on the inmate."

It's the same unit, ACLU attorneys said, that has since been the scene of other problems. On Wednesday, The Times reported that oversight inspectors caught eight deputies in the high-security unit watching a "sexually explicit video" instead of tending to a suicidal inmate.

One inspector described the unit as "moldy" and humid and said the men living there have no books or pens.

"They have absolutely nothing, and it's completely dark," oversight commissioner Haley Broder said in an interview. "Being down there for 30 minutes, I don't know how anyone could survive this."

According to the D.A.'s memo, the inmate in the surveillance video — whose name was redacted — had been housed in that high-security unit because he'd previously threatened to stab deputies and had an "extensive history" of assaulting people.

On July 4, 2022, the memo said, Deputies Jose Peralta

and Johnathan Gutierrez walked up to the inmate's cell to escort him to the shower. After they cuffed him and he exited the cell, the deputies said he told them: "Don't touch me."

Because the surveillance video does not have sound, it's not possible to tell what — if anything — the three men said. But according to the D.A.'s memo, Peralta claimed the inmate threatened to headbutt Gutierrez.

By Gutierrez's account, once the inmate exited his cell he quickly turned toward the shower with a "sudden movement" that caught the deputy off guard, according to the memo. Gutierrez reacted by grabbing the inmate's forearm and reaching for his shoulder. Then, he alleges, the inmate "lunged his upper body forward."

It all happened so fast, Gutierrez said, that he was focused only on controlling the inmate. According to the memo, the deputy said his right hand "ended up behind" the inmate's head as the man was moving forward.

"It was his own momentum that caused his head to make contact with the wall," Gutierrez wrote in a use-of-force report that prosecutors quoted in their memo.

Eliasberg characterized that description as "patently false."

When investigators interviewed the inmate a few hours after the incident, he seemed to dispute the deputies' description, too, and said nothing about threatening to headbutt them — but said they had previously threatened him.

"I'm walking out, the cops pulled me out, and I went forward, and he hit me right in the forehead," he told them, according to the memo. "That's all I remember. Because the cop told me yesterday that once they get me out of the cell, they were going to get me."

The memo said he went on to tell investigators that he is on psychiatric medication and believes he has telepathy. When he couldn't stay on topic, investigators cut the interview short.

The deputies did not provide voluntary statements to investigators, the memo said, though both men wrote use-of-force reports that prosecutors analyzed when evaluating the case.

To prove the deputies committed a crime, prosecutors wrote, they'd have to show that the force was willful, unlawful and "not in self-defense."

But they said the video appears to confirm the inmate made some "sudden movements" and "began moving his body in the direction of the wall before Gutierrez grabbed" him by

the back of the neck.

"It cannot be determined from the video footage whether Gutierrez deliberately slammed" the inmate into the wall or whether it "was accidental," prosecutors continued, concluding they didn't have enough evidence to move forward with a case.

Corene Kendrick, another ACLU attorney involved in the jail lawsuits, called that reasoning "mind-boggling," saying that whether the slam was intentional should be left up to a jury.

"Whether or not the officers willfully smashed the man's head into the wall or whether his head somehow just hit the wall like they contend, that is something a jury should determine," she said. "It's really stunning they would think there was no crime committed here."

Nearly a decade ago, the ACLU raised similar allegations in a July 2015 letter to then-D.A. Jackie Lacey. The letter focused on local prosecutors' failure to charge a group of deputies who beat and pepper-sprayed a visitor they claimed attacked them in 2011.

Initially county prosecutors charged the visitor — Gabriel Carrillo — with battery on a peace officer and other crimes but said there was "no evidence to suggest that the deputies acted inappropriately."

After the U.S. attorney's office took over the case, federal prosecutors secured criminal convictions against five deputies, including two who admitted in court that Carrillo had been handcuffed during the attack. Carrillo sued, and the case settled for \$1.2 million.

According to the ACLU's letter, the Carrillo case was part of a larger pattern. The district attorney's office was quick to file charges against inmates — often without reviewing video evidence — but "almost never" filed charges against deputies, the civil rights organization said.

Eliasberg said last week that little has changed.

"This is just more evidence of the D.A.'s unwillingness to provide accountability for criminal behavior by law enforcement," he said. "The ACLU will be expeditiously asking the U.S. DOJ to investigate this incident and prosecute as it did in 2011 and 2012."

Currently, the Sheriff's Department is subject to several consent decrees stemming from federal lawsuits. One, a case known as *Rosas vs. Luna*, began in 2012 when inmates alleged "degrading, cruel and sadistic deputy attacks on inmates" had become a common occurrence. Many of the beatings meted out by deputies, the suit alleged, were "far more severe than the infamous 1991 beating of Rodney King."

After three years of legal wrangling, in 2015 the inmates — represented by the ACLU — and the county came to an agreement about specific changes the Sheriff's Department would make to reduce the number of beatings behind bars.

Nearly a decade later, there have been some signs of improvement, as county data show that jailers punch inmates in the face far less frequently than they used to. But the department has yet to comply with all of the terms of the agreement. The case continues.

# Lookout in 2022 heist on armored truck gets 14 years

James Russell Davis was part of a group linked to a series of armed robberies.

By Brittney Mejia

A Los Angeles man who acted as a lookout during the armed robbery of an armored truck was sentenced Friday to nearly 14 years in prison.

James Russell Davis, a member of a group that law enforcement officials dubbed the "Chesapeake Bandits," pleaded guilty in February to one count of interference with commerce by robbery and one count of discharging a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence.

The 2022 robbery, in which a co-conspirator fired a handgun, netted the group more than \$160,000 in cash. Davis, who was captured by the FBI, has been in federal custody since March 2023.

U.S. District Judge Fernando L. Aenlle-Rocha ordered Davis, 35, to pay \$166,640 in restitution.

"When people commit crimes with guns, tragedies happen," U.S. Atty. Martin Estrada said in a statement. "This is why it is so important that we bring the weight of federal prosecution against the perpetrators of violent gun crime."

In a sentencing memo, Jay Lichtman, Davis' attorney, asked the judge to consider his client's "tragic personal history," including physical harm and emotional damage as a child.

Lichtman also noted that when Davis was about 25, he was hit in the chest by a stray bullet while attending a youth basketball game. Lichtman wrote that the bullet has remained lodged over the aortic arch of the heart, "causing Mr. Davis daily physical pain and emotional stress."

"Mr. Davis deeply regrets his involvement in the offenses charged in this case," Lichtman wrote. "He humbly asks the Court to consider his personal history and characteristics in deciding on an appropriate sentence."

Reached by phone, Lichtman said the judge considered the mitigating factors in handing down his sentence.

"Although we would have

preferred a lower sentence, it was still below the guidelines," he said.

Authorities believe the group was behind a series of heists targeting armored cars across the Los Angeles region. They were called the "Chesapeake Bandits" because they planned the holdups from a home on Chesapeake Avenue in L.A.'s West Adams neighborhood, investigators say.

Members would force security guards to the ground at gunpoint, zip-tie them and grab money bags before fleeing, according to law enforcement.

In a plea agreement, Davis admitted that in 2022, he and a co-conspirator cased a credit union in Hawthorne, where they observed a Sectran truck driver servicing an ATM. On Feb. 14 of that year, he admitted, he and co-conspirators robbed a Sectran Security Services armored truck by ambushing the driver.

Davis' co-conspirators were armed with a black semiautomatic handgun and an AR-style rifle, which they pointed at the driver, who was identified in the agreement as J.G.

Davis admitted to acting as a lookout and performing countersurveillance nearby.

According to the plea agreement, the group forced J.G. to the ground by holding a firearm to his head, then stole bags filled with approximately \$166,640 in cash.

"Imagine the terror of being pulled to the ground with a gun pointed at your head," Krysti Hawkins, acting assistant director in charge of the FBI's Los Angeles field office, said in a statement. "Davis and his accomplices violently ambushed an individual just doing his job so they could make off with other people's money."

The lead defendant in the case, Deneyvous Jayan Hobson, 38, has pleaded not guilty. His trial is scheduled for Sept. 3.

Hobson is charged with one count of Hobbs Act conspiracy, one count of Hobbs Act robbery, one count of using a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence and one count of being a felon in possession of a firearm and ammunition.

According to FBI spokesperson Laura Eimiller, the agency is seeking additional suspects it believes are linked to the series of armed robberies.

# Monterey otter star Rosa dies, at age 24

By Terry Castleman

Rosa, the Monterey Bay Aquarium's oldest sea otter and one of its social media stars, died Wednesday, the aquarium said in a statement.

The southern sea otter, 24, had served as a surrogate mother for 15 otters, the most in the aquarium's history. She outlived the life expectancy for her species in the wild, which is typically 15 to 20 years, according to a post by the aquarium on Facebook.

Rosa was known for her blond head and "her signature head-all-the-way-back swimming style," the aquarium wrote.

"Rosa was one of our most playful sea otters, and even at 24 years old, she would still be seen frolicking and wrestling with the younger otters when she investigated it," said Melanie Oerter, curator of mammals.

"Rosa was usually found sleeping against the window while on exhibit with her chin tucked tight into her chest and her tail swishing back and forth," she said.

She first arrived as a "five-pound, four-week-old pup after being stranded as an orphan in September 1999," and was released into the wild for several years, according to a page about Rosa on the aquarium's website. She returned to the Monterey Bay Aquarium in 2002 after experts determined that she had become too accustomed to humans and was not suited for life in the wild.

In the last several weeks, Rosa's health deteriorated, and experts at the aquarium decided to euthanize her. "She passed away peacefully, surrounded by her caretakers," according to the aquarium's post.

In the post, the aquarium called Rosa a "charismatic ambassador for her threatened species" who played "a leading role in the story of sea otter recovery from near-extinction during the fur trade."



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

## JET THEM WHILE THEY'RE HOT

A child cools off while playing in a spray pool amid the heat Thursday at Rio de Los Angeles State Park in the L.A. neighborhood of Glassell Park.

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## 2 brothers killed in car crash; one was a grad-to-be

By MELISSA GOMEZ

Two teen brothers died in a car accident last week, just days before one was set to graduate at Morningside High School.

David and Hector Ceja, 17 and 15, died after the car they were in collided with another vehicle Tuesday night in Playa Del Rey, authorities said. The Inglewood Unified School District identified the two teens last week.

“We are deeply saddened by the tragic loss of two Inglewood Unified School District students as a result of a fatal car accident,” the district said in a statement. “The district is providing counseling support to our school communities during this difficult time. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the families impacted by this profound loss.”

On Thursday, the school honored David Ceja during its graduation ceremony, where he would have crossed the stage and received his diploma. A framed photo of a smiling David, dressed in his red graduation cap and gown, was placed among the rows of seated graduates at the ceremony.

The mood at the graduation was somber as his family received his diploma on his behalf. The school held a moment of silence for the “fallen monarchs,” the school’s mascot. Three doves were released during the ceremony in honor of the brothers.

“This is devastating,” Morningside High School Principal Kiwana Cain said during the commencement ceremony.

“We’re awarding him with his diploma today because he earned it. He earned it. He was supposed to be here with us today,” Cain said.

According to authorities, the car the teens were in was traveling north on Vista Del Mar near Dockweiler Beach when it crossed over into the southbound lane and collided with another vehicle. David died at the scene; his brother died on the way to the hospital, Los Angeles police officials said.

Three other people were also injured and taken to a hospital, according to the Los Angeles Fire Department.

The cause of the crash is under investigation.

# Ex-CHP officer awarded \$1 million

The former employee alleged sexual content was improperly shared in OT fraud inquiry.

By CAROLINE PETROW-COHEN AND JAMES QUEALLY

Years after a controversial overtime fraud probe, a Los Angeles County jury has awarded a former California Highway Patrol employee \$1 million in damages after she sued the agency for mishandling sexual content found on her cellphone.

Doris Peniche, a former CHP overtime coordinator at the East Los Angeles office, claimed her colleagues improperly viewed and shared her sexual photos and videos after obtaining the material through a search warrant.

She sued CHP and several individuals for negligence, intentional infliction of emotional distress and distribution of private sexual material, among other charges. The jury ruled in her favor Thursday after a three-week trial.

The overtime probe that led to Peniche’s phone being searched first became public in 2019, when CHP Southern Division Chief Mark Garrett held a news conference alleging dozens of officers had bilked the agency for unworked hours.

The search warrant for Peniche’s phone data, including photos and cell tower pings, was issued in July 2018.

Garrett said officers assigned to protect Caltrans workers repairing Southern California freeways billed CHP for eight-hour overtime shifts even when the protection detail did not take that long.

Officers at the East L.A. station claimed at least \$360,000 worth of fraudulent overtime, Garrett said.

Dozens were relieved of duty, and the California attorney general’s office filed felony fraud and theft charges against 54 officers from the station.

The roster cleave was so broad that it triggered an agency-wide shuffling of staff because the station was home to only approximately 100 officers to begin with.

Though the case gained headlines and was touted as a major corruption investigation by the CHP and attorney general, charges against all but one defendant have since been dismissed.

Peniche was fired from the CHP in May 2019 amid the investigation, her lawyer, Charles Murray, said.

Murray argued during



KENT NISHIMURA Los Angeles Times

**A FORMER** overtime coordinator at the East Los Angeles office of the CHP claims her colleagues improperly viewed and shared her sexual photos and videos after obtaining the material through a search warrant.

the civil trial that CHP investigators improperly shared the sexual content from her device with one another and with at least one other employee outside of the case, Murray said.

Members of the criminal investigation team uploaded the content onto a shared drive, witnesses testified, and also shared it with administrators.

Lt. Martin Geller, who was author of the search warrant, discovered photos and videos of Peniche giving and receiving oral sex upon his initial review of the evidence. He told other investigating officers about the content in order to alert them, he testified.

Geller was following CHP policy that potential evidence be shared with the administrative team, he said.

Murray questioned that policy, arguing it didn’t make sense and ultimately harmed Peniche.

“You have an investigator that knows there’s sex material and it is highly sensitive,” Murray said in court. “It doesn’t appear to be relevant, but he goes ahead and uploads it to the criminal shared drive. You decide if that policy makes sense.”

A CHP spokeswoman declined to comment.

Where internal investiga-

tors saw corruption in the overtime investigation, attorneys for the accused officers and a number of former CHP leaders saw “standard operating procedure.”

Officers assigned to Caltrans overtime details routinely remained on call for a full eight hours even if they were not in the field and were entitled to the extra pay because they could be called back to the repair site, attorneys argued in a dismissal motion filed in 2022.

That approach had been the procedure established by CHP since at least 2010, according to a number of former CHP executives including ex-Southern Division Chiefs William Siegel and Art Acevedo.

In late 2022, an L.A. County Superior Court judge reduced the charges to misdemeanors, granting the 54 officers entry into a diversion program as long as they satisfied certain requirements including paying restitution.

All but one have paid restitution and had their cases dismissed, according to the attorney general’s office. The remaining officer, Pedro Chavez, is due back in court in August.

Former L.A. County Dist. Atty. Steve Cooley, who represented some of the officers

at disciplinary hearings, called the overtime prosecution “shameful” and “one of the great frauds by corrupt law enforcement in California history.”

Ironically, he said, the state spent more money attempting to prosecute officers than they ever alleged was stolen.

CHP Sgts. Robert Ruiz and Matt Lentz on the administrative team shared the material with Capt. Melissa Hammond, who was a lieutenant at the time, Peniche’s complaint said.

The complaint also said Hammond told CHP Sgt. Connie Guzman that the images “confirmed” rumors that had been circulating about Peniche having multiple sexual partners, including her brother-in-law.

Murray denied the rumors and said that the images did not show Peniche with her brother-in-law or with multiple men. He also said that Hammond and others acted outside the scope of their duties to intentionally harm Peniche.

“They are trying to see if there’s enough material to fire over 50 people,” he said of the overtime investigation. “Why was my client’s folder the only one with a subfolder of photos? Was it because she was the over-

time coordinator or was it because she was disliked immensely?”

Defense lawyer Joseph Wheeler said his clients appropriately reviewed the content as part of their investigation.

“You can’t determine whether something’s relevant unless you actually review it,” he said during the trial.

Wheeler attempted to place some responsibility on Peniche, arguing that she should not have allowed sexual photos of herself to be taken.

“Once that search warrant is issued for the data on your phone, any expectation of privacy is gone,” he said. “If you wanted to keep your body private, why would you let other people take photos of you?”

Although Peniche testified that she was concerned about where her sexual material was spread and who had access to it, Wheeler said there was no evidence the content was leaked outside of CHP.

Before deliberations, Murray told the jury to look beyond CHP’s evidence policies when deciding the case.

“You can send a message and say, ‘I don’t care what your policy is, that ain’t right what you did,’” he said.

## Combs’ honorary degree rescinded

Howard University cites video of the rapper attacking his then-girlfriend.

By RICHARD WINTON

Howard University trustees on Friday voted to rescind an honorary degree granted to Sean “Diddy” Combs, citing a recently surfaced video of the hip-hop mogul repeatedly attacking Casandra “Cassie” Ventura in a Los Angeles hotel in 2016.

Trustees of the Washington, D.C., university also disbanded a scholarship in Combs’ name and terminated a 2016 “gift agreement” in which Combs had contributed \$1 million through his foundation, according to a university statement. His foundation’s future financial pledges have also been canceled.

The university, which Combs attended, said the vote “to accept the return ... of the honorary degree conferred upon him in 2014” was unanimous.

“Mr. Combs’ behavior as captured in a recently released video is so fundamentally incompatible with Howard University’s core values and beliefs that he is deemed no longer worthy to hold the institution’s highest honor,” the statement



**AN IMAGE** from video of Sean “Diddy” Combs attacking Casandra “Cassie” Ventura in a hotel in 2016.

continued. “The university is unwavering in its opposition to all acts of interpersonal violence.”

Friday’s decision is the latest setback for Combs, and comes as federal prosecutors in New York are considering whether a Homeland Security Investigations probe into alleged sex trafficking should result in criminal charges.

In the 2016 video, obtained and published by CNN last month, Combs is seen chasing, kicking, dragging and hurling a glass vase at Ventura, who was his girlfriend at the time.

The video seemed to confirm at least some of the physical abuse allegations against the singer detailed in a lawsuit filed in Novem-

ber — accusations Combs had denied.

That lawsuit was settled a day after it was filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. In it, Ventura alleged that Combs “became extremely intoxicated and punched” her in the face, “giving her a black eye” during an attack in March 2016.

In a video statement posted on Instagram days after the video’s release, Combs said, “My behavior on that video is inexcusable. I take full responsibility for my actions in that video.”

“I was disgusted then when I did it. I’m disgusted now,” he added. “I went and I sought out professional help. I got into going to therapy, going to rehab. I had to

ask God for his mercy and grace. I’m so sorry. But I’m committed to be a better man each and every day. I’m not asking for forgiveness. I’m truly sorry.”

Federal prosecutors are preparing grand jury subpoenas for witnesses to testify in the sex-trafficking investigation against Combs, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Investigators have already interviewed several witnesses and told them to be prepared to testify, the source said, though it remains unclear when that testimony will occur or how far federal officials are in determining whether to bring charges. The source spoke on condition of anonymity because the case is ongoing.

Combs has not been charged with any crime and has denied any wrongdoing. The probe was launched after three women, including Ventura, accused him of rape, assault and other abuses dating back three decades.

In March, investigators searching Combs’ Holmby Hills mansion emptied safes, dismantled electronics and left papers strewn in some rooms, sources told The Times.

Combs’ lawyers have strongly criticized the federal probe, calling the searches of his homes “militarized” and a “witch hunt.”

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# Arrest made in Mexican Mafia killing

[**Mafia**, from B1] return to prison, he spent the next two years wearing a wire.

The resulting case went to trial in 1997. In a scene that mirrored the attempt to silence mob turncoat Frank Pentangeli in “The Godfather Part II,” Eduardo glowered from the front row of the courtroom benches when his brother took the witness stand.

Ernesto was unnerved, Valdemar recalled.

“You’ve got your brother staring at you, knowing he’s a member of the very organization you’re betraying. It’s very much like ‘The Godfather.’”

Unlike the fictional Pentangeli, Ernesto had no change of heart. He endured six weeks of cross-examination by lawyers for the defendants. All but one defendant were convicted.

Ernesto was racked with guilt over the position in which he’d left his relatives — some of whom renounced him and refused to follow him into witness protection, Valdemar said.

“He was ripping himself from half of his family. He had basically become what his gang would call a coward and a snitch. It ripped him apart.”

Valdemar said that under Mexican Mafia code, Eduardo would have been obligated to kill his brother if he saw him or learned of his whereabouts.

“They call it cleaning up your own [mess],” Valdemar said.

Eduardo would always carry the shame of his brother’s betrayal, Max Torvisco, a fellow member of Varrio Nuevo Estrada, testified years later. Although Eduardo never cooperated with the government, “people stayed away from him,” Torvisco said.

In 1998, a year after his brother’s testimony, Eduardo found himself in the middle of a war.

The Mexican Mafia was divided into two factions: a group loyal to Benjamin “Topo” Peters, one of the defendants Ernesto helped convict, and an upstart group that called itself “the majority.”

A member of “the majority,” John “Stranger”



WALLY SKALIJ Los Angeles Times

## TWO SIDES

A supporter and a critic of Donald Trump debate Friday outside a Beverly Hills home where the former president held a fundraiser for his campaign. On Saturday, Trump headed to Newport Beach for a fundraising event at the gated Harbor Island community.

Turscak, asked Eduardo in 1998 to help set up the murder of a Peters loyalist, Mariano “Chuy” Martinez. Eduardo agreed to lure Martinez, a fellow member of Varrio Nuevo Estrada, into a meeting — only to double-cross Turscak and tell Martinez of the plot, according to an FBI report reviewed by The Times.

Martinez sought his revenge on Easter Sunday.

He gathered a crew of seven men at Estrada Courts, where he passed out guns and walkie-talkies before riding in a three-car caravan to the Atwater Village home of Turscak’s mother, a witness testified.

When Turscak walked out the front door, followed by his wife with their 2-month-old baby in her arms, Martinez gave the order via walkie-talkie to kill him, according to the testimony of Torvisco, Martinez’s right-hand man. One shooter’s gun jammed. The other fired wildly at Turscak, who ran back inside the house, Torvisco said. No one was hit.

A year later, Turscak, Martinez and dozens more from both sides of the war were behind bars for parole violations and racketeering charges — but not Eduardo.

Underworld figures who knew the younger Castro

described him as a middle-of-the-road presence who never seemed to make trouble. According to an associate who requested anonymity for fear of retaliation, Castro ate breakfast every day at Dino’s, a hamburger stand on Main Street in Lincoln Heights, whiling away the hours with a cup of coffee and puzzles from the newspaper.

By 2009, Eduardo had fallen on hard times. Ralph Rocha, a Mexican Mafia member turned informant, told authorities he’d heard that Castro was living out of a car.

According to Rocha’s statement to authorities, two brothers from the Evergreen gang were shaking down nightclub owners, claiming Eduardo had inducted them into the Mexican Mafia.

Rocha said he asked Eduardo how he was broke while the brothers had amassed a boat, a mansion in San Diego and a racehorse called the Down Low. Rocha said Castro brushed off his concerns and refused to help track down the brothers.

Rocha told authorities that when he heard a rumor that Ernesto had been spotted in Estrada Courts, he sent an underling to request a meeting with Eduardo.

The emissary was gunned down in his car.

“We just took that as him saying, ‘F— you. Come and get me,’” Rocha said, according to a recording reviewed by The Times.

Rocha put a “green light” on Varrio Nuevo Estrada — a standing order to attack its members on the street and in jail — until Eduardo agreed to meet. An informant who witnessed Rocha give the order told the FBI he had encouraged a crowd of gang members to “take target practice” on Castro’s old crew.

The conflict faded when Rocha was arrested for extortion. By 2015, however, Eduardo’s standing within his organization remained precarious.

..

Some 200 miles from Los Angeles, at Centinela State Prison in the Imperial County desert, an inmate named Sergio Sanchez had been selling drugs without paying the customary one-third “tax” to the Mexican Mafia.

According to testimony before a Los Angeles County grand jury, Sanchez argued that he shouldn’t have to pay the tax because he worked for “Eddie Boy.” This set off a flurry of calls between in-

mates using contraband cell phones and associates outside of prison, all of whom were trying to determine Castro’s standing.

In a five-person conference call that authorities intercepted on a wiretap, a man loyal to Eduardo said angrily, “Somebody was spreading the rumor that they plucked the homie E’s wings” — that Castro was no longer recognized as a Mexican Mafia member.

“Eddie Boy,” he said, was “fed up with all of this.”

“He reached out to the Bay” — a reference to the maximum security prison at Pelican Bay — “and to everywhere he could. And he wants to know who is the one saying that.”

Many conference calls later, Castro’s status was confirmed: “EB is not good,” a man on the streets of Wilmington told a prisoner at Centinela.

Two days later, Sanchez — the inmate who had invoked Eduardo’s name for protection — was stabbed 16 times by two prisoners, according to testimony. He survived after being airlifted to a hospital.

In 2016, the younger Castro refused to participate in the assassination of Dominick “Solo” Gonzales, who had angered Mexican Mafia members in the state prison

system by encroaching on their collection rackets in the San Fernando Valley, according to testimony at a recent racketeering trial.

Eduardo’s issues made him an easy target for a smear campaign by rivals who wanted his territory, said Valdemar, the retired sheriff’s sergeant who turned Ernesto as a witness.

“They would politic against Eddie,” Valdemar said, “and it would be very easy, because he had all these strikes against him.”

Armendariz, the man accused of killing Castro, has a rap sheet dating to 1987 that includes convictions for murder, robbery, drug sales and possessing guns and ammunition as a felon, court records show.

Sheriff’s deputies suspected Armendariz was running gambling parlors called *casitas* on the Eastside, according to a search warrant affidavit reviewed by The Times. He was also collecting money from smoke shops that sold illegal software that allowed gamblers to play blackjack, poker and pai gow on their phones, a detective wrote.

According to the affidavit, Armendariz was kicking up money from gambling houses and smoke shops to two imprisoned Mexican Mafia members.

# O.C. judge halts UC strikes

[**Strike**, from B1] said Melissa Matella, UC associate vice president for systemwide labor relations, in a statement.

UC officials had twice failed before the state Public Employment Relations Board to halt the United Auto Workers Local 481L strike that kicked off nearly three weeks ago at UC Santa Cruz before expanding to campuses including UCLA and UC Irvine.

Union President Rafael Jaime, a doctoral student in literature at UCLA, alluded to those losses by the university system in a statement Friday, saying workers were “ready for a long fight.”

“UC academic workers are facing down an attack on our whole movement,” Jaime said. “PERB, the regulatory body with the expertise to rule on labor law, has twice found no grounds to halt our strike. I want to make clear that this struggle is far from over. In the courtroom, the law is on our side and we’re prepared to keep defending our rights — and outside, 48,000 workers are ready for a long fight.”

The union represents graduate teaching assistants, researchers and other academic workers who lead discussion groups, grade papers, conduct research and administer exams, among other responsibilities. It authorized the strikes last month, alleging its members’ free speech rights were harmed during crackdowns on pro-Palestinian protests at UCLA, UC San Diego and UC Irvine, as well as other charges. It also cited harm to workers who participated in a UCLA encampment that a mob attacked April 30 without police intervention for hours.

Most of Friday’s hearing was taken up by lawyers for each side attempting to persuade the judge — who indicated at the onset that he leaned toward halting the strike — on two main issues: the question of whether the Superior Court should have taken up the case and the extent of the “irreparable harm” the university alleged the strike has caused.

UC attorneys argued that the walkout violated “no strike” provisions in contracts it has with the union.

“We are purely here on a breach of contract. ... Our no-strike clause is clear and unambiguous,” said Tim Yeung, a Bay Area-based attorney who represented the university system.

Margo Feinberg, a Los Angeles-based lawyer representing the union, said the university was “forum shopping,” alleging it had looked for a friendly venue after losses at the labor board, which typically oversees higher-education union-employer disputes.

“We’re in the wrong place,” Feinberg said. “No disrespect, your honor, but we should be before the Public Employment Relations Board.”

Sherman, the judge, sided with UC on whether his court was the proper place to argue the issues.

“I am not sure this is a labor dispute. Parties did not have a disagreement over the terms and conditions of employment,” he said.

Yeung said the strike was damaging student academics permanently, including through class cancellations. He that said many campuses will hold finals this week and that union workers were key to the process.

“We have grades due immediately after finals. Students are depending on those grades,” he said, noting that some union workers do grading. The strike “may affect [students’] ability to move on to the next level. ... There is going to [be] harm to our students if this is not stopped.”

UC officials have told The Times that they do not know exactly how many classes, discussion groups or other work led by union members has been affected by the strikes. The union has also not replied to questions from The Times about how many union-represented workers are participating in strikes.

Feinberg said in court that UC’s legal filings were broad and vague as to how the strike has hurt campuses. She also said the union went on a longer strike in 2022 over pay and benefits with “no irreparable harm” to schools.

“Some of this stuff is just made up. ... I understand there is a lot drama they are trying to create around this, but ... it’s like, where’s the facts?” Feinberg said.

The union’s filing quoted a university website that recently said, “Class sessions, examinations, and other academic activities are still continuing and the university expects that academic work will be completed” during the strike.

UC has also contended the strike is about politics, not traditional labor issues.

In court documents, UC cited an instance in which a union member pushed their department to vote for the strike, stating, “The top demand that matters here is disinvestment. This is about Palestine first and our abil-



BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

A SUPERIOR COURT judge has ordered unionized academic staff to halt strikes at UCLA, above, and other UC campuses, citing “damage to students’ education.”

ity to work comfortably at UC second.” In its filings, the union disputed many of UC descriptions of the strike and its intentions as “hearsay.”

The union maintains its strike is legal and unrelated to its contracts because the walkout is over broad worker rights it alleges were violated during university actions against pro-Palestinian protesters, including arrests and academic discipline that has prevented some workers from access to university-owned housing.

The union filed unfair-labor practice charges with PERB over those accusations. UC has filed its own charges with the board, contending that the strike is illegal.

The labor board denied two UC injunction requests, ruling the university did not meet the legal threshold for it to stop the walkout while mediation over both sides’ charges continued over the long term.

The labor board had also requested to be a party to the Orange County case, ar-

guing that it has “exclusive initial jurisdiction over aspects of this dispute.” The judge on Friday denied the board’s expedited request to join the case but said it could file the motion again on a normal court schedule.

UC’s decision to go to state court was described as a “brazen” move by a UC Irvine professor of employment and labor law.

“It’s not that they clearly do not have the authority to go to Superior Court,” Veena Dubal, the professor, said Thursday before the hearing. “That is a legal issue for the court to decide. But it is pretty brazen because they are going simply because they did not like the outcome at PERB, which is the agency charged with actually dealing with these issues.”

John Logan, a professor in the department of labor and employment studies at San Francisco State, said Friday’s decision would not be the “final word on the strike, of course, and the UAW strikers will still be confident that they can pre-

vail. But the timing of the ruling will make it difficult for them to get the leverage they would have had by striking at the end of the quarter.”

Some union members Friday said they would consider potentially ignoring the judge’s order.

“It’s go time!” said a post on X by UCSC4COLA, an account representing an unknown number of rank-and-file union members at UC Santa Cruz, where the union went on strike May 20. The union, where members have previously gone on unauthorized wildcat strikes, is one of the strongest chapters in UAW 481L.

The post linked to a thread from earlier in the day, prior to the court decision, that said some Santa Cruz workers would spend the weekend deciding “whether or not to defy” the judge’s order, “even as it weakens our legal protections against discipline and quite possibly annuls our access to the strike fund.”

“The stakes are very high,” the posts said.



# Newsom: Marriage equality at stake

By MACKENZIE MAYS

SAN FRANCISCO — Twenty years after he issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples in defiance of federal law as mayor of San Francisco, Gov. Gavin Newsom returned to the city Friday to try to convince voters that the fight for LGBTQ+ rights isn't over.

Kicking off Pride Month, the Democratic governor is promoting a measure on the November ballot that would remove language in the state Constitution that defines marriage as between a man and woman.

Courts have deemed the outdated state definition unenforceable and unconstitutional. The initiative comes as LGBTQ+ groups are urging caution about the possibility of another Donald Trump presidency and potential rulings from a conservative Supreme Court majority he helped appoint.

"Why do we feel we need to do this? What more evidence do you need? Wake up to the world we're living in,"

Newsom said Friday at Manny's, a cafe in San Francisco's Mission District that has become a go-to venue for Democratic campaigns. "It's profound and precious progress. You can't take it for granted."

Newsom and supporters of the measure at Friday's event, including Mayor London Breed and state Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco), pointed to the Supreme Court's undoing of Roe vs. Wade as proof that rights — including the right to marriage — are not certain.

After the Supreme Court in 2022 overturned Roe, ending the constitutional right to abortion, conservative Justice Clarence Thomas said in a concurring opinion that the court should reconsider rulings that rely on similar legal reasoning, such as those that protect same-sex marriage and access to contraception.

California and other states have since passed ballot measures to enshrine abortion rights in their constitutions. The same needs

to be done for LGBTQ+ rights, Newsom said.

"Here we are in 2024, and we're not experiencing a rights expansion, we're experiencing a rights regression," he said.

The definition in California's current Constitution dates to 2008, when voters approved a ban on same-sex marriage with Proposition 8. That has since been overturned in court, and liberal California remains a leader on LGBTQ+ rights. But the language in Proposition 8 remains on the books.

The measure, if approved by voters, would replace that definition with a broader "fundamental right to marry."

Although there is no current threat to the legality of same-sex marriage, and President Biden signed a bill attempting to safeguard it in 2022, supporters of the measure are taking no chances. They say the outdated language in California's Constitution must be erased for good.

State Sen. Toni Atkins (D-San Diego), the former

California Senate leader who is running for governor in 2026, thanked Newsom for allowing her to legally marry her wife in 2008, reflecting on the so-called summer of love, when LGBTQ+ couples rushed to wed ahead of the vote on Proposition 8.

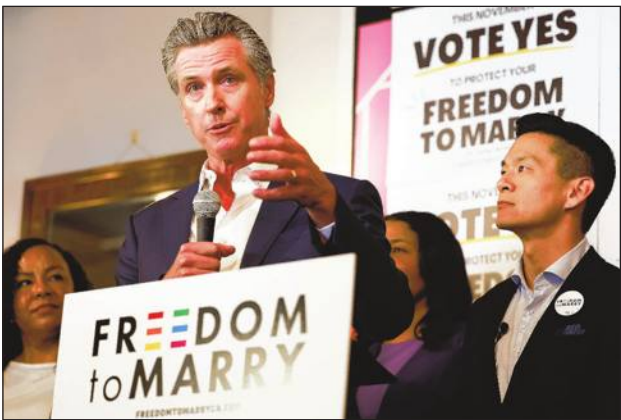
Atkins said she officiated at 18 weddings that year and remembered days when she attended multiple ceremonies — but that came to "a devastating end" when Proposition 8 passed.

Since the initiative was ruled unconstitutional, the Supreme Court ensured the right to same-sex marriage in 2015.

"In California today, we believe the ability to marry who you love is a fundamental right. And while we may feel a sense of security ... we can't become complacent in our fight to protect our rights," Atkins said Friday.

The California Family Council, a conservative policy organization, opposes the November ballot measure.

Spokesperson Greg Burt said in a statement that



JESSICA CHRISTIAN San Francisco Chronicle

**GOV.** Gavin Newsom on Friday promotes a measure to protect "precious progress" on LGBTQ+ rights.

marriage between a man and a woman creates "the optimal family environment" for children and that the law shouldn't "tamper" with "the natural order."

The organization said Friday that a broader definition of marriage could lead to the legalization of polygamy.

In April, the Oakland City Council officially recognized polyamorous families in an effort to protect "diverse family structures" from discrimination.

Most Californians' views have changed since Proposition 8.

Polling by the Public Policy Institute of California in 2021 showed that an overwhelming majority of Californians supported protections for the LGBTQ+ community.

However, a recent nationwide poll conducted for The Times by NORC at the University of Chicago showed a clear political divide in how Americans view the influence of LGBTQ+ people in society, with 3 in 4 Democrats saying that impact is positive, and nearly the same share of Republicans saying it has been negative.

## Is homeless count accurate?

[**Sacramento**, from B1] ice," Loaves and Fishes said in a statement. "All campus programs have reported serving more guests daily than last year."

The nonprofit said it saw a 6.4% increase in the number of homeless people seeking services from 2022 to 2023, including a 21% increase in meals served.

Shannon Dominguez-Stevens — director of Loaves and Fishes' Maryhouse, a daytime shelter for women and children — said she anticipates those numbers will further increase this year.

"Just anecdotally, on a day-to-day basis, we're seeing more people come to us in crisis [mode], having just lost housing and unable to find shelter beds," she said. "It's surprising, and frankly

it's absolutely unbelievable there's been such a decrease in the community. It doesn't make sense."

Dominguez-Stevens said she was skeptical of Simtech Solutions Inc., the new firm hired by Sacramento Steps Forward to help conduct the count and analyze the data. Previous homeless counts were conducted with assistance from Sacramento State University.

She said the new firm used a different methodology to collect and analyze data.

Additionally, she said, city and county leaders increased homeless encampment clearing activity over the last two years, causing homeless people to distrust government officials and go deeper into hiding.

Dominguez-Stevens also worries the 2024 point-in-time numbers will negatively affect government funding for housing and supportive services.

The biennial point-in-time homeless count is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and is used to help determine how federal funding for services should be allocated. The data also help government entities such as Sacramento County quantify and categorize their homelessness populations to determine what services and resources are needed in particular areas.

Dominguez-Stevens said raising concerns about the results was not meant to create tension between the nonprofit and the county.

"But we are an organization that is dedicated to amplifying the voices of people who are experiencing homelessness in our community," Dominguez-Stevens said. "And the only way to do that is to continue to advocate even if our advocacy causes some feathers to be ruffled."

County officials said they were anticipating a fair amount of healthy skepticism when the results came out.

"We double-checked, triple-checked and looked at our methodology," Bates said. "We went back to our national consultant, we were going every which way to see if there's anything here from a methodology standpoint that would warrant us to be concerned, and that led us to look at other data in our system, and so it's those things that led us to conclude that these numbers stand."

Trent Simmons, data analytics director for Sacra-

mento Steps Forward, said Simtech Solutions was selected because it had conducted more than 300 point-in-time counts across the country. It used a census-tract methodology compared against the four-mile zones used in previous counts.

"I don't think there's anything defective to point in one direction over the other," he said.

The firm also provided a mobile app for volunteers to input data, which it collected and analyzed. Simmons said there were no reports of any major glitches, and support staffers with the firm were on standby to address any issues.

City and county officials said the drop in homelessness is a reflection of the partnership they established in 2022 after the homeless population shot up by 67% between 2019 and 2022, surpassing that of San

Francisco.

That partnership led both agencies to pool their resources to boost the number of outreach teams, shelter bed capacity and create a coordinated entry system to ensure people are accessing the homeless services they need, officials said.

Additionally, officials said rents in the region have dipped by 3% and apartment vacancy rates have risen by 58% since 2022.

Steinberg said the doubts expressed about the results of this year's homeless count do not dampen the celebratory mood surrounding the results.

"When the numbers went up in 2022, those of us in the trenches accepted that reality," he said. "Now that we have some much more hopeful news, and by the way I have been measured about this, this is not a declaration of victory, but it does represent astounding progress."

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**Manager, Risk Assurance Compliance and Analytics (Mult Pos), PwC US Consulting LLP, Los Angeles, CA.** Asst clnts in dvlpg analytics & tech sltns that hlp them dvt, montr, & prdct risk. Req Bach's deg or foreign equiv in IT, MIS, Info Sci, Acct, Math or rel + 5yrs post-bach's, progress rel work exp; OR a Master's deg or foreign equiv in IT, MIS, Info Sci, Acct, Math or rel + 3yrs rel work exp. 80% telecommuting permitted. Mst be able to commute to designated local office. Domestic &/or intl travel up to 60% req. Salary: \$136,000/yr. Please apply by sending your resume to: US\_PwC\_Career\_Recruit ment@pwc.com, specifying Job Code CA4217 in the subject line.

**SENIOR ACCOUNTANTS**  
iKruher Inc is seeking Senior Accountants in Arcadia, California. Responsible for day-to-day accounting and financial reporting of the company and each subsidiary. Supervise and/or manage general ledger accounting functions. Assist in the preparation and ongoing analysis of budgets and oversees the Accounts Receivable Accounting and ensure an accurate and timely monthly-close process. Coordinate and prepare all monthly, quarterly and annual state sales tax returns, use tax return. Salary \$92,206 per annum. Apply at [Dan@ikruher.com](mailto:Dan@ikruher.com)

Production Co. looking for Admin. & Personal Assistant to provide support for personal & business related needs. Req: 2 yrs. exp. in job offered, or as ex. assistant, secretary, receptionist, or rel. Exp./skills must include MS Excel, Maintaining calendar & contact info. & event coordination. Salary range \$75.5K- \$80K. Jobsite: Studio City, CA. Work auth. req'd if hired. Send resume to: Tincy Pyro Productions at [amy@tinypyro.com](mailto:amy@tinypyro.com). Principals only.

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#### Employment

**Amgen Inc.; Associate Data Analytics; Thousand Oaks, CA;** Utilize quantitative and analytical skills to support the development of data science and reporting capabilities within Finance Insight & Tech (FIT) function. May Telecommute. Interested candidates email resume to [Talent-Mobility@amgen.com](mailto:Talent-Mobility@amgen.com). Must reference, Attn: Talent Mobility Job # 20516.3306. The annual salary range for this position in the U.S. is \$86,483.00 - \$112,950.00 per year. Also, this position offers stock, retirement, medical, life and disability insurance and eligibility for an annual bonus or for sales roles, other incentive compensation. For more details visit <https://careers.amgen.com/life-at-amgen/benefits/>.

**Business Analyst.** Bachelor in Bus. Admin., Mktg., Statistic, Info. Systems or rtd req'd. Salary: \$47,195/yr. Worksite: Irvine, CA. Send resume: Jalita Corporation; 17880 Skypark Cir #140, Irvine, CA 92614; Attn: lwatsuki

Digital Quality Assurance Analyst (Los Angeles, CA) sought by Public Storage to review functional & design specs to ensure full understanding of individual deliverables. Identify test reqmts from specs, map test case reqmts & design test coverage plan. Write, implmt, & document test cases to identify defects & update system reqmts. Salary: \$102,335. Send resume & salary reqmts to: Sybil Enriquez at [srenriquez@publicstorage.com](mailto:srenriquez@publicstorage.com)

The State Bar of California is hiring for the following in Los Angeles, CA: Senior IT Analyst. Performs advanced and specialized IT work that requires technical expertise and an understanding of complex analytical procedures and systems processes. Bachelor's or foreign equivalent in Computer Science, Computer Engineering, or Electrical and Electronics Engineering + 3 years of experience as IT Professional. Salary: \$98,130-\$130,835/year. Email resumes to: andrey.chua@calbar.ca.gov

#### Employment

Market Research Analyst for wholesale distribution of tires @ \$63,398/yr. Mail to Katana Racing, Inc., 4490 Ayers Ave., Vernon, CA 90058.

**Senior Supply Planner (Ops. Res. Analyst), Schwan's Shared Services, LLC, a subsidiary of Schwan's** seeks a Senior Supply Planner (Ops. Res. Analyst) in La Palma, California. Formulate and apply mathematical modeling and other optimizing methods to develop and interpret information that assists management with decision making, policy formulation, or other managerial functions. Must have proof of legal authority to work in the U.S. Requirements - Education: Bachelor's degree (U.S. or foreign equivalent) in Economics, Statistics and Applied Mathematics, Supply Chain Management or a closely related field. OR a Master's degree (U.S. or foreign equivalent) in Economics, Statistics and Applied Mathematics, Supply Chain Management or a closely related field. Experience: For candidates with a qualifying Bachelor's degree - three years of experience as an operations research analyst, supply chain analyst, budget analyst or similar position involving analysis for forecasted demand for manufacturing of packaged consumer food at a food manufacturer and distributor. For candidates with a qualifying Master's degree - one year of experience as an operations research analyst, supply chain analyst, budget analyst, sales analyst or similar position involving analysis for forecasted demand for manufacturing of packaged consumer food at a food manufacturer and distributor. The salary for this position has a range of \$77,147 to \$110,000. Minimal travel required, less than 10%. Work from home, one day a week, in the metro area is permitted but not required. Interested candidates should apply on-line at [www.schwansjobs.com](http://www.schwansjobs.com). This position is for full-time employment by Schwan's Shared Services, LLC for employment in La Palma, California. EOE.

#### Employment

**Principal Advanced Analytics needed by DIRECTV, LLC in El Segundo, CA** (and various unanticipated locations throughout the U.S.; may work from home) to gather, analyze, and interpret a wide variety of data to identify causal relationships and trigger points that influence customer behavior. Our Principal Advanced Analytics' earn between \$153,458.00 to \$202,100.00 yearly. DIRECTV, LLC offers amazing benefits from health insurance to tuition reimbursement and paid time off to discounts on products and services. Apply at <https://jobs.directv.com/>, select JOB SEARCH and APPLY and select Search by Requisition Number at the left bottom of the page and enter Job Number: R240149.

**Product Data Analyst**  
Perform a variety of data analysis activities while managing the relationship of the data team with all customers and internal stakeholders. Min Reqs: Masters Deg in Business Analytics or a cslty rtd field & 4 yrs exp performing data analysis and building business intelligence dashboards. Salary: \$146,744. Based in Santa Monica, CA. Telecommuting permitted. Semi-annual travel to SimplePractice's Santa Monica office req. To apply, send resume to [recruiting@simplepractice.com](mailto:recruiting@simplepractice.com) with "Product Data Analyst (CA-4058)" in the subject line. SimplePractice, LLC

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#### Employment

Amgen Inc.; Specialist SAP Architect; Thousand Oaks, CA; Collaborate with technical and infrastructure architects to design and develop the reference architecture for complex Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solutions using technologies from the leading cloud service providers such as AWS. May Telecommute. The position requires up to 10% travel to various unanticipated sites throughout the U.S. (national). Interested candidates email resume to [Talent-Mobility@amgen.com](mailto:Talent-Mobility@amgen.com). Must reference, Attn: Talent Mobility Job # 20516.3935. The annual salary range for this position in the U.S. is \$136,307.00 - \$176,041.00 per year. Also, this position offers stock, retirement, medical, life and disability insurance and eligibility for an annual bonus or for sales roles, other incentive compensation. For more details visit <https://careers.amgen.com/life-at-amgen/benefits/>.

**Senior External Audit Generalist (Mult Pos), PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Los Angeles, CA.** Assist a variety of clients to slvr thmrlx bus issues fr strtry to exctn. Req. Bach's deg or foreign equiv in Acct, Mgmt, Fin, Bus Admin, or rel + 2 yrs rel wrk exp. 80% telecommuting permitted. Mst be able to commute to designated local office. Domestic &/or intl trvl up to 20% of time req. Salary \$100,000/yr. Please apply by sending your resume to: US\_PwC\_Career\_Recruitment@pwc.com, specifying Job Code CA4176 in the subject line.

Los Angeles Times Classified  
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#### Employment

Associate Vice President - Cloud Engineering sought by Next Gear Solutions, LLC in Irvine, CA (telecommuting permitted): Manage the DvPr Operations & Site Reliability Engg services that provide process, tooling, & monitoring. <5% domestic travel req'd. \$228,700 - \$308,800 /yr. Apply at: <https://bit.ly/3QBRLzg>

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Bookkeeper for non-profit @ \$44,470/yr. Mail to Abundant Blessings, Inc., 7900 S Vermont Ave., LA, CA 90044.

**Limninx, Inc., dba Go-Guardian seeks Business Intelligence Analyst II in El Segundo, CA:** Provide tactical & strategic intelligence to biz decision-makers (BDMs) within company w/ focus on sales, marketing, product & people. Telecommuting an option. Reqs: MS(or equiv)+1 yr. exp. Salary: \$126,776.16 - \$145,792.58 per annum. Submit resume w/ ref. to: Req.#: 21-3514 at: [ATTN:Joseph Lisuzko, jobs@goguardian.com](mailto:ATTN:Joseph Lisuzko, jobs@goguardian.com).

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I go wherever I'm needed. Today I'll be teaching you your math lesson.

Mr. B

You tried one on him in gym last week.

I've got a prank for him.

69

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# Obituaries

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## Esther Wachtell

Esther Wachtell, devoted mother, cherished grandmother and great-grandmother, loving wife, valued philanthropist and beloved member of the community passed away surrounded by family on June 1, 2024. Her life was a testament to the power of generosity, compassion and a deep appreciation for the arts, education, and community.

Despite her insistence that she was only 60 years old, Esther was born on June 30th, 1934 in New York to Rhoda and Victor Pickard. She grew up with an unwavering commitment to make the world a better place. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Connecticut College and received her master's from Cornell University. She met the love of her life, Tom Wachtell, on a blind date and because she thought he would not, asked him out on their second date. They married and moved to California in 1963 to build their personal "Shangri-LA" filled with the extended family they created, a trove of friends and their long line of German Shepherds. It was in these early years that Esther began to channel her love of the arts and community service into meaningful action.

Esther's career was marked by her outstanding leadership. She had various board roles at Thomas Aquinas College, Cal State Channel Islands Foundation, the Museum of Ventura County, The Ojai Music Festival, Ojai Community Bank, USC Center for Philanthropy and Public Policy, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, and the Music Center, just to name a few. When she took on a role, she was all in. She would show up to every meeting, had strong opinions and was never hesitant to voice them. She may have been small in stature, but never in impact.

In addition to her board work, Esther was active in the civic life of her communities, from being a commissioner in the 1984 Olympics, to working on Tom Bradley's mayoral campaigns, she was constantly striving to show the best of Los Angeles. The business she built, The Wachtell Group, to bolster non-profits in Southern California, made her very proud. Esther's passion for community continued when Tom and Esther moved to Ojai over 25 years ago. Her dedication and work ethic earned her the respect and admiration (and often shudders when she pulled out her yellow pad) of all who worked with her. She believed deeply in the power of these institutions to transform lives and communities.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Esther was known for the warmth, generosity, and the personal connections she forged with so many friends and colleagues. She was a mentor to many, always willing to share her knowledge and support for the next generation of leaders.

Esther was intensely curious. There was no trip without a reading list, no destination without a museum and no corner of the world where she could not find art and beauty. Any topic worth discussing deserved philosophic exploration and should lead to the deepening of ones understanding of the world.

There was nothing more important to Esther than her family. They were the center of her universe. Her generous embrace included anyone who came within her family orbit - which led to many Thanksgiving dinners of over 80 "family" members - each of which began with prayers, a recognition of how lucky we all were and, as no gathering should go without, patriotic songs.

Esther was pre-deceased by her husband of 65 years, Tom, who was always her greatest champion and supporter. She is survived by her children, Roger Wachtell and his wife Kathy, Wendy Wachtell and her husband Bob Graziano, and Peter Wachtell and his wife Debbie as well as her grandchildren: Katherine, Tommy, Bryce, Kenzie and Jordan, Lauren, Lexi, Ashley and James, Davis, Bradley and Valerie, Brian and Beatrice, Jameson and Randi, and Matt and Elise and her great-grandson, TR. She was "Mena" to many more including Christopher and Katie, Michelle, Erin, Ryan, Jake, Bryce, Garrett, Gabby, Clinton, Ben and Jimmy.

The family would like to thank those who have been so kind and loving to Esther over the last several years including Carri, Angelica, Jesus, and Antonio. Her many friends in Ojai and Los Angeles brought beauty and richness to her life every day and we are so grateful for their steadfast love and support.

Prayers are welcome to send Esther on her way to God. A Celebration of Life Mass with a reception to follow will take place at Thomas Aquinas College, 10000 Ojai Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060 at 10:00 am on June 29, 2024. In lieu of flowers, please do something kind for someone you love.

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## Doris Jean Austin Carver

December 24, 1929 - May 30, 2024

Doris passed away peacefully after a short illness in the early hours of May 30th, 2024.

A longtime resident of Santa Monica, she grew up with her two siblings, Wanda and Herman "Klay", and raised by her loving parents, Herman and Louise Klabunde, who were respected restaurateurs of Santa Monica. Doris attended and graduated from Saint Monica High School in 1947. Her dedication to St. Monica Catholic Community remained lifelong. She was preceded by her beloved husbands, Aubrey Austin Jr. of Santa Monica Bank and W. Paul Carver, with whom she found love again, later in life. Doris is survived by her children, Janet Austin, Jean Marie Austin, Aubrey L. Austin, Nancy Austin; her grandchildren, Jason Grindall, Audra Henry, Paul Benton Carver; and her great grandchildren, Chloe Grindall, Sophie Grindall, Bailee Carver, Andrew Carver.

Doris was known for her kind, generous and loving spirit, always willing to lend an ear to dear friends and family. She loved to entertain and gather people together and truly was the "glue" in her family and friend circles and will be truly missed by many in the community. Her steadfast faith and dedication to philanthropy was reflected in her continuous support of many charities and events, whether it was sponsoring a family in need or participating in SMASH, an annual event supporting education and formation at St. Monica Community. Her elegant, friendly and charming demeanor made her absolutely adored by all and she will be deeply, deeply missed.

Her memorial service will be on Monday, June 10th, 2024 at 10am at St. Monica Catholic Community. In lieu of flowers, the family would prefer a donation be made in her name to one of her favorite charities: St. Monica Community, World Vision, St. Joseph Center.

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## Frances Augusta (Hughes) FARRER

September 3, 1927 - May 24, 2024

Frances Augusta (Hughes) Farrer, passed away peacefully surrounded by loved ones shortly after a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer.

Born in Pasadena, CA, Fran grew up as a young actress appearing in many Shirley Temple films as well as modeling for fashion magazines and commercials. As a young woman, Fran chose to forego her Hollywood life to pursue higher education at UCLA. There, she would make lifelong friendships at Kappa Alpha Theta and meet her future husband, John Farrer, MD.

While John was attending medical school at Boston University, their oldest child, Susan, was born in 1952. In 1954, they were stationed at Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, TX, where John served as a flight surgeon and their second child, Jay, was born. By 1956, they found themselves back at UCLA where John was a resident, and their third child, Laura was born.

In 1961, Fran and John moved to Newport Beach, where John began his medical practice in urology at Hoag Hospital. The close friends they made within the Hoag community upon their arrival, endured as such for all their life.

Fran and John were adventurous at heart, with many backpacking trips through the Sierras, sailing the California Coast and cycling through Europe. They were dedicated to their fitness accomplishments such as both of them medaling in the L.A. Marathon at the age of sixty-four.

After John passed away in 1994, Fran found comfort in her church at St Andrews Presbyterian and support in the many friendships she had there. She remained dedicated to her physical fitness, attending classes for approximately thirty years at Body Design studio where the owner and a group of closely knit clients were a second family to her. Fran also continued to travel with close friends and family, exploring remote corners of the world.

Her undying passion for life was in the people she met near and far. All will miss her effusive charm and her reservoir of strength that those around her leaned upon.

Fran was predeceased by her husband, John, and her son, Jay. She is survived by her two daughters, Susan Antonini Kuypers, Laura Thomson (Jack Thomson), her five grandchildren, Adam Antonini, Laura Antonini, Logan Farrer, Sydney Farrer, Brooke Thomson, her two step grandchildren John Thomson (Bonnie), Collin Thomson (Barbara), and her two great granddaughters Allison Antonini, and Abigail Antonini.

A memorial service will be given at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, 600 Saint Andrews Rd., Newport Beach on Saturday August 3, 2024 at 11:00/AM

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made online by visiting <https://www.hoaghospitalfoundation.org/frances-farrer-tribute.html>

Donations may also be sent to the Hoag Hospital Foundation (330 Placentia Avenue, Suite 100, Newport Beach, CA 92663), in memory of Frances Farrer.



## James (Dink) Lenihan

James Edward Lenihan  
July 17, 1937-May 28, 2024

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of James "Dink" Lenihan. The son of Joseph Lenihan and Marion Crawford, he was number three out of six children. The four Lenihan boys were well known in Los Angeles for their occasional shenanigans. Dink attended Holy Spirit Grammar school where he first met his future wife Mary Grimmer in the first grade. At Loyola High School (go Cubs!) he was a standout football player, playing both sides of the field, which he often reminded us, "as the captain he could call time-outs just to let him catch his breath." After graduating Loyola University, he became a civil engineer and worked on many of the LA freeways, the Long Beach islands and locally, at the Redondo Beach Jetty.

Dink and Mary got married and settled in Redondo Beach where they raised two children, Colleen and Joe.

Dink enjoyed time with his family taking summer trips to Catalina, spending Thanksgivings in Baja and sharing his passion for golf at Rolling Hills CC or Arrowhead CC. After retirement, if he wasn't playing golf or in the card room, you could find him holding court on "his barstool" at the Bull Pen drinking a Budweiser, the king of beers.

Dink is survived by his wife of 64 years Mary Grimmer Lenihan, daughter Colleen Lenihan Maners (husband Dean) and was "Grandpa-man" and Camp Arrowhead Counselor to his 5 grandchildren James, Jack and Clare Lenihan; Sydney and William Maners (wife Alex Kate); and beloved third twin and Arrowhead camper MacKenzie Dickens. His son Joe Lenihan, who passed last year and his brothers Joe and John have now completed their foursome and are playing the perfect round with Dink

There will be a mass at St Lawrence Martyr in Redondo Beach, the graveside services will be at Holy Cross, no obligation.



## Dr. Martin Henry Litke

May 1931 - September 2023

Martin was born in Brooklyn, New York in May of 1931 to Louis and Teresa Litke. He died of natural causes in September 2023 at the age of 92 in his home in Newport Beach, CA. Martin graduated from Abraham Lincoln high school in Brooklyn 1949, Princeton University in 1953. He attended Medical School at NYU (Class of 1957), did his internship at Bellevue Hospital in New York City, and completed his residency as an Internist at the VA Hospital in Long Beach, CA.

He married the love of his life, Mildred Cohen, in September of 1957, who joined him as a schoolteacher in Korea, where Martin served as a Captain in the army (1958-1960), providing medical care for patients in Seoul post-Korean War. While in Korea, they had their first son, David Litke, in 1959.

Martin ran his private medical practice with his wife in Garden Grove, CA for 25 years before retiring to pursue his love of travel, teaching, and his hobbies. Between trips to the far reaches of the globe with Mildred, he remained involved in medicine as a teacher and mentor to the residents and interns at the Medical School of UC Irvine, becoming a clinical professor of medicine at UC Irvine medical center. Achieving his dream of attending college at Princeton, was a huge source of pride for Martin; and as an alumnus, he stayed involved in recruiting new Princeton students. His hobbies included boating, fishing, tennis, photography, theater, symphony, and bird watching.

Most important to Martin was his love of his family. He was a dedicated husband, father, and a doting grandfather and great grandfather. Martin is predeceased by his wife Mildred and his first son David; and survived by his daughter Ann and son Matthew Litke. He is dearly missed by them as well his 6 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren and many extended family members.

## Harold Lurie

November 24, 1927 - May 21, 2024

Hal was married to Sandy (deceased), the love of his life, for 57 years. He was the proud father of Karen Malatesta (Ian), Steven Lurie (Andrea) and Robert Lurie (Nancy); the loving grandfather of Adam (Lauren), Andrew (Melissa), Rachel, Jason, Emily, Jane and Zachary; the adoring great-grandfather of Carter, Amelia, Noah and Eden; and the devoted brother of Marian Troy (deceased) (Paul). Hal valued family above all else; his life was a testament to his profound love for, and pride in, his loved ones. His many friends cherished him for his warmth, integrity and generosity. He started working at Acme Electric Wholesale Supply Co. as a truck driver while in college at UCLA and, through hard work and dedication, eventually became its co-owner. He was also active in the community, including as a member of Sinai Temple, volunteer for the Prostate Cancer Foundation, and longtime supporter of UCLA basketball. He will be missed beyond words, and will live on in our hearts forever. Donations in his memory may be made to Sinai Temple or the Prostate Cancer Foundation.

Lois passed away peacefully after a short fight with a fractured pelvis. She is survived by several cousins, niece Karen Yokomizo and nephew Mark Yokomizo.



## Daniel Peter Nadsady

Dan Nadsady of Bakersfield, Ca. passed at his family home in Sun Valley, Ca. on Sunday June 2nd, 2024. Born in Burbank, Ca. November 11th 1949 to Clarence and Geraldine Nadsady. Survived by his wife Shirlena Nadsady, son Joe, Dan's five siblings and many nieces and nephews.

Received Civil Engineering degree SDSU. Retired Metropolitan Water District. Loved to garden, genealogy, hummingbirds, reading & remembered everything.

## Anne Ryder

March 20, 1939 - May 7, 2024

(Leslie) Anne Ryder was born on March 20, 1939, in Seattle, WA. She passed away peacefully on May 7, 2024, in Long Beach, CA, surrounded by members of her family. Anne was the daughter of John N. and Margaret Ryder. She is survived by her brother, John K. Ryder and his wife Sandy; her children, Teresa Zimmerman-Liu and Thomas Zimmerman; her grandchildren, Joanna (Joey) Liu and her husband Michael Hardy, Phoebe Liu, Elizabeth Liu and Luis Garcia; and her great-grandchildren, Kamali Liu, Xolani Hardy, Jason Garcia, and Christopher Garcia.

A funeral mass will be held at 5:30 pm on Tuesday, June 11 at St. Matthew Catholic Church in Long Beach, CA. There will be a reception immediately afterwards in the St. Matthew Parish Hall.

In lieu of flowers, Anne hoped her friends would make contributions in her memory to one or more of these charities that were dear to her heart: Unbound ([Unbound.org/Ryder](https://unbound.org/Ryder)), Homeboy Industries ([homeboyindustries.org/donate](https://homeboyindustries.org/donate)), Assistance League of Long Beach ([www.allb.org](https://www.allb.org)), and St. Luke's Shower Program in Long Beach (<https://onrealm.org/stlukeslb/give/showers>).

## Lois Sayoko Yagi

June 18, 1923 - May 26, 2024

Lois Sayoko Yagi was the second daughter born to Hatsue & Takeshi Yagi. She graduated from Santa Monica High School and shortly thereafter travelled to Japan with two cousins, where they were stranded until WWII ended.

She worked 38 years for Los Angeles County, moving to Las Vegas after the 1994 Northridge Earthquake with her brother Stanley Akira. They returned to Los Angeles and moved into Nikkei Senior Gardens with their sister Frances Kiyoko.

Lois passed away peacefully after a short fight with a fractured pelvis. She is survived by several cousins, niece Karen Yokomizo and nephew Mark Yokomizo.

Only private family services will be held.

For her final request, in lieu of flowers and/or koden, please make a contribution to Nikkei Senior Gardens; 9221 Arleta Avenue; Arleta, CA 91331.

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## John William Wactor III

John William Wactor III, 37, of Summerville was murdered on Saturday, May 25, 2024, in Los Angeles, California while heroically shielding his co-worker.

Johnny was born on August 31st, 1986, in Charleston, South Carolina, son of John W. Wactor II and Scarlett S. Wactor. Johnny was the oldest of three brothers, Lance E. Wactor and Grant C. Wactor. The family built a house on 5 acres in Summerville, SC when Johnny was 13. He grew up with a deep appreciation for nature and his family.

Wactor's roots run deep through the lowcountry with a surviving grandmother, 5 aunts, 5 uncles, and 11 cousins. Johnny was a decorated athlete. He enjoyed being active and taking care of his health. Wactor was a nationally ranked and state champion swimmer, winning countless medals and ribbons. To this day, Wactor holds the record for the 11-12 Boys 50 Meter Free for swimming in the tri-county area.

Johnny started performing at an early age. He made his first public performance at 10 as Julius Caesar at Givhans Elementary School. The following year Johnny was accepted into Rollings Middle School of the Arts. By 19, Johnny knew that he wanted to be an actor. Upon graduation from the College of Charleston, with a double major in Business and Spanish, Johnny moved to Los Angeles to pursue his acting career.

Johnny continued to hone his craft as a storyteller in several studios in Los Angeles, ultimately finding his creative community at Stuart Rogers Studios in North Hollywood.

His loss has been felt by his family, closest friends and the worldwide community of his fans. He leaves behind a remarkable body of work as an Actor; starring as a lead on Siberia, an NBC primetime TV show, and was Brando Corbin on long-time running soap opera, General Hospital. Countless TV and Film credits, but he was not done. He had a vigor for the next story to tell.

Johnny recognized the importance of service to his community donating his time and energy to so many in need. Recently reading Dr. Seuss to local elementary schools in Los Angeles, making and passing out sandwiches to the homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic. He protested with his fellow actors during the writer's strike.

Johnny stood up for what he believed in and remains an example of how to live life with non-negotiable integrity and grit. He found solace and serenity with his loving family, on the mountain, climbing, being a proud big brother to Lance and Grant, with the boys, just talking to his mother, in play, always outside, in nature.

A man brimming with magnetism and humility. A pure life force, passion Personified, awaking in the early mornings with purpose, ready to go. Johnny's love will be remembered and felt by all. Forever leaving an everlasting mark on this world.

Funeral services will be held Saturday, June 15, 2024, at Summerville Baptist Church, 417 Central Avenue, Summerville, SC 29483. Family will be receiving friends at 1:30, with the Funeral to follow at 1 o'clock. Flowers will be accepted to Summerville Baptist Church. Memorials may be made to the Edisto Island Open Land Trust of Charleston, SC or Stuart Rogers Studios of Los Angeles, CA.

The family is asking everyone to pray for the immediate capture, conviction, and severe penalty of the three masked murderers.

Arrangements by Parks Funeral Home, 130 West 1st North St., Summerville, SC 29483. [www.parksfuneralhome.com](https://www.parksfuneralhome.com).

## Cynthia Zeidner

Mount Sinai Mem Parks - H. Hills 800-600-0076

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## The year that was 1935

Although a primitive, two-color process was first used in 1922, audiences weren't impressed by Technicolor until a three-color system appeared in "Becky Sharp."

[latimes.com/archives](https://latimes.com/archives)



BILL ANDERS, 1933 — 2024

# One of the first humans to orbit the moon dies in plane crash at age 90

[**Bill Anders**, from B1]  
Anders and his crewmates were also the first humans to witness the blue Earth rising over the moon's gray surface.

As the spacecraft was rotating, Anders looked out the side window and was taking photos when the Earth emerged from behind the moon.

"Oh, my God, look at that picture over there!" he exclaimed in a recorded exchange. "There's the Earth comin' up. Wow, is that pretty!"

That moment, captured on film, was the iconic photo "Earthrise." The image captivated people worldwide and became a profound symbol of the environmental movement, showing the fragility of life on Earth in the vastness of space.

Looking out from the spacecraft, Anders said later, the Earth seemed "like a fragile Christmas tree ornament. And I thought to myself, you know, it's too bad we don't treat it more like a Christmas tree ornament."

The photo has had a major influence on society. Drawing on the perspective captured in the photo, environmentalists organized the first Earth Day in 1970.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said Anders "offered to humanity among the deepest of gifts an astronaut can give."

"He traveled to the threshold of the Moon and helped all of us see something else: ourselves. He embodied the lessons and the purpose of exploration. We will miss him," Nelson wrote in a social media post.

The International Astronomical Union commemorated the taking of the photo in 2018 by naming one of the moon's craters Anders' Earthrise.

In a NASA video interview in his later years, Anders reflected on how seeing Earth from that perspective influenced his thinking about people and the planet.



NASA

**'A GREAT PILOT'**  
Bill Anders is flanked by his Apollo 8 crewmates James A. Lovell Jr. and Frank Borman in 1968.

"It's really too bad, you know, we're shooting missiles and rockets and what-not at each other on this tiny little place we call home. It's the only home in the universe for us humans," he said. "It's too bad we don't treat it a little better."

When he snapped the image with a Hasselblad camera, he saw the Earth emerging not over the moon but to the side of it. In the photo's original orientation, the moon is on the right side. But the image has typically been framed with the lunar surface at the bottom, making the Earth appear to be rising.

In one interview, Anders said the photo "gave a jump-start to the environmental movement."

"It helped point out that not only is the Earth delicate and fragile, but it's also very

finite," he said. "All of the views of the Earth from the moon have let the human race ... realize that we're all jammed together on one really kind of dinky little planet. And we'd better treat it and ourselves better, or we're not going to be here very long."

Anders was the lunar module pilot on the Apollo 8 mission. In a 1997 interview about the space program, he said that before his flight, he'd guessed there was "one chance in three we'd have a successful mission."

William A. Anders was born in 1933 in Hong Kong to a military family. His father was a U.S. Navy officer.

Anders attended Grossmont High School in El Cajon in San Diego County. He went on to the Naval Academy, then was commissioned by the Air Force.

He retired from the Air Force reserve as a major general. But he never stopped flying, even decades after he returned from space.

After Apollo, Anders carved out an executive career that spanned the public and private sectors. Known for a gruff manner and exacting attention to detail, he served as executive secretary of the National Aeronautics and Space Council, a commissioner on the Atomic Energy Commission and the first chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Later came stints as ambassador to Norway, vice president of General Electric Co. and executive vice president at Textron Inc.

In the early 1990s, he served as chairman and chief executive of General Dynamics, overseeing belt-tightening at the defense contractor.

In 1996, Anders and his wife co-founded the Heritage Flight Museum, now next to Skagit Regional Airport in Burlington, Wash. In early October, Anders and his son Greg — who is now the museum's executive director — flew a pair of T-34 aircraft in a formation demonstration above the museum.

Anders and his wife, Valerie, divided their time between Washington and the San Diego community of Point Loma.

He is survived by six children and more than a dozen grandchildren.

Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly, a former astronaut, said that through the "Earthrise" photo, Anders "forever changed our perspective of our planet and ourselves."

"He inspired me and generations of astronauts and explorers. My thoughts are with his family and friends," Kelly wrote in a social media post.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

# Whooping cough cases on the rise

By **TERRY CASTLEMAN**

It's been five years since the last major outbreak of whooping cough in California, but the disease is on the rise.

Nationwide, cases of pertussis, as the illness is formally known, have been nearly three times higher so far this year than during the first five months of 2023, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And in California, case counts "have been higher during the first several months of 2024 than in the prior several years," the state Department of Public Health said in a written statement to The Times.

California has recorded 506 cases this year, almost four times the 128 cases reported during the same span last year.

The respiratory infection, which is especially dangerous for infants, is cyclical by nature, spiking every three to five years, said Dr. Nava Yeganeh, medical director for vaccine preventable disease control at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

In 2019, whooping cough cases in L.A. County increased to over 1,000. Since then, counts have been relatively low, "so we are overdue," Yeganeh said.

While numbers are currently not trending upward at the rate of the 2019 level, "it could be coming," she added.

The infection is caused by bacterial droplets and causes symptoms one to three weeks after exposure. Initially, symptoms can include a runny nose, cough and fever, Yeganeh said, but can progress to "violent, relentless coughing fits" that can disrupt sleep and cause rib fractures and hematomas in eyes.

Most at risk for the disease are infants, who can have breathing problems to the extent of turning purple around their mouths.

"They often need to be

hospitalized and monitored closely," Yeganeh said.

The earliest age an infant can be vaccinated is 6 weeks. Children should receive five doses of the vaccine by the time they are 6 years old. And California officials require a booster dose to enter seventh grade. The CDC and the state's Department of Public Health also recommend booster shots for adults.

Yeganeh said she was traumatized by seeing infants with whooping cough struggle to breathe when she worked in hospitals.

L.A. County, however, has not reported any infant hospitalizations for pertussis since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. Vaccinating pregnant women "has made a huge difference for us," Yeganeh said.

Prenatal vaccination, which occurs during the third trimester of a pregnancy and allows the mother's immunity to transfer to the baby, at least temporarily, "prevents most cases in infants younger than 2 months of age," according to the California Department of Public Health.

The effectiveness of masking and well-ventilated indoor spaces — lessons from the COVID pandemic — also applies to whooping cough, Yeganeh said.

She noted that outbreaks on the East Coast could make their way to California, as they have done with RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus.

"We're definitely keeping an eye out and expecting to see outbreaks of pertussis this year," she said.

Those with symptoms should get tested, and those who are infected should be treated with antibiotics to prevent further transmission.

And experts recommend keeping up to date on vaccinations. County-level kindergarten data show a dip in the rate of those with current vaccinations, from 95% in 2019 to 92%, in 2020. The numbers have climbed back to 95% since then.

Los Angeles Times

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Today in Southern California

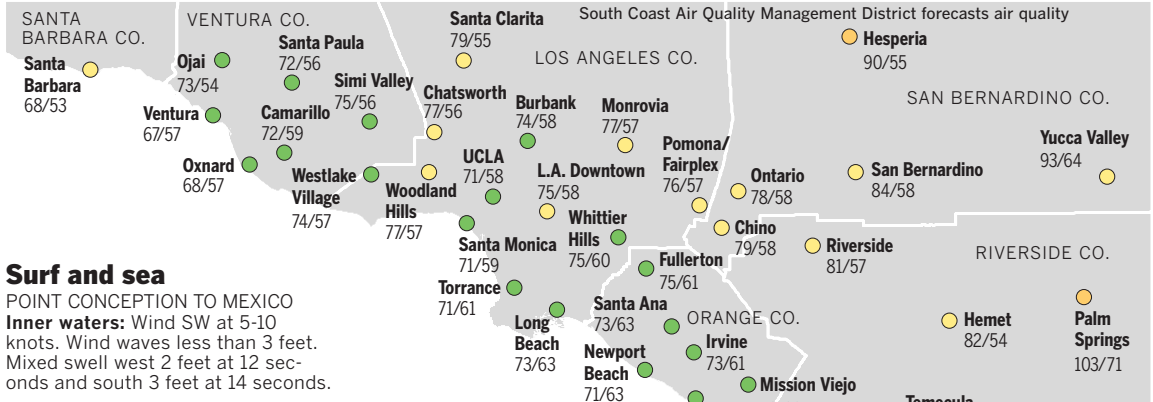
**Low clouds and coastal drizzle to start:** Low clouds and fog will stretch from the Inland Empire to the coast to start this morning as a strong onshore flow continues. There may even be areas of drizzle early on. Elsewhere, there will be sunshine for the most part, but some high clouds will slide through the region. Winds will be gusty during the afternoon along the Antelope Valley and foothills.

5-day forecasts

High/low temperatures are average forecasts for entire zone.

	L.A. Basin		Valleys		Beaches		Mountains		Deserts	
Today	75 58		76 56		71 59		78 42		103 71	
	Low clouds dissipate		Low clouds dissipate		Low clouds dissipate		Partly sunny		Very warm	
Monday	Turning sunny	75/60	Clearing	82/58	Clouds to sun	70/58	Partly sunny	79/45	Very warm	104/78
Tuesday	Partly sunny	74/58	Partly sunny	83/57	Partly sunny	66/59	Sunny; warm	80/46	Sunny; warm	107/79
Wednesday	Turning sunny	75/60	Sunny	82/57	Mostly cloudy	71/58	Sunny	79/45	Very warm	107/73
Thursday	Mostly sunny	76/59	Mostly sunny	82/59	Mostly sunny	71/58	Cooler	75/44	Breezy	103/72

Air quality



Surf and sea

**POINT CONCEPTION TO MEXICO**  
**Inner waters:** Wind SW at 5-10 knots. Wind waves less than 3 feet. Mixed swell west 2 feet at 12 seconds and south 3 feet at 14 seconds.

**Surf zone:** The risk of strong rip currents is moderate at all county beaches but low at Santa Barbara County beaches.

County	Height	Period	Direction	Temp
Santa Barbara	1-3'	13 sec	WSW	61
Ventura	2-4'	13 sec	WSW	61
Los Angeles	2-4'	13 sec	SW	63
Orange	2-4'	13 sec	SW	63
San Diego	2-4'	13 sec	SW	65

Tides

L.A. Outer Harbor, in feet.

Today	1:31p	3.6 Hi	6:30a	-0.8 Lo
	11:37p	5.6 Hi	5:28p	2.8 Lo
Mon.	2:29p	3.6 Hi	7:17a	-0.4 Lo
	-----	Hi	6:25p	2.9 Lo

UV index

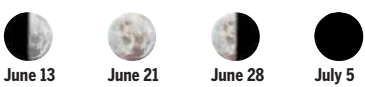
Minutes to burn for sensitive people  
Las Vegas, 10 Phoenix, 10  
Los Angeles, 10 San Francisco, 25

California cities\*

City	Sat.			Today			Mon.		
	Hi	Lo	Prcp.	Hi	Lo		Hi	Lo	
Anaheim	74	62	--	75	60		77	60	
Avalon/Catalina	61	56	Tr	62	54		67	54	
Bakersfield	96	67	--	94	67		95	71	
Barstow	104	71	--	100	69		99	72	
Big Bear Lake	77	42	--	78	42		79	45	
Bishop	100	58	--	93	59		95	60	
Burbank	75	58	--	74	58		79	58	
Camariillo	68	61	--	72	59		72	56	
Chatsworth	74	57	--	77	56		82	57	
Chino	81	60	--	79	58		86	57	
Compton	74	61	--	74	60		76	60	
Dana Point	68	63	--	70	60		69	60	
Death Valley	115	104	--	111	97		111	101	
Del Mar	66	62	--	63	59		65	53	
Escondido	73	61	--	75	57		78	56	
Eureka	61	48	.01	61	49		60	49	
Fallbrook	73	60	--	75	56		77	56	
Fresno	94	62	--	93	63		97	70	
Fullerton	75	64	--	75	61		76	61	
Hemet	83	55	.01	82	54		87	55	
Hesperia	85	56	--	85	57		91	59	
Huntington Beach	67	64	--	70	62		69	60	
Idyllwild	77	56	--	77	57		83	60	
Irvine	71	63	--	73	61		74	60	

Sun and moon

Today's rise/set  
**Los Angeles Co.** 5:41a/8:04p  
**Orange Co.** 5:41a/8:02p  
**Ventura Co.** 5:45a/8:08p  
Moon 8:30a/11:22p 8:29a/11:20p 8:33a/11:27p



Almanac

Saturday Downtown readings

Temperature	Los Angeles	Fullerton	Ventura*
High/low	72/63	73/63	63/57
Normal high/low	76/60	77/61	71/54
High/low a year ago	72/58	75/58	66/56
Record high/date	99/1890	96/2015	78/1973
Record low/date	49/1894	56/2020	43/1950

Precipitation	Los Angeles	Fullerton	Ventura*
24-hour total (as of 2 p.m.)	0.00	0.00	0.01
Season total (since Oct. 1)	22.15	16.59	24.77
Last season (Oct. 1 to date)	28.03	21.35	27.04
Season norm (Oct. 1 to date)	14.18	11.74	15.99
Humidity (high/low)	93/69	93/56	100/86

City	Sat.			Today			Mon.		
	Hi	Lo	Prcp.	Hi	Lo		Hi	Lo	
L.A. D'town/USC	76	59	--	75	58		75	60	
L.A. Int'l. Airport	68	60	--	70	59		69	59	
Laguna Beach	67	63	--	69	61		69	62	
Lancaster	89	62	--	88	64		92	60	
Long Beach	74	64	Tr	73	63		74	61	
Mammoth Lakes	78	47	--	76	45		78	44	
Mission Viejo	71	61	--	73	60		75	58	
Monrovia	75	58	--	77	57		80	59	
Monterey	64	52	--	66	54		62	52	
Mt. Wilson	65	55	--	62	54		65	53	
Needles	110	82	--	106	79		106	78	
Newport Beach	69	64	--	71	63		70	62	
Oakland	78	57	--	77	56		81	57	
Northridge	64	54	--	65	54		72	54	
Oceanside	74	64	--	74	58		74	61	
Ojai	71	55	--	73	54		77	57	
Ontario	80	60	--	78	58		82	58	
Palm Springs	105	71	--	103	71		104	78	
Pasadena	73	58	--	75	57		77	58	
Paso Robles	71	49	--	86	49		85	51	
Redding	98	69	--	95	67		104	69	
Riverside	82	57	--	81	57		84	57	
Sacramento	84	57	--	86	55		94	60	
San Bernardino	85	58	--	84	58		87	58	

‘Hate doesn’t win’: Repenting from our bigotry

[Arellano, from B1] tration and society at large let a terrible disease spread because it first emerged in the gay community — haunted me.

I might have thought homosexuality to be terrible — but an uncaring government that let people die because of who they were was far worse. A few months later, I went up to my classmate and apologized. I was sincere, but I’ll never forget the understandable skepticism on his face.

I’ve been trying to atone for my sins ever since.

I told my brother when he entered fourth grade to tell me when he and his friends played a schoolyard game called Smear the Queer. One person randomly got the label, and everyone else threw a football at him. I knew it wasn’t a matter of *if* my brother would join in but *when* — because I was taught that game too.

One day, he came home excitedly and reported that he and his friends finally played Smear the Queer. I explained what the word meant and what the game represented, and made him swear to never join again.

Professionally, I went on to slam politicians and groups that try to deny LGBTQ+ people their rights and dignity. Today, I have close LGBTQ+ friends and still get in heated debates with loved ones about their latent and overt homophobia.

I am an imperfect ally, though. I cannot erase the hurt I inflicted before, so I remember those dark days to remind myself that I can always do better.

That’s why a recent poll done for The Times by NORC at the University of Chicago and paid for by the California Endowment brought me some hope about this country’s long,

painful journey toward accepting LGBTQ+ people — and was also a gut check on how much work there still is to do.

The survey was a sequel of sorts to a pioneering 1985 Times project asking people how they felt about homosexuality.

The differences between then and now are stark. Back then, 73% said they felt gay and lesbian relationships were wrong, which an accompanying Times story noted was almost unchanged from a similar 1973 Gallup poll. This most recent poll? Just 28% felt that way.

In 1985, 51% of respondents thought there should be workplace protections for gay and lesbian people. Today, the number is 77%. The older poll showed that 35% were “uncomfortable around gays.” This time around, the question wasn’t even asked.

The 1985 Times study was released with no photos or comment. This time around, we published our findings with moving essays by my current and former LGBTQ+ colleagues. The poll and essays were part of a project called “Our Queerest Century” that is live on our website and will appear in print as a special section June 23.

These surveys show that beliefs do change with time and exposure. But while there’s more acceptance of gay and lesbian people today, a new intolerance has emerged. The 1985 poll didn’t ask about transgender people. The Times/NORC poll did — and the results are discouraging.

More than a third of respondents said they would be very or somewhat upset if their child came out as gay or lesbian. (In 1985, the figure was 89%.) But if the child came out as trans or nonbinary, the percent-



GARY CORONADO Los Angeles Times

**PRIDE FLAGS** fly at L.A. County facilities throughout June to support the LGBTQ+ community. A new poll shows a sharp drop in homophobia since 1985 but a shortage of acceptance of trans and nonbinary people.

age increased to 48%.

When it came to letting people “[live] their lives as they wish,” only 19% “strongly or somewhat disapproved” if the person was gay or lesbian. Trans or nonbinary? 31%.

Even more telling was a question about whether increased attention on trans and nonbinary people in the media and politics was good or bad. Only 16% thought it was good, while 40% thought it was bad (42% answered “neither”).

The poll unsurprisingly shows that politics and religion correlate with people’s opinions on LGBTQ+ issues.

But I also feel that a lack of familiarity plays a huge role. While 72% of American adults in the Times/NORC survey said they knew someone who identified as gay or lesbian, only 27% said the same about transgender or nonbinary people. When you have a come-to-Jesus moment with someone you’ve been taught to see as

“different,” you quickly realize how foolish you are.

Case in point: me, again. A decade after my shameful behavior toward my Anaheim High classmate, I read a powerful column by Times sports-writer Mike Penner that revealed he would return from vacation as Christine Daniels.

“I am a transsexual sportswriter,” Penner wrote. “It has taken more than 40 years, a million tears and hundreds of hours of soul-wrenching therapy for me to work up the courage to type those words.”

I was so moved that I sent a note of appreciation through a mutual friend. To my surprise and delight, Daniels wanted to meet me to talk about dealing with sudden fame. I was then at the OC Weekly, and The Times had featured me and my column “iAsk a Mexican!” — leading to an avalanche of attention.

I was nervous, and not just about meeting a writer

whose work I had long admired. I didn’t know anyone who identified as transsexual and worried that I would offend Daniels by asking an inappropriate question or using the wrong name or pronoun.

At a panini spot in Old Towne Orange, Daniels quickly disabused me of my low-key transphobia. I found myself focusing on the person before me: Kind. Hilarious. Brilliant. Happy. In the Weekly, I continued to proudly bash the ghouls who ridiculed Daniels, all the way to the sad day in 2009 when Mike Penner, who had returned to using that byline in The Times, died by suicide.

Today, as city councils reject calls to fly rainbow flags during Pride Month and school boards ban books and curricula that touch on anything LGBTQ+, as adults protest drag-time story hours in the name of protecting children and hurl invectives at drag nuns while mocking the rise

of “Latinx,” I remember my journey from hatred to humility.

I asked Bamby Salcedo, president and chief executive of the TransLatin@ Coalition, about the best way to change closed hearts and minds.

It’s not “about doing a training or checking a DEI box” she said, referring to diversity, equity and inclusion; it’s about having difficult conversations from a place of love, “because hate doesn’t win.”

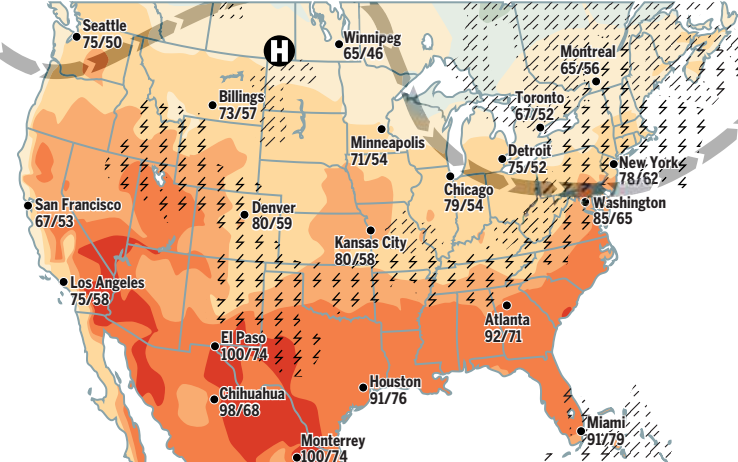
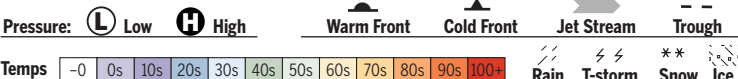
A heartfelt pushback to someone’s anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes, Salcedo said, can “put out that seed of change. And if you plant it, *la cosecha sale* [the harvest comes].”

I remind myself that people can change — and those who’ve experienced a road to Damascus moment must urge others to follow our path.

The most avoidable sin is ignorance, after all, and all sinners must repent. Take it from one.

Today in North America

**Storms in Texas and Tennessee:** Severe thunderstorms will move through areas of northern Texas eastward to western Tennessee with hail, flooding downpours and localized damaging wind gusts. Elsewhere, sweltering heat will bake much of Florida.



U.S. cities

SATURDAY’S EXTREMES FOR THE 48 CONTIGUOUS STATES

High 109 in Gila Bend, Ariz.

Low 33 in Poplar, Mont.

City	Saturday			Today			City	Saturday			Today			
	Hi	Lo	Prcp.	Hi	Lo	Sky		Hi	Lo	Prcp.	Hi	Lo	Sky	
Albany	71	54	Tr	69	55	R	Seattle	79	54	--	75	50	P	
Albuquerque	97	69	--	89	62	W	Tampa	93	81	.02	94	80	S	
Anchorage	65	47	--	62	49	Pc	Tucson	105	73	--	100	69	S	
Aspen	78	44	.05	75	47	Pc	Tulsa	96	78	.01	82	63	T	
Atlanta	89	63	--	92	71	Pc	Washington, D.C.	86	64	--	85	65	P	
Austin	95	69	--	96	71	Pc	Wichita	93	72	Tr	78	59	P	
Baltimore	85	59	--	84	62	Pc	World							
Boise	95	69	--	86	56	Pc	Acapulco	90	75	--	90	76	C	
Boston	75	60	.04	69	58	R	Amsterdam	64	52	.45	61	52	P	
Buffalo	69	56	.02	66	52	Ts	Athens	97	77	--	91	70	S	
Burlington, Vt.	71	59	.17	67	56	Ts	Bangkok	93	84	.02	92	81	T	
Charleston, S.C.	91	71	--	100	75	Su	Barcelona	77	72	--	76	68	T	
Charlotte	86	60	--	91	66	Cy	Berlin	79	46	--	70	49	S	
Chicago	77	59	.15	79	54	Pc	Cabo San Lucas	88	73	--	90	73	S	
Cincinnati	76	55	.01	78	57	Pc	Cairo	102	79	--	97	74	S	
Cleveland	78	52	--	76	55	Pc	Dubai	106	90	--	106	91	S	
Columbia, S.C.	89	62	--	97	72	Pc	Dublin	63	50	.04	57	44	Sh	
Columbus	78	53	Tr	77	56	Pc	Havana	84	73	.03	89	75	T	
Dallas/Ft.Worth	98	78	--	94	72	Pc	Ho Chi Minh City	95	79	.28	90	80	T	
Denver	86	52	.02	80	59	Ts	Hong Kong	86	78	.21	87	81	T	
Detroit	78	54	.10	75	52	Pc	Istanbul	84	70	--	87	69	P	
El Paso	103	80	--	100	74	W	Jerusalem	90	72	--	86	64	T	
Eugene	81	53	.01	79	49	Cy	Johannesburg	58	33	--	59	37	S	
Fort Myers	92	78	.10	91	78	Ts	Kuala Lumpur	91	78	.12	91	76	T	
Hartford	78	57	--	74	57	R	Lima	66	60	--	66	60	P	
Honolulu	86	73	--	86	75	Pc	London	66	52	--	65	51	P	
Houston	93	75	--	91	76	Pc	Madrid	76	66	.31	77	57	S	
Indianapolis	80	57	.01	78	56	Pc	Mecca	110	86	--	112	84	T	
Jacksonville, Fla.	98	74	--	100	72	Ts	Mexico City	87	63	--	84	61	S	
Kansas City	86	65	2.06	80	58	Pc	Montreal	70	59	.25	65	56	T	
Knoxville	84	57	Tr	78	60	Ts	Moscow	72	55	--	72	57	P	
Las Vegas	107	86	--	103	78	Pc	Mumbai	95	84	.55	89	84	T	
Louisville	78	62	.02	79	61	Pc	New Delhi	106	88	--	106	86	H	
Medford	88	60	Tr	86	55	Su	Paris	73	48	--	70	49	T	
Memphis	87	65	.12	88	64	Ts	Prague	77	50	.01	71	53	P	
Miami	91	76	.83	91	79	Ts	Rome	87	59	Tr	83	66	C	
Milwaukee	71	56	.19	75	53	Pc	Sao Paulo	77	63	.16	82	63	P	
Minneapolis	76	58	.04	71	55	Pc	Singapore	86	80	.05	89	80	T	
Nashville	97	59	.04	80	58	Ts	Taipei City	--	86	75	--	89	78	T
New Orleans	95	78	--	93	77	Pc	Tokyo	81	68	.03	78	66	C	
New York	76	63	--	78	62	Pc	Vancouver	72	52	--	69	53	P	
Norfolk	85	71	--	93	71	Cy	Vienna	85	57	.10	75	61	T	
Oklahoma City	94	71	Tr	84	64	Ts	Key: Su sunny; Pc partly cloudy; Cy cloudy; Fg foggy; Prcp precipitation; Dr drizzle; Hz hazy; S snow; Ts thunderstorms; R rain; Sn snow; Sf sleet; W windy; I ice; Rs rain/snow; W windy; Tr trace. <b>Notes:</b> National extremes exclude Alaska and Hawaii. * - data estimated.							
Omaha	80	64	.19	82	54	Pc	Saturday's readings as of 2 p.m.							
Orlando	96	76	.08	98	76	Su	Forecasts by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2024							
Philadelphia	82	64	--	83	63	Pc	AccuWeather Visit AccuWeather.com							
Phoenix	110	84	--	105	78	Su								
Pittsburgh	77	55	--	74	55	Pc								
Portland, Ore.	81	58	--	78	52	Pc								
Providence	75	58	.01	70	57	R								
Raleigh/Durham	88	59	--	94	66	Cy								
Reno	94	61	--	91	60	Pc								
Richmond	86	60	--	91	62	Ts								
St. Louis	86	69	.34	81	60	Sh								
Salt Lake City	93	66	--	98	69	Pc								



SPORTS

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024 :: LATIMES.COM/SPORTS

# Leaving Clark at home is a major blunder

**BILL PLASCHKE**

She has been shoved, smacked, walloped and whacked. She's been hip-checked, hammered, steamrollered and smothered.

In the last month, Caitlin Clark has endured the typical rough initiation into the world of women's professional basketball, and while some of it reeks of resentment, most of it has been fair.

Until now.

What the USA women's basketball committee is doing to her — and to millions of new women's basketball fans — is misguided, short-sighted and just plain wrong.

Clark, the most popular women's basketball player in the world, is being body-slammed out of the Olympics.

In a story first reported by the Athletic, the 12-player Team USA women's roster for this summer's Paris Games will not include Clark.

[See Plaschke, D5]



# An NFL trial may hold key for MLB

**BILL SHAIKIN ON BASEBALL**

The mission statement is clear. You might not agree with the commissioner of Major League Baseball on everything, but you probably would agree with him on this.

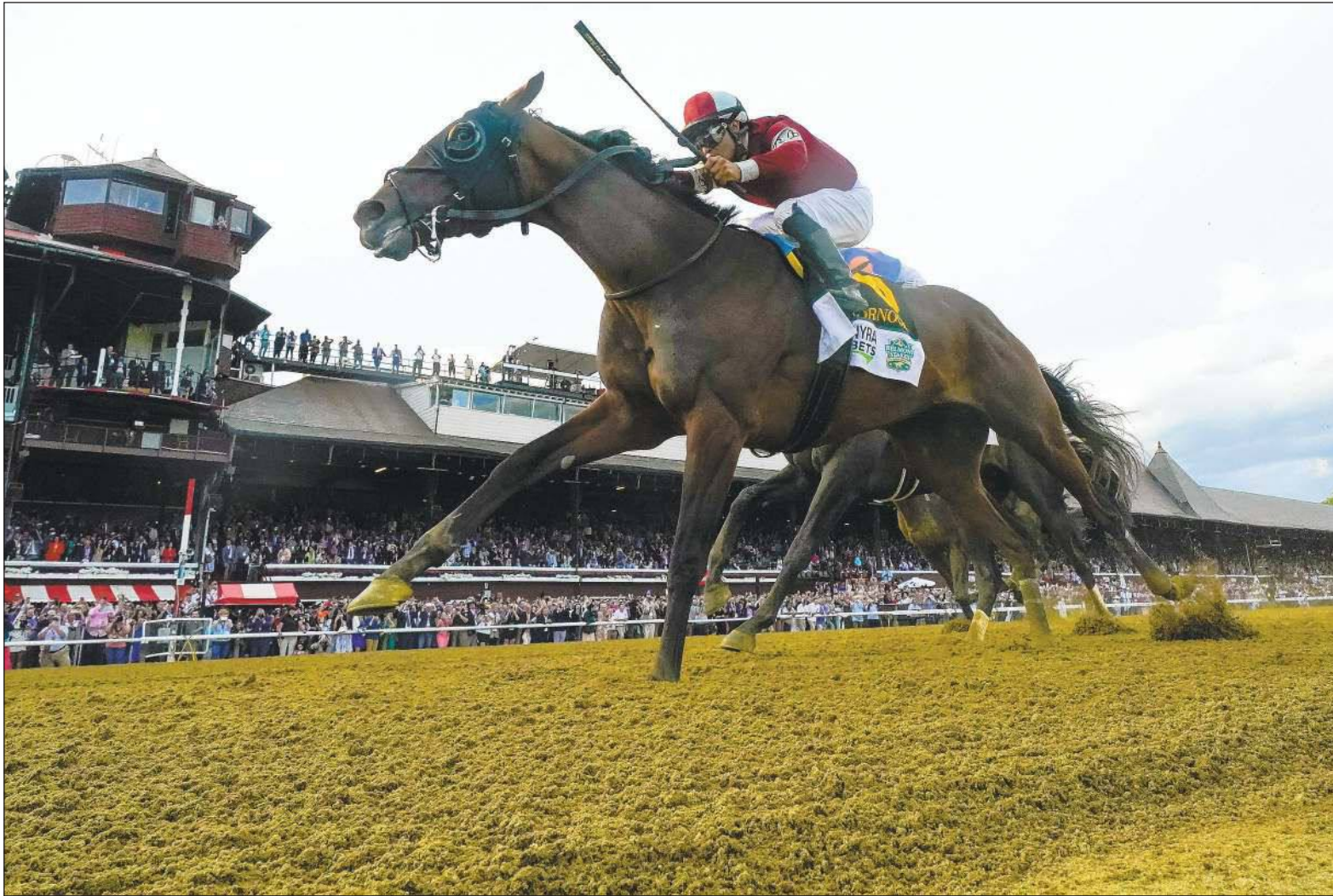
"If there is one thing I could wish for, more than anything else," Rob Manfred told me two years ago, "it would be the ability to give our fans that frictionless experience of being able to watch what they want to watch, where they want to watch."

No more blackouts. No more driving yourself crazy trying to figure out whether your favorite team is playing on ESPN or Fox or MLB Network or a local cable channel, or on Apple or Amazon or Netflix or Peacock or Roku or whatever other streaming service might throw a few dollars at major league owners.

Within the last year, amid the collapse of local cable sports channels around the country, Manfred and his lieutenants have been pretty clear about how they would like to achieve this.

[See Shaikin, D7]

## BELMONT STAKES



SETH WENIG Associated Press

**LONG SHOT DORNOCH**, with jockey Luis Saez aboard, crosses the finish line first to win the 156th running of the Belmont Stakes.

# Dornoch just full of surprises

The 17-1 long shot takes a late lead and holds off Mindframe and favorite Sierra Leone

By JOHN CHERWA

The Triple Crown season is over. Three races, three different winners. No clear star in the making. Or maybe three of them.

Dornoch etched his name into thoroughbred history by winning the 156th Belmont Stakes, a race run for the first time at Saratoga Race Course in mid-state New York.

At 17-1, not much was thought of the 3-year-old colt who finished 10th in the Kentucky Derby following a fourth in the Blue Grass Stakes. But on Saturday, in a 10-horse field, he challenged Preakness winner Seize the Grey on the front end of the race and as other horses started to fade away, Dornoch kept going, winning by a half-length.

Mindframe, who had run only two races coming into the Belmont, finished second, followed by the favorite Sierra Leone, whose late-run-



ROBERT H. HOUSTON Associated Press

## RACE TRACK HITS FINISH LINE

TV star and co-owner Jack Klugman, right, hugs Chris McCarron after Jaklin Klugman won the 1980 California Derby at Golden Gate Fields, set to close Sunday. **D8**

ning style couldn't make up the ground he needed to. The remainder of the field was Honor Marie, Antiquarian, Protective, Seize the Grey, Kentucky Derby winner Mystik Dan, The Wine Steward and Resilience.

Dornoch paid \$37.40 to win.

"He's one of the top 3-year-olds in the country, which is what we thought," winning trainer Danny Gargan said. "I got him beat in the Blue Grass [Stakes]. Today we let him run his race and he won. If he gets to run he'll always be tough to beat."

"The Derby we broke a little slow and we rushed up and we were cut off and that was it for us. We got lucky today and had a clean trip."

Confidence always has been high surrounding the \$325,000 purchase, whose ownership group includes former Dodger Jayson Werth as a minority partner.

[See Belmont, D8]



FRANK FRANKLIN II Associated Press

**THE DODGERS'** Yoshinobu Yamamoto pitched seven scoreless inning against the Yankees, who came into Friday's series opener on an eight-game win streak.

# Big Apple stage not too big for sharp Yamamoto

By JACK HARRIS

NEW YORK — As the baseball world orbited around him Friday, Yoshinobu Yamamoto hardly seemed to care.

Not in the Dodgers' clubhouse before the game, when Yamamoto sat alone at his locker, then with his legs propped up on a black leather couch, quietly reviewing scouting reports as reporters swarmed the otherwise empty room.

Not as he took the field hours later at Yankee Stadium for the opening game of this weekend's highly anticipated Dodgers-Yankees series, receiving a chorus of boos from a fan base that had hoped to see him in pinstripes.

And certainly not over a scoreless seven-inning, seven-strikeout start in the Dodgers' 2-1 win, with Yamamoto's gem setting up Teoscar Hernández for a game-deciding two-run double in the 11th inning.

"His best outing as a Dodger," manager Dave Roberts said.

More than that, it was the perhaps the first time Yamamoto looked every bit of a superstar.

[See Dodgers, D6]

## FRENCH OPEN

### Swiatek three-peats as champion

Top-ranked woman is the first to do so since 2007 and captures her fourth French title in five years. **D2**

## HIGH SCHOOLS

### Baseball and softball stars

The Times recognizes the top players, coaches and teams of the baseball and softball seasons. **D3**

## 'CLIPPED'

### Truth is stranger than fiction

Does the new series get it right? Our writers who covered the Sterling scandal weigh in on it. **D4**



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# Swiatek continues French Open dominance

Top-ranked woman is the first to win three times in a row since Henin from 2005-07.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PARIS — For a few minutes, anyway, it seemed as if Iga Swiatek was a bit off in the French Open final against Jasmine Paolini. Swiatek kept making mistakes early Saturday, was broken in the third game and trailed at Court Philippe Chatrier.

Might a true surprise be in the offing? Could Paolini not only make a match of this, but also win it?

Um, no. Not even close. Not with the way Swiatek can dominate opponents, especially on red clay.

The top-seeded Swiatek quickly recalibrated her wayward strokes and simply overwhelmed Paolini, grabbing 10 games in a row en route to a 6-2, 6-1 victory that gave her a third consecutive championship at Roland Garros and fourth in five years.

The 23-year-old from Po-



THIBAULT CAMUS Associated Press

**IGA SWIATEK** revels after beating Jasmine Paolini in the French Open final 6-2, 6-1. Swiatek is 35-2 overall in Paris, including a current streak of 21 straight wins.

land had to save a match point in a second-round victory against Naomi Osaka last week, but in the five matches after that three-set escape, Swiatek dropped a total of only 17 games.

“This tournament has been pretty surreal with its beginning and with second

round, and then I was able to get my game better and better every match. I’m really proud of myself, because the expectations obviously have been pretty high from the outside. Pressure, as well,” said Swiatek, who is 35-2 overall at the French Open, including a current streak of

21 straight victories. “I’m happy that I just went for it and I was ready to deal with all of this — and I could win.”

She is the first woman with three trophies in a row in Paris since Justine Henin from 2005 to 2007.

The 12th-seeded Paolini, a 28-year-old from Italy ap-

pearing in her first Slam final, called facing Swiatek at Roland Garros “the toughest challenge in this sport.”

Swiatek also won the French Open in 2020 and the U.S. Open in 2022 and is 5-0 in major finals.

She added this triumph to those on clay at Madrid and Rome last month, becoming the first woman to win all three events since Serena Williams did it in 2013.

“I never played a player that has this intensity before in my life,” Paolini said. “For me, right now, I think it was the most challenging match I played in my entire career.”

During Saturday’s post-match ceremony, Swiatek was flanked by a pair of women who each won 18 Grand Slam singles titles, Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova. Evert said before this French Open that she thinks Swiatek could surpass her women’s record of seven championships in Paris.

Paolini, who will rise to a career-best No. 7 in the rankings Monday, never had been past the second round at a major until getting to the fourth round at the Austral-

ian Open in January. She will play in the doubles final Sunday with partner Sara Errani against Coco Gauff and Katerina Siniakova.

## UCLA commit wins boys’ junior title

UCLA commit Kaylan Bigun and Czech Tereza Valentova won the junior boys’ and girls’ titles.

The fifth-seeded Bigun, who is 18 and was born in L.A., rallied to win 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 in the final against unseeded 17-year-old Tomasz Berkiet for his first Grand Slam title in juniors.

The 12th-seeded Valentova beat No. 3-seeded Laura Samson 6-3, 7-6 (0) in the first all-Czech junior singles Grand Slam final. It was her first major title in juniors, having lost in the U.S. Open final last year.

Bigun hopes to carry on his good form on clay when he eventually plays on the ATP tour.

“I don’t think Americans have been known to specialize in the red clay,” he said. “Obviously I want to win at the highest level on clay, and until I do that I’ll say I’m a junior clay court specialist.”

## PRO CALENDAR

	SUN 9	MON 10	TUE 11	WED 12	THU 13
 DODGERS	at N.Y. Yankees 4 ESPN		TEXAS 7 SNLA	TEXAS 7 SNLA	TEXAS 7 SNLA
 ANGELS	HOUSTON 1 BSW		at Arizona 6:30 BSW	at Arizona 6:30 BSW	at Arizona 6:30 BSW, FS1
 SPARKS	LAS VEGAS 6 SpecSN		at Seattle 7 SpecSN		
 GALAXY	SATURDAY: VS. KANSAS CITY, 7:30 P.M., APPLE TV				
 LAFC	SATURDAY: AT ORLANDO, 4:30 P.M. PDT, APPLE TV				
 ANGEL CITY	SATURDAY: AT HOUSTON, 6:30 P.M. PDT, ION				

Shade denotes home game.

## TODAY ON THE AIR

TIME	EVENT	ON THE AIR
AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL		
10 p.m.	AFL, Collingwood vs. Melbourne	TV: FS1
AUTO RACING		
9:30 a.m.	NHRA, Thunder Valley Nationals, qualifying	TV: FS1
11 a.m.	Formula One, Canadian Grand Prix	TV: 7, ESPND
12:30 p.m.	IndyCar Series, XPEL Grand Prix at Road America	TV: 4, Peacock
12:30 p.m.	NASCAR Cup, Toyota/Save Mart 350	TV: 11, FOXD
4 p.m.	NHRA, Thunder Valley Nationals, finals (delay)	TV: FS1
BASEBALL		
7 a.m.	New York Mets at Philadelphia	TV: ESPN, ESPND
10:30 a.m.	Baltimore at Tampa Bay	TV: MLB
10:30 a.m.	Minnesota at Pittsburgh	TV: ESPN+
1 p.m.	Houston at Angels	TV: BSW R: 830, 1220
1 p.m.	Arizona at San Diego	TV: MLB
4 p.m.	Dodgers at New York Yankees	TV: ESPN R: 570, 1020
BASKETBALL: NBA		
5 p.m.	NBA Finals, Game 2, Dallas at Boston	TV: 7, ESPND R: 710
BASKETBALL: WNBA		
6 p.m.	Las Vegas at Sparks	TV: SpecSN
BOWLING		
11 a.m.	PBA Tour Finals, Group 1	TV: CBSSN
1 p.m.	PBA Tour Finals, Group 2	TV: CBSSN
COLLEGE BASEBALL		
9 a.m.	NCAA tournament, Georgia vs. North Carolina State	TV: ESPNU
11:30 a.m.	NCAA tournament, Clemson vs. Florida	TV: ESPN
Noon	NCAA tournament, West Virginia vs. North Carolina (if necessary)	TV: ESPN2
3 p.m.	NCAA tournament, Evansville vs. Tennessee	TV: ESPNU
4:30 p.m.	NCAA tournament, Texas A&M vs. Oregon	TV: ESPN2
6 p.m.	NCAA tournament, Kentucky vs. Oregon State	TV: ESPNU
GOLF		
9:30 a.m.	PGA Tour, The Memorial, final round	TV: Golf, Peacock
10 a.m.	LIV Golf, Houston, Day 3	TV: 5
11 a.m.	ShopRite LPGA Classic, final round	TV: Peacock
11:30 a.m.	PGA Tour, The Memorial, final round	TV: 2, Paramount+
11:30 a.m.	PGA Champions Tour, American Family Insurance Championship, final round	TV: Golf, Peacock
2 p.m.	PGA Korn Ferry, BMW Charity Pro-Am, final round	TV: Golf, Peacock
HORSE RACING		
Noon	America's Day at the Races	TV: FS1, BSSC
3 p.m.	America's Day at the Races	TV: FS1
PRO FOOTBALL		
4 p.m.	UFL, XFL Conference Championship, San Antonio at St. Louis	TV: 11
4 p.m.	CFL, BC at Toronto	TV: CBSSN
RUGBY		
1 p.m.	MLR, Anthem RC at San Diego	TV: FS1
SOCCER		
3 p.m.	NWSL, Kansas City vs. Seattle	TV: Paramount+
3 p.m.	Canada, York vs. Vancouver	TV: FS2
TENNIS		
6 a.m.	French Open, men's final	TV: 4, Peacock
2 a.m. (Mon.)	s-Hertogenbosch (ATP/WT), Stuttgart (ATP), Nottingham (WTA), early rounds	TV: Tennis
TRACK AND FIELD		
11 a.m.	USATF New York Grand Prix	TV: 4, Peacock

## LETTERS

# WNBA should be protecting Clark

The brain trust at the WNBA has to have its head examined. The brand of basketball they have offered since its inception has had virtually zero appeal to fans. The Sparks averaged under 6,500 fans per game last season and just as important there was basically zero TV revenue. Thus there is no money to pay even great players like Candace Parker or A’ja Wilson very well.

Now Caitlin Clark, a generational talent, comes along who fans actually want to watch and rather than adapting to a new more fan-friendly style of play, two-bit hacks like Chennedy Carter take runs at her with impunity and we’re told it’s “just a more physical league.” After all the whining about women not getting paid enough, they finally have the player to lift the entire league and all they have to do is call some fouls. They are one cheap-shot injury away from killing the goose that is trying to lay the golden eggs.

JEFF HEISTER  
Chatsworth

::

I’m watching these cheap shots on Caitlin Clark, and I’m getting flashbacks to Bill Laimbeer and the Bad Boy Pistons. The assault on Clark must end now before someone gets hurt.

VAUGHN HARDENBERG  
Westwood

::

No double standard here! Al Campanis was fired for a racist statement, which was just an ignorant opinion and not profane. Pat McAfee (whoever he is) uses a racist/sexist slur intentionally about Caitlin Clark, and he is allowed to walk it back while ESPN has “no comment.” Wow!

MICHAEL SCHALLER  
Temple City

## Not on Dan-wagon

Lakers fans who cannot wait to see their favorite team bulldoze opponents by double digits in the manner of Dan Hurley’s UConn teams should take a deep breath. The performance of highly successful college coaches who made the leap to the NBA (and who did not play pro ball) is modest at best. Witness Rick Pitino with a record of 192-220 (.466), John Calipari’s 72-112 (.391) and Jerry Tarkanian’s 9-11 (.450).

It is no surprise that their exceptional ability to recruit at the college level resulting in a consistent talent advantage did not translate to the NBA. Moreover, not having “played in the league” makes it doubly demanding for a coach to retain credibility in a locker room full of highly paid NBA All-Stars.

DAVE SANDERSON  
La Cañada



DOUG MCSCHOOLER Associated Press

**ROOKIE** star guard Caitlin Clark, right, has been the target of cheap shots in her young WNBA career.

## Times poll

We asked subscribers of our Dodgers newsletter two questions:

**Are you in favor of an automated strike zone?**

After 12,607 responses:

- It should remain called by umpires .....39.5%
- Every ball or strike call should be automated.....36.7%
- I prefer a challenge system .....23.8%

**What do you think of the Joe Davis/Orel Hershiser team?**

After 17,822 votes:

- I like them both.....80.9%
- I don’t like either of them .....7.5%
- I like Davis but not Hershiser.....7.4%
- I like Hershiser but not Davis .....4.2%

::

On the eve of the NBA Finals, the Lakers shocked the sports world with news of an imminent offer to be presented to UConn coaching legend Dan Hurley. Hopefully, Hurley is fully aware that coaches moving from the NCAA to the NBA often crash faster than you can say “Jerry Tarkanian.”

ROB FLEISHMAN  
Placentia

## When winning just isn’t enough

Dylan Hernández’s take on the Dodgers season seems about right. Yes, it is nice to win games in the regular season, but as we have found out, painfully I might add, that those wins mean nothing when you get blown out in the playoffs. And with record win-loss records in the regular season, they are even more embarrassing. It is a team game and there are many people who have contributed to that dismal record. Dave Roberts is not 100% to blame, although some of his mystifying moves sure haven’t helped.

BRUCE FISCHER  
Huntington Beach

::

I know this is hopelessly antiquated thinking, but maybe the Dodgers brain trust might want to consider playing some situational small ball. When they

have the likes of Tyler Glasnow or Gavin Stone putting up zeroes inning after inning, and can’t seem to find a hit to drive in a runner from second base, maybe a sacrifice bunt and a productive out could do the trick. Worth considering?

DENNIS DULING  
San Gabriel

::

After reading that the Dodgers have not scored a run in Tyler Glasnow’s last five starts, I have a solution. The Dodgers should have a bullpen game and when they score a run, bring in Glasnow to complete the game.

JEFF HERSHOW  
Woodland Hills

## Let’s check the poll

In a recent edition of Houston Mitchell’s “Dodgers Dugout,” readers were asked to take a survey regarding the recent (mostly negative) comments about Dodger broadcasters Joe Davis and Orel Hershiser. However, there was no space to explain your choice.

My explanation would have been: Joe Davis is a pro who was the perfect (if that’s possible) replacement for Vin Scully. Hershiser is not in the same category. I don’t think the younger fans as well as the overall fan base change through the years can relate to his personality and glib on-air delivery. I know he

I certainly remember Vin Scully having partners broadcasting Dodger games. Jerry Doggett comes to mind. Maybe Ross Porter spent some time in the booth with him also. Vinny was able to combine his unique style while always maintaining his intrinsic humility. That is why it was always a pleasure to listen to any event broadcasted with Vinny.

NEAL RAKOV  
Santa Fe, N.M.

## Remembering T.J. Simers

I missed and will miss T.J. Simers’ columns. I was a reader who loved his column.

I will admit, at times cringe-worthy reading, but there was always a common thread: He would not let the owners, front office and the players hide behind their big egos.

Sure he could have been more diplomatic and more careful with the nicknames he used. But it felt like he was fighting on behalf of the everyday fan (and I’ll admit, not every fan agreed with his approach). On a personal note, I was able to win a pair of tickets for USC Professor Michael Genzuk to see T.J. talk with Vin Scully and John Wooden.

I loved his class so much and knew he was a true blue Dodger fan that I’ll never forget the chance I had to thank a professor I admired. Every now and then, T.J. Simers had a heart.

JUAN M. GERARDO  
Cincinnati

::

I read an article T.J. Simers did on Vin Scully. It moved me so much I sent him an email thanking him for making my day. His warm response back to me was “you have made mine as well.”

RIP, T.J.! No need to wrestle with the angels above.

DAN SOTELO  
Dove Canyon

::

The Los Angeles Times welcomes expressions of all views. Letters should be brief and become the property of The Times. They may be edited and republished in any format. Each must include a valid mailing address and telephone number. Pseudonyms will not be used.

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## SPORTS EXTRA

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HIGH SCHOOLS: THE TIMES’ ALL-STAR TEAMS

BASEBALL ALL-STAR TEAM

**Pitcher, Ethan Schiefelbein, Corona, Sr. :** The UCLA commit went 8-0 with a 0.23 earned-run average and 83 strikeouts in 52 innings in leading the Panthers to a 30-win season and Southern Section Division 1 championship.

**Pitcher, Boston Bateman, Camarillo, Sr.:** The Louisiana State commit went 11-1 with an 0.54 ERA and gave up only 10 hits in 64⅓ innings for the Division 4 champions.

**Utility, Seth Hernandez, Corona, Jr.:** The Vanderbilt commit and top pro prospect for 2025 hit eight home runs, drove in 34 runs and was 9-0 on the mound with a 0.62 ERA.

**Catcher, Josh Springer, Corona, Sr.:** The Oregon commit never missed a game in four years. He batted .381 with 40 hits this season.

**Infielder, Brody Schumaker, Santa Margarita, So.:** The Texas Christian commit shared the Trinity League most valuable player award, playing second base and hitting .383.

**Infielder, Bryce Rainer, Harvard-Westlake, Sr.:** The Texas commit finished with 49 hits and a .505 batting average with 17 stolen bases as Mission League MVP. He had nine saves as the closer.

**Infielder, Billy Carlson, Corona, Jr. :** The Vanderbilt commit had three huge home runs during the Division 1 playoffs while serving as the Panthers’ closer. He finished with a .367 average.

**Infielder, Nate Castellon, Calabasas, Sr.:** The Cal Poly commit finished with 43 hits and a .500 batting average, plus 10 stolen bases, while playing shortstop.

**Outfielder, Anthony Pack, Millikan, Jr. :** The Texas commit hit .394 with three doubles and and three triples, scored 30 runs and had 11 stolen bases for the Moore League champions.

**Outfielder, Trevor Goldenetz, Huntington Beach, Jr.:** The Texas Christian commit finished with a .394 average and delivered clutch hits in the big games all season.

**Outfielder, Noah Malone, South Hills, Sr.:** The Loyola Marymount commit batted .388 with 33 hits and four home runs.

— ERIC SONDHEIMER

BASEBALL TOP 25

By Eric Sondheimer

Rk	School (W-L)	Comment (last week’s ranking)
1	CORONA (30-3)	Southern Section Division 1 champion (1)
2	HARVARD-WESTLAKE (27-5-1)	Southern Section Division 1 runner-up (2)
3	ORANGE LUTHERAN (28-7)	Southern Section Division 1 semifinalist, regional Division 1 champion (3)
4	SANTA MARGARITA (22-10-1)	Southern Section Division 1 quarterfinalist (4)
5	HUNTINGTON BEACH (24-10)	Southern Section Division 1 semifinalist (5)
6	LA MIRADA (25-8)	Southern Section Division 1 second round (10)
7	SAN DIMAS (25-5)	Southern Section Division 1 quarterfinalist (7)
8	BECKMAN (25-6-1)	Southern Section Division 3 champion (NR)
9	MATER DEI (17-13)	Southern Section Division 1 second round (9)
10	HART (26-5)	Southern Section Division 2 champion (NR)
11	ST. JOHN BOSCO (23-11)	Southern Section Division 3 runner-up, regional Division III champion (18)
12	WESTLAKE (26-5)	Southern Section Division 2 quarterfinalist (6)
13	CORONA CENTENNIAL (22-7)	Southern Section Division 3 second round (8)
14	LOS ALAMITOS (24-8)	Southern Section Division 3 quarterfinalist (15)
15	JSERRA (15-13-1)	Southern Section Division 1 first round (12)
16	CHAMINADE (20-10)	Southern Section Division 3 second round (13)
17	GAHR (18-11)	Southern Section Division 1 second round (14)
18	CALABASAS (19-10)	Southern Section Division 1 first round (16)
19	AQUINAS (24-7)	Southern Section Division 1 second round (19)
20	FOOTHILL (21-9)	Southern Section Division 1 second round (20)
21	MOORPARK (21-12-1)	Southern Section Division 2 runner-up, regional Division II runner-up (NR)
22	ARLINGTON (26-5)	Southern Section Division 2 quarterfinalist (11)
23	SHERMAN OAKS NOTRE DAME (19-10-1)	Southern Section Division 1 second round (23)
24	ALISO NIGUEL (18-8)	Southern Section Division 2 first round (21)
25	MARANATHA (22-7)	Southern Section Division 2 second round (22)

SOFTBALL ALL-STAR TEAM



**ALEENA** Garcia, left, had 53 hits for Whittier Christian. Brianne Weiss was 19-1 for Orange Lutheran.

**Pitcher, Brianne Weiss, Orange Lutheran, Sr. :** The Notre Dame commit led the Lancers to the Trinity League championship, going 19-1 with a 0.75 ERA and 234 strikeouts in 130 ⅓ innings.

**Pitcher, Brynne Nally, Garden Grove Pacifica, Sr.:** The Long Beach State commit threw a shutout in the Division 1 final and finished 19-2 with a 0.99 ERA.

**Utility, Cambria Salmon, Beaumont, Sr.:** The Texas commit was 18-7 with an 0.86 ERA and hit .427 with nine home runs.

**Catcher, Ilove’a Brittingham, Oaks Christian, Sr.:** The Brigham Young commit hit .540 with 19 home runs and 38 RBIs. She had three home runs in a game that clinched the Marmonte League championship.

**Infielder, Aleena Garcia, Whittier Christian, Sr.:** The UCLA commit had 53 hits, including 17 doubles and 13 home runs, while driving in 37 runs.

**Infielder, Kaniya Bragg, Garden Grove Pacifica, Sr.:** The UCLA commit hit eight home runs and finished with a .431 average while playing brilliant defense for the Division 1 champions.

**Infielder, Rylee McCoy, Oaks Christian, Sr.:** The Oregon commit hit .512 with nine home runs.

**Infielder, Jade Diaz, Anaheim Canyon, Jr.:** The Cal commit hit .380 with 10 doubles, three triples and four home runs.

**Outfielder, Tamryn Shorter, Norco, Jr.:** The Boise State commit hit .598 with 49 hits, 27 RBIs and eight home runs.

**Outfielder, Taelyn Holley, Murrieta Mesa, Jr.:** The Tennessee commit batted .598 with 49 hits, including 11 home runs.

**Outfielder, Taylor Shumaker, Esperanza, Sr.:** The Florida commit had 49 hits, 18 home runs and 37 RBIs.

— ERIC SONDHEIMER

Final softball rankings

To see Cal-Hi Sports’ final rankings for Southland teams, visit latimes.com/highschool

BASEBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Hernandez owned big moments

By ERIC SONDHEIMER

Seth Hernandez did not play high school baseball until this season, his junior year. He was home-schooled. Thirty-three games later, the impression he made, the impact he had and the accomplishments he achieved won’t be soon forgotten.

In a season that left many wondering if they were watching a baseball prodigy, Hernandez helped lead Corona High to a 30-3 record and a Southern Section Division 1 title by going 9-0 on the mound with an 0.62 ERA and hitting eight home runs, driving in 34 runs and batting .354 as the No. 3 hitter in the lineup.

“He’s as good as any high school baseball player I’ve ever seen,” coach Andy Wise said.

Hernandez, who is 6 feet 4 and 190 pounds, has been selected The Times’ player of the year.

Committed to Vanderbilt, he’s considered one of the top three prospects for the 2025 amateur draft.

He made a smooth, effortless transition to high



NICK KOZA For The Times

**JUNIOR PITCHER** Seth Hernandez of Corona went 9-0 with a 0.62 ERA and batted .354 for the Panthers.

school baseball. He fit right in, using his combination of confidence and humility to be a dependable contributor. With his bat, he delivered clutch hits, including a two-run home run in the section semifinals that helped eliminate Huntington Beach. On the mound, his fastball in the mid-90s and terrific breaking pitch left him unbeaten.

He was having fun playing every game.

“It’s great to dominate,” he said. “You put in so much work behind the scenes and when you perform, it’s great. You get emotional a little bit but also keep it under control.”

Said Wise, “He can do it all. He’s supremely confident, humble, not afraid to fail, will smile in the face of adversity and loves the big moment.”

With Hernandez teaming with left-hander Ethan Schiefelbein on the mound, Corona proved to be the No. 1 team in the nation.

The Panthers won the National High School Invitational in North Carolina before closing their season with five playoff wins against tough Division 1 opponents.

BASEBALL COACH OF THE YEAR

Passionate Medina brings crown to Bell

By ERIC SONDHEIMER

Fiery and passionate like the football coach he used to be, Frank Medina of Bell High refused to let his young team of mostly freshmen, sophomores and juniors fear anything.

The Eagles won 19 of their last 20 games to win their first City Section Open Division championship with a 4-1 win over defending champion Birmingham at Dodger

Stadium.

Medina has been selected The Times’ baseball coach of the year.

“He’s so tough on us,” sophomore pitcher Jayden Rojas said. “We all thank him. He built us to grind.”

Bell played great defense, gave up only one run in three playoff victories and never cracked under pressure.

Medina kept challenging his players to strive for more. After winning the Eastern League title, he made sure

they believed a trip to Dodger Stadium was possible, and Bell’s path included wins over Sylmar, Granada Hills and Birmingham, all top programs from the San Fernando Valley.

The bus ride home from Dodger Stadium explained the significance of the win.

“Cars were passing by and honking horns,” Rojas said. “When we got to Bell, there was a bunch of people with phones out yelling, ‘Champs!’ ”



CRAIG WESTON For The Times

**BELL’S** Frank Medina led the Eagles to a first City Section Open title.

SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Bragg’s many tools give her edge

By STEVE GALLUZZO

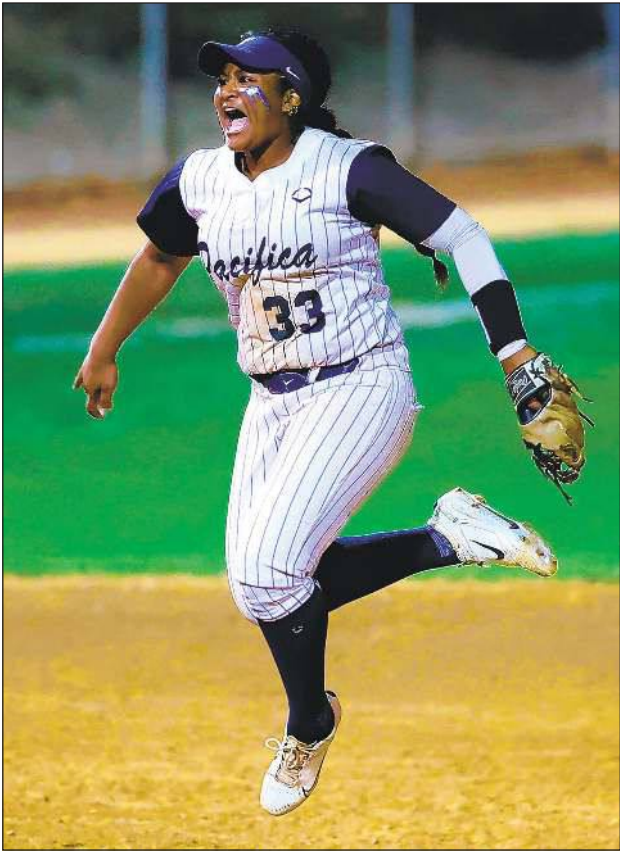
Perhaps no one played a more pivotal role in her team’s success on the softball diamond than Kaniya Bragg of Garden Grove Pacifica, the top player for the Southern Section Division 1 champion.

The UCLA-bound senior was at her best in the final May 17 at Bill Barber Park against Orange Lutheran, drawing a key walk and scoring in the fourth inning, then launching a towering home run to provide an insurance run in the sixth inning in the Mariners’ 3-0 shutout for their second consecutive championship.

Bragg has been selected The Times’ softball player of the year, and now she’s eager to display her talents in Westwood and contend for national championships.

If anyone appreciates the quality of player the Bruins are getting, it’s Pacifica coach Tony Arduino, who says Bragg is one of the best athletes he has had in 17 years coaching high school sports.

“Three-sport athletes don’t come around very often and it’s been an absolute honor coaching Kaniya for the last four years,” Arduino said of his starting



NICK KOZA For The Times

**KANIYA BRAGG**, who led Garden Grove Pacifica to the Division 1 title, will attend UCLA next season.

duino said of his starting shortstop who also played on the volleyball team in the fall and basketball team in

the winter. “She’s always trying to improve. She’s constantly asking for feedback on what she can do to fine-

tune her game. Some athletes think they know it all, but that’s not Kaniya. She wants to get better every day.”

Bragg’s numbers back up her coach’s assessment. She played every game this season, pacing her squad with eight home runs, 30 runs scored, 27 RBIs and a .907 slugging percentage. She had 28 hits, seven doubles and struck out only six times in 83 plate appearances.

Bragg had two homers and four RBIs in a 10-0 Empire League victory at La Palma Kennedy and had four hits including a homer, five RBIs and three runs in Pacifica’s 13-2 playoff triumph over Oaks Christian. She finished her prep career with 22 homers, 116 RBIs and 122 runs.

“She can change a game with her bat, her glove and her ability to run the bases,” Arduino said. “Another thing that makes her special is she takes just as much pride in her defense as her offense. She’s won our defensive MVP award three times. All Kaniya really cares about is winning and she’s willing to put the team before her personal success. There’s simply no way we’re back-to-back CIF Division 1 champions without her leadership.”

SOFTBALL COACH OF THE YEAR

Aguirre gets Carson to play at its very best

By STEVE GALLUZZO

Despite winning the City Section Open Division softball title last year, Carson was not the favorite going into this season.

The opponent the Colts defeated for the title, Granada Hills, was expected to raise the trophy given that only one of its players graduated.

Meanwhile, Carson had to replace co-captain Priscilla Villarreal, outfielder Amanda Marrufo and All-City second baseman Zaniah Puni.

However, Rudy Aguirre got his team to play its best when it mattered most and earned The Times’ coach of the year honors following

Carson’s 1-0 victory over Granada Hills in 14 innings on May 18 at Long Beach State, the championship game lasting more than four hours during which he seemingly pressed all the right buttons.

“They came in with a 27-2 record and a really good pitcher, Addison Moorman, so we knew they were going to be very tough,” Aguirre said of Granada Hills. “We worked a lot on hitting, we had long practices in preparation for that game, the girls worked hard and they believed.”

Aguirre took over the program in 2017 after nine years as a coach at Marine League rival Banning — a stint that started in 2009 when his daughter Steph-

anie transitioned from center field to catcher for the Pilots.

Aguirre has led Carson to a 38-17-2 record in the last two seasons and now he might be building a dynasty in the South Bay as pitcher Giselle Pantoja, who tossed a one-hitter with 17 strikeouts in the finals against Granada Hills, is projected to return for her senior year.

“We have really strong leadership,” Aguirre said. “In the offseason, Giselle developed her off-speed pitches and a changeup she could throw for a strike.”

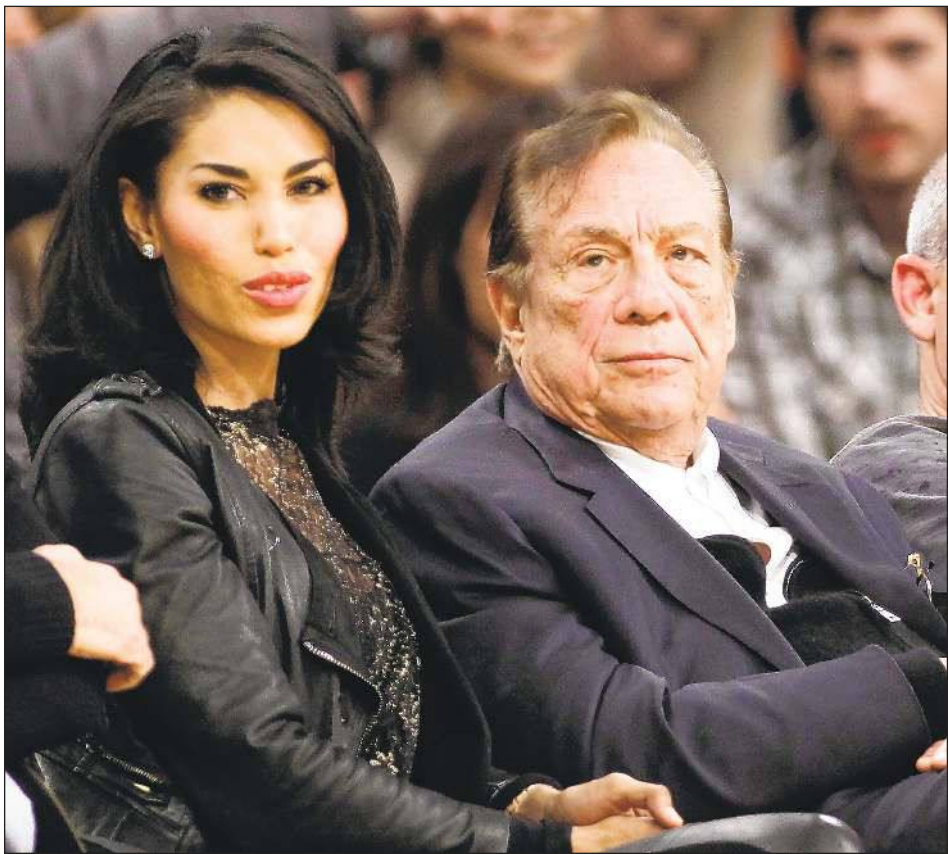
After suffering its only league loss to San Pedro, 3-2 on April 5, Carson reeled off 10 wins in a row to close the season, outscoring its opponents 146-9.



STEVE GALLUZZO For The Times

**RUDY AGUIRRE** helped lead Carson to the City Open Division title.





DANNY MOLOSHOK Associated Press

**DONALD STERLING**, with mistress V. Stiviano, is portrayed by Ed O'Neill, right, in "Clipped," a series based on the downfall of the former Clippers owner.

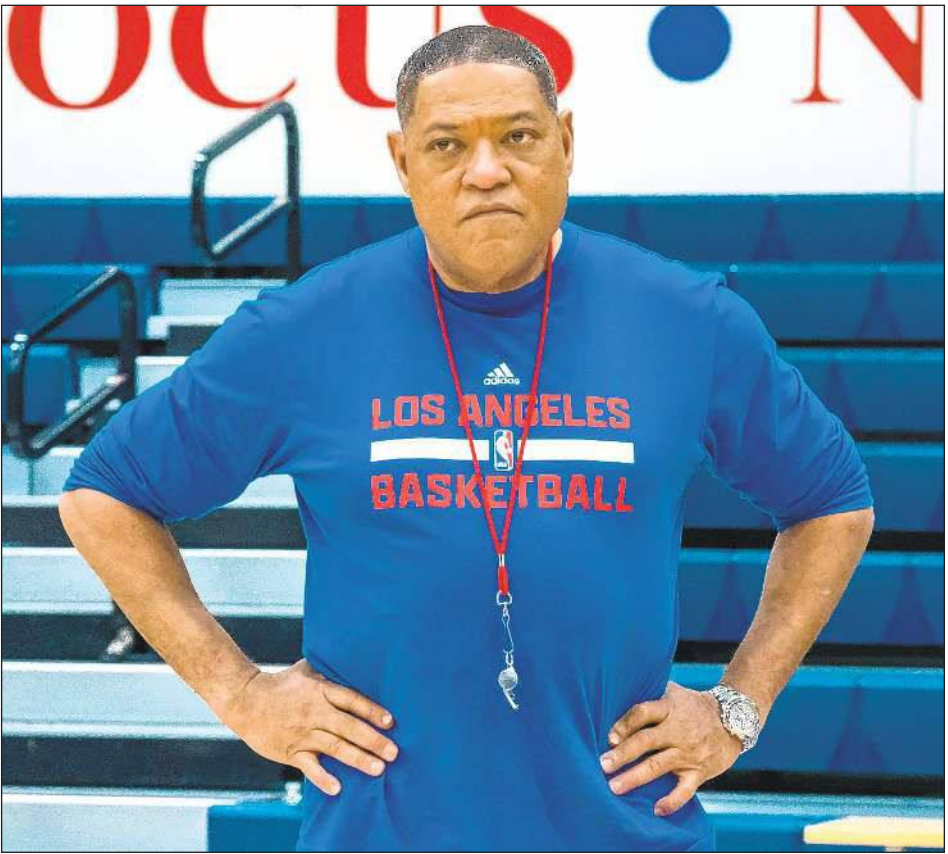


KELSEY MCNEAL FX



LUIS SINCO Los Angeles Times

**DOC RIVERS** is played perfectly by Laurence Fishburne, right, who got the former Clippers coach's portrayal down pat despite not being a sports fan.



KELSEY MCNEAL FX

The Hulu series "Clipped" offers a dramatic look at the Donald Sterling scandal, during which recordings by V. Stiviano exposed the former Clippers owner's racist remarks and triggered explosive fallout. Times writers Ben Bolch, Bill Plaschke and Dan Woike covered the Sterling saga and help us fact-check it. Plaschke had a brief cameo in the show, which was based on ESPN reporter Ramona Shelburne's podcast series.

**Ed O'Neill, who is well known for his roles on "Married... with Children" and "Modern Family," tackled the role of Donald Sterling during the series. Did he deliver a reasonably accurate version of the Sterling you saw while covering the Clippers?**

**Bolch:** Sterling had a more firm, menacing presence — you felt uncomfortable just being in the same room with him. O'Neill captures the buffoonery to a large extent but seems a touch more jovial than the man he portrays. Writers missed the opportunity to add another layer to his character by failing to dedicate one of the show's flashbacks — probably the best part of the series — to a young Sterling to demonstrate what went into making him such a hateful person. O'Neill doesn't make Sterling as unlikable as he is in real life, which is troublesome given that he's the show's primary antagonist.

**Plaschke:** Ed O'Neill is terrific as Donald Sterling. Eccentric, bombastic, sleazy, completely unaware of how the world viewed him. I actually attended the White Party that was so vividly portrayed in the first episode, and it perfectly captured the way he ruled over his kingdom of young women and business sycophants. I brought my then-girlfriend to the party and Sterling hit on her. Seriously. After she pulled herself away from him, she was like, "At least that man has good taste!" This scene was so well filmed, I was transported back to that moment, and once again I felt, like, ick.

**Woike:** O'Neill's version is more pointed and focused, maybe a little less eccentric, than the version of the man I remember being around the team at this stage. Sterling never carried himself as acerbic in my dealings with him. There was more feebleness. This portrait is sharper with the gross stuff turned up to 11. But at the core of this, there's a person who cares about himself and his position more than others — people of different races, different classes, his players, his employees, his wife, etc. — and O'Neill certainly captures that. The real guy is just so weird — in addition to all the hatefulness.

**No character portrayed in the series has spent more time on television than Doc Rivers. Laurence Fishburne has a different**

# When truth is stranger than fiction

'Clipped' mostly wins in portraying Sterling scandal, if not fully able to show how weird its subjects really were

By Ben Bolch, Bill Plaschke and Dan Woike

**body type than Rivers, but did he reasonably capture the former Clippers coach's personality and reaction to the Sterling scandal?**

**Woike:** In the aftermath of the Sterling tapes, Doc Rivers moved even more to the foreground — in basketball, in the organization. He handled the situation as well as someone could've and I think that comes through in the show. He was built for it, and that's here. It's a strong performance.

**Bolch:** The most authentic, nuanced performance in the series belongs to Fishburne. He captured Rivers' essence down to the fit of his dress shirts, his facial expressions and his sandpapery voice. Fishburne also replicated Rivers' ability to shepherd the Clippers through the scandal — as well as the toll it took on him — in convincing fashion, especially during the ballroom meeting with the players as they decided whether to keep playing. His commanding presence and ability to vacillate between one-liners and earnest remarks also reminded me a lot of the way Rivers conducted himself.

**Plaschke:** Like O'Neill, Fishburne is great. He has Doc's look, Doc's walk, Doc's voice. And it's amazing because, in meeting Fishburne on the set while I shot my brief scene, it became clear he knew nothing about Doc Rivers, knew nothing about the Clippers, couldn't even name more than a couple of them. He apologized to me for not being a sports fan, but I was so impressed he wasn't a sports fan yet still tackled this role. And he tackled it brilliantly.

**What was the atmosphere like immediately after the audio recordings of Sterling's racist comments were first released and did the show capture that moment well?**

**Plaschke:** It was an off day in the [Clippers' playoff] series and I

was visiting my brother in Napa Valley and my brief respite became a total nightmare, everybody in L.A. going crazy, everybody in the NBA going crazy, I'm typing a column on a folding table on a porch in wine country and then rushing back to the Bay Area for the madness.

**Woike:** Chaos. Total chaos. You went from covering a basketball series to covering one of America's greatest shames — its racist past and present.

**Bolch:** It was complete mayhem. The media horde waiting to get into the Clippers' practice at the University of San Francisco was eager to hear what Rivers and the players had to say about Sterling's remarks. Rivers decided he would be the only one to talk — and spoke emphatically about the team's collective disdain for what was said. It was one of his most impressive moments during the whole ordeal, showing his ability to navigate pressure on the fly. This scene was oddly left out of the show, which amounts to a huge opportunity lost.

**Did anything stand out in the first few episodes as inaccurate compared to your experience covering the Clippers scandal?**

**Bolch:** The show captured the essence of the scandal but doesn't really hit its stride until the last three episodes, where the character backstories are revealed and new ground is covered that may not be known to those who casually followed the ordeal. This was the most compelling part of the series and some viewers may not make it there given the earlier episodes are more uneven. If you are the slightest bit intrigued by what you've seen by the end of Episode 3, keep watching.

**Plaschke:** The show has two main drawbacks. ... first, Blake Griffin is NOT Blake Griffin. He doesn't look like him, doesn't

sound like him, doesn't act like him, not even close. I remember seeing the actor on the set and wondering, who is he playing? When somebody told me he was Blake, I was like, they must do a heckuva job on him with props and costumes and makeup. Well, they didn't. He's a fine actor, he's just badly miscast. The second mistake is a lack of attention to the basketball scenes. They were so good in "Winning Time," maybe we're spoiled, but at least in the early episodes, the basketball play is chopped up and hard to follow and pretty awful.

**Woike:** The portrayal of Blake Griffin seems way off to me — someone who I never viewed as a selfish teammate or as a Sterling lapdog. Seems totally fabricated to me. Especially the introductions. Also, V. Stiviano comes across as maybe a little too normal here than any of us around at the time thought. The general ickiness of this is pretty on point. The basketball/casting stuff is what it is, the show having the misfortune of airing this closely to the doppelganger work "Winning Time" did in its two seasons. I think, generally, it's close enough. Some character traits are turned up too loud. Any heroism assigned to Shelly Sterling also doesn't sit great with me. Not a lot of heroes in this story.

**Did anything you saw during the series surprise you? Was there anything you wished would have been handled differently to better reflect that period of the Clippers' era?**

**Plaschke:** Chris Paul versus the rest of the team should have been highlighted. That was the theme that eventually brought down Lob City. And CP3 actually looks and sounds like CP3. I would have also liked more of Seth Burton. The public relations guru is played by a great actor, and I wanted to see more of Burton's incredible

tightrope walking as he handled this craziness.

**Bolch:** Tensions between Chris Paul and the rest of the team were alluded to in the first episode but never developed. That could have been another thread in the show that heightened the drama and revealed more behind-the-scenes dissension that prevented the Clippers from maximizing their potential. J. Alphonse Nicholson's portrayal of Paul is good enough to warrant more screen time.

**Woike:** I think just how "normal" Donald Sterling, Shelly Sterling and V. Stiviano all seem — which probably speaks to just how strange those people are. For the people who were around them, it's just so hard to explain how strange they all were.

**This remains a dramatization of the Sterling scandal and the creators never promised the audience a documentary. Still, the real saga was salacious enough to capture a lot of attention. Overall, how would you grade the show's accuracy?**

**Bolch:** The accuracy as far as the scandal's timeline goes is spot-on, but I'm not sure the well-known plot or the characters — besides Fishburne as Rivers — make this damedly all that riveting. Most of the scenes involving V. Stiviano and Donald Sterling feel like whimsical caricatures compared to the gripping tension whenever Rivers takes center stage. The writers might have been better served to fully commit to a send-up or go the other way and make the Sterlings more abominable figures so that you can't stop watching because you need the relief of their forced sale of the team. As it stands, "Clipped" is sort of like the team it portrays — never quite reaching the intended destination.

**Plaschke:** With the exception of Blake Griffin, it feels pretty accurate. I love the way it uncovers the real V., I think Shelly Sterling's character is spectacularly spot-on and Ed O'Neill does a remarkable job pulling back the curtain on the real Donald. And the main take-away for all Los Angeles sports fans should be obvious. Think about it, for the first time ever, THE CLIPPERS ARE ON TV IN JUNE!

**Woike:** If the story is about the key factors in play, the firestorm it caused, the public airing of Sterling's plantation mentality and Doc Rivers' and the Clippers players' resolve through this mess, it's a hit. But the dramatized parts — the way some employees were made to seem like bumbling morons, the way Griffin was portrayed (he's going to have some of the biggest gripes) — don't land for me as someone who was there every day. In this case, the truth — and the work done by people on that front — is more compelling than the fiction.



NBA NOTES

# Kidd does best to divide Celtics’ dynamic duo

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — Jason Kidd couldn’t figure out how to stop the Boston Celtics in Game 1 of the NBA Finals.

Now he’s hoping they will get in their own way.

The Mavericks coach seemed eager to sow dissension in the Boston locker room Saturday when he singled out Jaylen Brown as the Celtics’ best player — words transparently designed to irk Jayson Tatum, an NBA first-teamer who was sixth in the voting for most valuable player.

“Jaylen’s their best player,” Kidd said. “He did everything, and that’s what your best player does. Just understanding how to play both sides — defense and offense at a high rate — he’s been doing that the whole playoffs.” Tatum said it won’t work.

“We understand that people try to drive a wedge between us. I guess it’s a smart thing to do — or try to do,” Tatum said. “We’ve been in this position for many years, of guys trying to divide us and say that one of us should be traded, or one is

better than the other. So it’s not our first time at the rodeo.”

On that, Brown agreed completely.

“We’ve been just extremely focused on what our roles and our jobs are. We have all had to sacrifice,” he said. “Right now, at this point, it’s whatever it takes to win. And we can’t let any outside interpretations try to get in between us.”

Drafted third overall in back-to-back years, Brown and Tatum have emerged as one of the NBA’s best duos, combining to lead the Celtics to the Eastern Conference finals five times in seven seasons. But even with the success — 64 wins this season, the No. 1 overall seed and a second trip to the Finals — they have had to combat speculation that there wasn’t room in the locker room for both of them.

Although Tatum’s career numbers have been better, Brown is the highest-paid player in the NBA — a quirk of timing and age that gave him the first shot at a super-max contract extension that will earn him more than \$300 million over five years.



CHARLES KRUPA Associated Press

JAYLEN BROWN, who scored 22 points in Game 1, is Boston’s best player, Dallas coach Jason Kidd says.

Brown also outplayed Tatum in the 2022 Finals, was the MVP of this year’s conference finals and outscored Tatum 22-16 in the Game 1 victory over Dallas on Thursday night.

But Tatum averaged 27 points, eight rebounds and

five assists this season, and Brown averaged 23, 5.5 and 3.6. And even with Brown outscoring him in Game 1, Tatum’s numbers are also better in the playoffs.

**Get ‘em in Game 2**  
Dallas wouldn’t mind

seeing form hold in Game 2. The Mavericks are 3-0 in Game 2s in these playoffs, all on the road.

Dallas is trying to become the first team to go 4-0 in Game 2s in a postseason since the Lakers during the bubble playoffs of 2020.

Game 2s are the only vulnerable spot the Celtics have had this postseason. They are 1-2 in them, all in Boston — they lost to Miami by 10, lost to Cleveland by 24 and beat Indiana by 16 in the Eastern Conference finals — and 12-0 in all other games.

## Irving on Boston

As expected, Mavericks guard Kyrie Irving, a former Celtic, wasn’t the most popular guy in TD Garden for Game 1.

“You know, thinking about my time in Boston, I could go down a myriad of things that none of you in here know that I was dealing with, and I don’t think a lot of people would care,” he said. “I think a few people would care and want to hear about it, and I would leave that space open in the future if you ever want to hear about it.”

## Streaking Celtics

Boston’s eight-game playoff winning streak is the longest in team history, and if the Celtics win Game 2, they’ll join the 2021 Phoenix Suns, the 1996 Chicago Bulls and the 1982 Lakers for the ninth-longest run in a single postseason.

Golden State has the record — 15 in a row in 2017. San Antonio won 12 in a row in 1999, and the Lakers had 11-game win streaks in 1989 and 2001. Cleveland won 10 straight in 2016 and 2017, the Spurs won 10 in a row in 2012 and New Jersey had a 10-game run in 2003.

## NBA PLAYOFF SCHEDULE

### NBA FINALS

1 Boston vs. 5 Dallas  
Celtics lead, 1-0

Gm 1	Boston 107, Dallas 89
Gm 2	Sunday at Boston, 5
Gm 3	Wednesday at Dallas, 5:30
Gm 4	Friday at Dallas, 5:30
Gm 5	June 17 at Boston, 5:30*
Gm 6	June 20 at Dallas, 5:30*
Gm 7	June 23 at Boston, 5*

\* if necessary | Times PDT, p.m.  
TV: All games on Channel 7

# Sparks end losing skid, beat Wings with a late surge

BY ANTHONY DE LEON

The last time the Sparks faced the Dallas Wings in May, they lost by one point. The Sparks avenged that loss during another close matchup Friday, defeating the Wings 81-72 during a Commissioner’s Cup game.

Crypto.com Arena was the scene of the battle between the bottom two teams in the Western Conference, with both aiming to turn around early-season misfortune. The Sparks (3-7) ended a three-game losing skid and the Wings (3-6) saw theirs extended to four.

It was a back-and-forth contest, featuring five lead changes. The Wings started on an 8-0 run and the Sparks were sluggish in the first half, shooting 16 for 35 from the field.

Dearica Hamby shook off a slow start in the first half after she scored only six points. She led the Sparks with 22 points and 12 rebounds on nine-for-16 shooting from the field, notching her sixth double-double of the season.

Hamby played a crucial role for the Sparks in the second half, scoring 16 points and becoming the team’s go-to scoring option.

“In games, we could’ve won, we folded in the second halves and fourth quarters,” Hamby said. “The steadiness and the composure we had at the end of this game was a moment of growth for us.”

Lexie Brown, providing a much-needed boost off the bench for the Sparks, putting them ahead for good after a three-pointer early in the fourth quarter for a 68-67 lead. She finished with 16 points, six assists and four rebounds as the bench combined for 34 points to help the Sparks overcome a slow start.

“In the last few games, I was allowing the other team’s defense to dictate my offense,” said Brown, who was four for eight from three-point range. “I got more aggressive hunting for my shot, and my teammates set me up great tonight. ... We emphasize that in practice today, being more intentional about what we’re doing on offense.”

Rookie Cameron Brink secured her first double-

double of the season, scoring 10 points and grabbing 10 rebounds. On defense, she added two blocks and two steals. Brink also scored a layup at the halftime buzzer to cut the Sparks’ deficit to six points.

The Sparks’ defense minimized the impact of the Wings duo, Maddy Siegrist and Arike Ogunbowale, who had huge first-half performances. Ogunbowale finished with 22 points and Siegrist had 21, but no other Dallas player scored in double figures.

“This is the second game now, and Arike is going to get her points, she is an elite player,” Sparks coach Curt Miller said. “[But], we made her work for everything, and hats off to our individual defenders.”

The Sparks limited the Wings to nine points in the fourth quarter. For the game, the Sparks held Dallas to two three-pointers in 17 attempts. Hamby credited the Sparks’ aggressiveness and tenacity on defense for helping them win.

“It wasn’t perfect, but we were competing,” Hamby said. “We emphasized digging deep and competing on defense. So to see it [happen] on the floor means a lot.”

Miller pointed to the win as a step in the right direction for the team, which he believes will breed optimism going forward.

“I love that we’re working to establish playing hard,” Miller said. “I am really excited about what this team is behind the scenes. The wins and losses will take care of themselves.”

The Sparks will play host to the defending WNBA champion Las Vegas Aces on Sunday at 6 p.m.

Friday’s late box				
SPARKS 81, WINGS 72				

DALLAS (72)—Billings 3-10 2-8, Siegrist 9-11 1-2 21, McCowan 1-6 4-4 6, Ogunbowale 10-28 2-22, Uzun 3-9 3-3 9, K.Brown 3-6 0-0 6, Soares 0-2 0-0 0, Sheldon 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 29-73 12-13 72.

SPARKS (81)—Hamby 9-16 4-6 22, Jackson 4-10 0-18, Nurse 0-4 0-0 0, Brink 5-11 0-0 10, Clarendon 3-4 1-2 7, Felton 0-3 0-0 0, Burrell 1-2 2-2 4, Vueri 3-4 1-2 7, Cooke 0-0 0-0 0, L.Brown 6-12 0-0 16, McDonald 2-4 2-2 7. Totals 33-70 10-15 81.

DALLAS.....	20	14	19	9	—	72
SPARKS.....	23	25	23	20	—	81

3-Point Goals—Dallas 2-17 (Siegrist 2-3, K.Brown 0-1, Soares 0-1, Uzun 0-3, Ogunbowale 0-9); Los Angeles 5-20 (L.Brown 4-8, McDonald 1-3, Burrell 0-1, Clarendon 0-1, Hamby 0-1, Brink 0-2, Jackson 0-2, Nurse 0-2). Fouled Out—None. Rebounds—Dallas 35 (Billings 12), Los Angeles 36 (Hamby 12). Assists—Dallas 14 (Ogunbowale 4), Los Angeles 23 (L.Brown, McDonald 6). Total Fouls—Dallas 16, Los Angeles 20. A—10,123 (18,997)



NOAH K. MURRAY Associated Press

**EVEN IF** Caitlin Clark played limited minutes for the U.S. team in Paris this summer, her mere presence would have accounted for unprecedented eyeballs on the women’s basketball tournament, Bill Plaschke writes.

# Leaving Clark out a blunder

[Plaschke, from D1] clude the one player the world wants to see there.

Clark, the greatest scorer in college basketball history and a decent WNBA rookie, has been cut.

A dozen spots, yet they couldn’t make room for the kid who just scored 30 points in the WNBA’s most-attended game in 17 years.

A dozen uniforms, yet they couldn’t find one for the kid who would fill the stands and sizzle the ratings and universally grow the game.

It was reported Clark is one of three alternates to potentially replace any one of the 12 who is unable to play, but don’t kid yourself.

They don’t want her. They don’t think they need her. They make no sense. They defy logic. They deviate from history.

Christian Laettner had no NBA experience when he was included on the 1992 Olympics Dream Team... yet Caitlin Clark is not making this one?

Diana Taurasi was a WNBA rookie when she made the 2004 Olympics team, and had similar stats to Clark at the time... yet 20 years later Caitlin Clark is not good enough?

Granted, the 12 women reportedly on the roster are the best in the world, from A’ja Wilson to Alyssa Thomas to the G.O.A.T. Taurasi.

Yes, there are no WNBA rookies here, and only three who will be making their first Olympic appearance, and all three newcomers are bonafide stars — Thomas, Kahleah Copper and Sabrina Ionescu.

And, of course, the USA women don’t require any more talent, they have a lifetime Olympics record of 70-3 with seven consecutive gold medals as one of the most dominating teams in sports history.

What the women do need, though, are eyeballs. What their game needs is worldwide growth. What this team needs is a reason for the casual fan to watch.

With the roster as currently constituted, none of that is happening. I can confirm this from experience. I have covered 10 Olympics and rarely did I venture to the women’s tournament because there was little interest and no buzz amid solid veterans playing to a foregone conclusion.

With Clark, everything changes. With Clark, there will be deafening buzz, overwhelming interest, millions watching.

With Clark on the team, even if she just plays a few minutes a game, the greatness of the USA women’s game and its newfound popularity will be amplified, accentuated and celebrated.

And isn’t that the role of the USA women’s basketball committee? To not only win a gold medal, but to make that medal shine by putting the USA dynasty in the best possible light?

How is a team without Caitlin Clark doing this? What sort of discussions about the future of USA women’s basketball would not include her? What on earth are they thinking?

You don’t want to know.

My esteemed colleague Christine Brennan of USA Today wrote that two sources told her, “concern over how Clark’s millions of fans would react to what would likely be limited playing time on a stacked roster was a factor in the decision making.”

There it is. They’re worried about all the attention she would receive. They’re concerned that she would steal some applause from the longtime veterans.

This is some of the same baloney that has quietly led to some of the on-court rough stuff. Some players are acting territorial. Others are being vindictive. There is a hint of resentment.

And here comes the USA women’s basketball committee, following their players’ lead, doing quite possibly the dumbest thing imaginable, telling America’s star-spangled superstar to stuff it.

They don’t realize that Caitlin Clark’s success is not an indication of their failure. It’s quite the opposite. Her success is a precursor for everyone’s success.

If she goes to Paris, it’s not a distraction, it’s a delight. How cool would it be to see a filled arena chanting Clark’s name while urging her to be substituted into the final minutes of a blow-out? How awesome would it be for social media to be debating the rotations of the women’s team after every game?

With Clark on the bench, this would not be the routine women’s tournament the USA quietly dominates. It would be loud and messy and wonderful, women’s basketball given NFL-like attention for two weeks, the world watching us grow.

There were reports that Clark didn’t make the team because she didn’t show up at the team’s final training camp this spring. Sorry. She was busy leading Iowa to the Final Four.

One can only hope that at some point, both players and officials will realize what the rest of the country has long since figured out.

Clark doesn’t steal attention, she brings it. She doesn’t hog the cheers, she doubles them. She’s not only getting rich, she’s making everyone around her richer.

By not jumping on this

train, Team USA is going to be obliterated by it.

All the talk in Paris will still be about Clark, only now she won’t be there to answer it herself, and Team USA will get tired of talking about her, and the whole organization will come across as petty.

These people have had snub issues before, remember.

Nothing is as bad as what happened to Candace Parker, who played in college at Tennessee, getting snubbed from the 2016 Olympics because she said Connecticut coach Geno Auriemma didn’t want her on the team. And she was a two-time WNBA MVP at the time!

Then, several years later, fellow former Sparks star Nneke Ogwumike was snubbed by the 2021 Tokyo team for equally odd reasons.

“There’s a number of players who are deserving... but how many times are we gonna say it’s unfair?” Parker told reporters at the time. “How many times are we gonna say it’s not politics? I think we all know that.”

The irony is that this latest snub is probably the best thing to happen to Caitlin Clark personally. She has been playing non-stop for almost a year, a full season at Iowa followed immediately by her WNBA work. She could use the Olympic break.

Yet it’s still a shocker, and not just for the average fan.

Two months ago, former Sparks great Lisa Leslie, when asked about Clark and the Olympics, told the Sporting News, “I don’t know how you leave the country without her.”

Team USA officials just figured out a way, and shame on them.



JUAN OCAMPO NBAE

**SPARKS PLAYERS** have something to cheer about during Friday’s home win against the Dallas Wings.



BASEBALL : FRIDAY FLASHBACK

Yamamoto shuts down streaking Yankees

STANDINGS

Through Friday					
NATIONAL LEAGUE					
West	W	L	Pct.	GB	L10
DODGERS	40	25	.615	—	7-3
San Diego	33	34	.493	8	4-6
San Francisco	31	33	.484	8½	4-6
Arizona	30	34	.469	9½	5-5
Colorado	22	41	.349	17	3-7
Central	W	L	Pct.	GB	L10
Milwaukee	37	26	.587	—	6-4
Chicago	30	33	.484	6½	4-6
Cincinnati	31	33	.484	6½	7-3
St. Louis	30	32	.484	6½	5-5
Pittsburgh	30	33	.476	7	5-5
East	W	L	Pct.	GB	L10
Philadelphia	44	19	.698	—	6-4
Atlanta	35	26	.574	8	5-5
Washington	28	35	.444	16	4-6
New York	27	35	.435	16½	5-5
Miami	22	41	.349	22	4-6

AMERICAN LEAGUE					
West	W	L	Pct.	GB	L10
Seattle	36	29	.554	—	7-3
Texas	30	33	.476	5	6-4
Houston	29	35	.453	6½	5-5
Oakland	26	39	.400	10	4-6
ANGELS	24	39	.381	11	4-6
Central	W	L	Pct.	GB	L10
Cleveland	40	22	.645	—	5-5
Kansas City	38	26	.594	3	4-6
Minnesota	33	30	.524	7½	4-6
Detroit	31	32	.492	9½	5-5
Chicago	16	48	.250	25	1-9
East	W	L	Pct.	GB	L10
New York	45	20	.692	—	8-2
Baltimore	40	22	.645	3½	6-4
Boston	32	32	.500	12½	5-5
Tampa Bay	31	32	.492	13	6-4
Toronto	30	33	.476	14	6-4

Today's games	
Dodgers at New York (AL)	4 p.m.
Houston at Angels	1 p.m.
New York (NL) at Philadelphia	7 a.m.
San Francisco at Texas	10 a.m.
Minnesota at Pittsburgh	10:30 a.m.
Atlanta at Washington	10:30 a.m.
Chicago (NL) at Cincinnati	10:30 a.m.
Baltimore at Tampa Bay	10:30 a.m.
Cleveland at Miami	10:30 a.m.
Milwaukee at Detroit	10:30 a.m.
Seattle at Kansas City	11 a.m.
Boston at Chicago (AL)	11 a.m.
Colorado at St. Louis	11:15 a.m.
Toronto at Oakland	1 p.m.
Arizona at San Diego	1 p.m.

[Dodgers, from D1]  
“I enjoyed the atmosphere,” Yamamoto said through his interpreter. “That was a great stadium. I enjoyed the whole game.”

In the buildup to this series in the Bronx — a showdown between not only two of MLB’s most historic franchises, but also two first-place teams that could meet in the World Series — most of the attention surrounded the former most valuable players and perennial All-Stars in the two lineups.

Shohei Ohtani, Mookie Betts and Freddie Freeman for the Dodgers. Aaron Judge, Giancarlo Stanton and Juan Soto for New York (although, Soto missed Friday’s game because a forearm injury and is questionable to play this weekend).

“I’m excited to see the stars show out,” Roberts said before the game. “We have some of the best players on the planet playing here.”

Where exactly Yamamoto fit into that celebrity constellation was less clear.

The 25-year-old Japanese star did earn the biggest contract for a pitcher outside of Ohtani in MLB history this offseason, signing with the Dodgers — despite heavy interest from other big-market clubs, the Yankees chief among them — on a 12-year, \$325-million deal.

He came to MLB as one of the most decorated pitchers in the history of Japan’s Nippon Professional Baseball as well, winning that league’s equivalent of the Cy Young Award three times.

“The Yankees are a great team and I appreciate their interest in me during the negotiation,” Yamamoto said. “But when I face them, it’s just a normal game.”

Despite all that, Yamamoto entered Friday with few signature moments in his rookie season.

His ERA was 3.32, solid but outside the top 35 in the majors. He’d yet to face an offense anywhere near as potent as New York’s.

“It’s going to be a good test for him,” Roberts said before the game. “But I know, for sure, the moment, the stage won’t be too big.”

Such intuition was spot-on.

Three hours before first pitch, as the rest of his teammates emptied out of a clubhouse teeming



FRANK FRANKLIN II Associated Press

**THE DODGERS’** Teoscar Hernández hits a two-run double during the 11th inning, the only runs they needed in a 2-1 victory.

with more than two dozen reporters, Yamamoto stayed put. Hat backward. Headphones on. Seemingly in his own world, unfazed by the spotlight of what many billed as the biggest series so far this season.

“He’s pitched in a lot of big games in his career,” Roberts said, referring to Yamamoto’s Japanese career and World Baseball Classic championship with Japan last year. “This is just going to be another experience for him.”

Once he took the mound, however, Yamamoto didn’t pitch like it was just another game.

From the jump, the undersized 5-foot-11 right-hander found increased velocity in his fastball, throwing 29 pitches at 97 mph or harder (plus another six at 96.9). He’d eclipsed that mark only three times all season.

“I think that was just my mechanics working very well today,” Yamamoto said.

“Any time you have more velo,”

catcher Will Smith added, “it helps.”

Yamamoto’s secondary stuff also looked sharper than normal, as he used the splitter and slider to complete four of his strikeouts.

“The things he did in Japan,” Hernández said, “he showed today.”

Asked later how he thought Friday might compare to a postseason atmosphere, Yamamoto shyly grinned.

“I didn’t think about October,” he said. “Just trying to execute my pitches like usual.”

Did Roberts learn anything about the pitcher, who has been tasked with anchoring the rotation alongside fellow offseason addition Tyler Glasnow?

“No,” Roberts said. “I knew he wasn’t gonna run from this moment.”

The Yankees — who entered the night with an eight-game winning streak and the best record in the majors — did stress Yamamoto

DODGERS 2, N.Y. YANKEES 1											
Dodgers	AB	R	H	BI	Avg.	New York	AB	R	H	BI	Avg.
Betts ss	3	0	1	0	.312	Volpe ss	5	1	1	0	.286
Ohtani dh	5	1	0	0	.312	Verdugo lf	5	0	1	0	.253
Freeman 1b	2	1	0	0	.291	Judge rf	3	0	2	1	.294
Smith c	5	0	0	0	.291	Stanton dh	5	0	0	0	.234
T.Hernandez lf	4	0	2	0	.258	Rizzo 1b	5	0	0	0	.228
Heyward rf	5	0	0	0	.246	Torres 2b	3	0	0	0	.229
Pages cf	4	0	0	0	.259	LeMahieu 3b	4	0	0	0	.154
Lux 2b	5	0	0	0	.204	Jonahs	5	0	0	0	.250
K.Hernandez 3b	4	0	1	0	.203	Cabrera 3b	4	0	0	0	.236
Totals	36	2	4	2		Griswold cf	4	0	1	0	.087
						Trisheno c	4	0	0	0	.254
						Totals	38	1	5	1	
Dodgers	000	000	000	02	—	2	4	1			
New York	000	000	000	01	—	1	5	1			
Walks—Dodgers 6; Betts 2, Freeman 2, Pages 1, K.Hernandez 1. New York 3: Judge 2, Torres 1. <b>Strikeouts</b> —Dodgers 7: Betts 1, Smith 2, T.Hernandez 1, Heyward 1, Pages 1, Lux 1. New York 12: Volpe 1, Verdugo 2, Stanton 3, Torres 1, LeMahieu 2, Grisham 1, Trevino 2. E—K.Hernandez (2), Torres (9). <b>LOB</b> —Dodgers 11, New York 9. <b>2B</b> —K.Hernandez (3), T.Hernandez (13), Judge (20). <b>RBIs</b> —T.Hernandez 2 (4), Judge (55). <b>Runners left in scoring position</b> —Dodgers 4 (Betts, Ohtani, Lux), New York 5 (Volpe, Stanton 3). <b>RISP</b> —Dodgers 1 for 9; New York 1 for 8. <b>Dodgers</b> IP H R ER BB SO NP ERA Yamamoto.....7 2 0 0 2 7 106 3.00 Bando.....% 2 0 0 0 2 7 16 0.00 Strickland.....% 2 0 0 0 1 12 0.00 Groves.....% 1 0 0 0 0 1 11 2.16 Hudson, W, 4-2.....1 0 0 0 0 1 14 4.59 Ramirez, S, 1-1.....1 1 1 0 0 2 14 3.00 <b>New York</b> IP H R ER BB SO NP ERA Poteet.....4% 2 0 0 3 1 84 1.72 Gonzalez.....% 2 0 0 0 1 14 3.00 Tonkin.....% 1 0 0 0 2 9 1.02 Ferguson.....1 0 0 0 0 1 17 5.03 Holmes.....1 0 0 0 0 10 1.27 Hamilton, L, 0-1.....1 2 1 2 1 2 30 3.00 Santana.....% 0 0 0 1 1 12 5.54 <b>U</b> —Tadashi Tichenor, Emil Jimenez, Nestor Ceja, Manny Gonzalez. <b>T</b> —3:21. <b>Tickets sold</b> —48,048 (47,309).											

CHICAGO WHITE SOX 7, BOSTON 2											
Boston	AB	R	H	BI	Avg.	Chicago	AB	R	H	BI	Avg.
Duran dh	5	1	0	0	.293	Julks lf	4	0	0	0	.293
Rydz/rf	3	0	1	0	.346	Ellis lf	0	0	0	0	.000
Wong c	4	0	2	0	.331	Lopez 2b	4	0	1	0	.244
Devers 3b	4	0	0	0	.286	Robert cf	4	0	1	1	.205
O'Neill rf	1	0	0	0	.250	Sheets dh	2	3	1	1	.235
Hamilton ss	3	0	0	0	.269	Vaughn 1b	4	2	2	1	.217
Westbrook 2b	3	0	0	0	.250	DeJong ss	4	1	2	2	.228
Cooper dh	4	0	1	0	.164	Colis rf	3	0	1	2	.231
Dalbec 1b	1	1	0	0	.150	Lee c	3	0	0	0	.245
a-Smith 1b	2	0	0	0	.228	Sosa 3b	3	0	0	0	.211
Rafaela ss- <i>cf</i>	4	0	1	0	.216	Totals	31	7	8	7	
Totals	34	2	6	0							
Boston	002	000	000	—	2	6	1				
Chicago	002	000	000	—	7	8	2				
a-struck out for Dalbec in the 7th.											
Walks—Boston 2: Westbrook 1, Dalbec 1. Chicago 2: Sheets 2. <b>Strikeouts</b> —Boston 14: Duran 2, Wong 2, Devers 3, Hamilton 1, Westbrook 1, Cooper 2, Smith 1, Rafaela 2. Chicago 5: Julks 1, Robert 1, Sheets 1, Lee 1, Sosa 1. E—Duran (2), Crochet (1), Ellis (2). <b>LOB</b> —Boston 8, Chicago 3. <b>2B</b> —DeJong (10), HR—Robert (4), off Criswell; Sheets (6), off Weissert; Vaughn (6), off Weissert. <b>RBIs</b> —Robert (6), DeJong (2), Colis 2 (3), Sheets (23), Vaughn (21). <b>SB</b> —Hamilton 2 (11). <b>Runners left in scoring position</b> —Boston 3 (Refsnyder, Dalbec, Duran); Chicago 2 (Sosa, Colis). <b>RISP</b> —Boston 0 for 5; Chicago 2 for 4. <b>Runners moved up</b> —Lee. <b>Baltimore</b> IP H R ER BB SO NP ERA Keith.....4 5 4 3 1 2 88 4.12 Weissert.....1% 2 2 2 0 1 22 3.04 Keller.....2 1 1 1 2 34 4.86 <b>Chicago</b> IP H R ER BB SO NP ERA Crochet, W, 6-5.....6 3 2 1 2 10 91 3.33 Cannon, S, 1-1.....3 0 0 0 0 4 6 5.94 <b>Inherited runners scored</b> —Weissert 1-0. <b>HBP</b> —Criswell (Colis), Crochet (Refsnyder). <b>U</b> —Sean Barber, Alan Porter, Ryan Blakney, Jim Wolf. <b>T</b> —2:32. <b>Tickets sold</b> —19,684 (40,241).											

MILWAUKEE 10, DETROIT 0											
Milwaukee	AB	R	H	BI	Avg.	Detroit	AB	R	H	BI	Avg.
Turung 2b	5	2	4	2	.303	Verdugo lf	3	0	1	0	.282
Contras c	5	1	2	3	.311	Greene lf	3	0	0	0	.241
Yelich lf	3	0	3	0	.324	McKinstry p	1	0	1	0	.202
Adams ss	4	0	0	0	.244	Perez rf	3	0	0	0	.248
Dunn 3b	0	0	0	0	.233	Canha 1b	2	0	0	0	.236
Friedrich c	4	1	2	0	.254	Dalbec 1b	2	0	0	0	.266
Chourio rf	1	0	0	0	.209	Ursheila 3b	3	0	0	0	.263
Hoskins dh	5	1	1	0	.237	Keith 2b	3	0	0	0	.216
Bauer 1b	4	1	0	0	.207	Malloy dh- <i>lf</i>	1	0	0	0	.182
Ortiz 3b	5	1	2	0	.292	Baez ss	3	0	0	0	.181
Petals cf	4	3	3	2	.260	Kelly c	3	0	0	0	.226
Totals	40	10	16	9		Totals	27	0	2	0	
Milwaukee	050	320	000	—	10	16	0				
Detroit	000	000	000	—	0	2	0				
Walks—Milwaukee 3: Yelich 1, Adams 1, Bauers 1. Detroit 4: Vierling 1, Perez 1, Malloy 2. <b>Strikeouts</b> —Milwaukee 10: Turung 1, Contreras 2, Adams 2, Frelick 1, Hoskins 1, Bauers 2, Ortiz 1. Detroit 5: Greene 2, Malloy 1, Baez 1, Kelly 1. <b>LOB</b> —Milwaukee 7, Detroit 4. <b>RBIs</b> —Hoskins (6), Turung (13), Contreras (17), <b>SB</b> —Perkins 2 (2), Frelick (14), <b>SB</b> —Yelich (9), Turung (22). <b>Runners left in scoring position</b> —Milwaukee 6 (Hoskins, Bauers, Adams); Detroit 0. <b>RISP</b> —Milwaukee 6 for 13; Detroit 0 for 2. <b>GI DP</b> —Contreras, Chourio, Baez. <b>DP</b> —Milwaukee 1 (Ortiz, Turung, Bauers); Detroit 2 (Canha, Keith, Canha; Ursheila, Keith, Canha). <b>Baltimore</b> IP H R ER BB SO NP ERA Myers, W, 2-2.....8 1 0 0 3 5 100 4.15 Meeker.....1 1 0 0 1 10 16 0.00 <b>Detroit</b> IP H R ER BB SO NP ERA Olson, L, 1-7.....4 8 8 1 6 82 3.43 Brieske.....1 2 2 2 2 2 63 2.70 Vest.....1 1 0 0 0 2 16 3.04 Holton.....1 0 0 0 0 0 5 4.13 McKinstry.....1 0 0 0 0 0 10 0.00 <b>HBP</b> —Holton (Yelich). <b>U</b> —Bruce Dreckman, Jeremie Rehak, Clint Vondrak, Dan Mezrel. <b>T</b> —2:22. <b>Tickets sold</b> —24,512 (41,083).											

HOUSTON 7, ANGELS 1												
Houston	AB	R	H	BI	Avg.	Angels	AB	R	H	BI	Avg.	
Altuve 2b	5	1	1	0	.286	Schanel 1b	4	0	0	0	.212	
Bregman 3b	4	1	2	0	.235	Renfrow 3b	4	0	0	0	.319	
Alvarez dh	4	2	2	0	.288	Ward dh	3	0	1	0	.254	
McCombs lf	0	0	0	0	.200	Pillar cf	4	1	2	1	.375	
Peña ss	5	0	1	0	.303	O'Hoppe c	3	0	1	0	.255	
Diaz dh	5	1	3	3	.258	Adell rf	3	0	0	0	.194	
Meyers cf	4	0	0	0	.259	Neto ss	3	0	0	0	.250	
Caratini c	3	0	0	0	.233	Tucker lf	3	0	0	0	.178	
Jabreu 1b	4	1	1	1	.122	Paris 2b	3	0	0	0	.118	
Cabbage rf	4	1	1	0	.238	Totals	30	1	4	1		
Totals	38	7	11	7								
Houston						100	000	510	—	7	11	0
Angels						010	000	000	—	1	4	0
Walks—Houston 3: Bregman 1, Alvarez 1, Caratini 1. Angels 1: Ward 1. <b>Strikeouts</b> —Houston 4: Altuve 2, Jabreu 1, Cabbage 1. Angels 8: Schanel 1, Renfrow 3, O'Hoppe 1, Tucker 3. <b>LOB</b> —Houston 7, Angels 3. <b>2B</b> —Alvarez (13), O'Hoppe (7). <b>HR</b> —Diaz (7), off Strickland; J. Cabre (2), off Contreras; Pillar (6), off Valdez. <b>RBIs</b> —Diaz 3 (32), Alvarez 3 (31), Jabreu (6), Pillar (22). <b>Runners left in scoring position</b> —Houston 1 (Meyers); Angels 1 (Tucker). <b>RISP</b> —Houston 3 for 5; Angels 0 for 2. <b>Runners moved up</b> —Adell. <b>GI DP</b> —O'Hoppe. <b>DP</b> —Houston 1 (Peña, Altuve, Jabreu). <b>Baltimore</b> IP H R ER BB SO NP ERA Valdez, W, 5-3.....9 4 1 1 1 8 106 3.53												
Houston, L, 2-6.....6 4 1 R BB SO NP ERA Contreras, L, 2-6.....6 4 3 3 2 20 4.65												
Angels.....2 2 3 3 1 0 16 2.70												
Contreras.....2 2 2 1 0 2 25 3.52												
<b>Inherited runners scored</b> —Strickland 2-2. <b>U</b> —Jonathan Perra, Hunter Wendelstedt, Josh Liddle, Nick Mahley. <b>T</b> —2:19. <b>Tickets</b> sold—36,534 (45,517).												



# Valdez has the Angels' number

Houston's five-run seventh inning and his four-hitter give him a fifth win in Anaheim.

BY GREG BEACHAM

Yainer Diaz homered in his fourth consecutive game and drove in three runs, and Framber Valdez pitched a four-hitter in the Houston Astros' 7-1 victory over the Angels on Friday night.

Yordan Álvarez hit a tiebreaking, three-run double in the five-run seventh inning by the Astros, who opened a weekend series at Angel Stadium with their fifth win in eight games.

Valdez (5-3) struck out eight in his seventh complete game and his first since his no-hitter last August. Valdez frequently dominates the Angels, including three career outings with at least 12 strikeouts along with five victories in eight career starts at Angel Stadium.

Valdez dedicated his performance to teammate Cristian Javier, who had Tommy John surgery last week and won't return to the mound until late next season at the earliest.

"It's one of those games for your record, for yourself, for your future, is really good," Valdez said through an interpreter. "I spoke to Cristian earlier today, and I told him, 'I'm going to throw a really good game today, because we need it.'"

Valdez didn't walk a batter until Taylor Ward drew a walk with two outs in the ninth. Manager Joe Espada decided to allow Valdez to face only one more hitter,



RYAN SUN Associated Press

**YAINER DIAZ** reacts to his two-run homer in the seventh inning of Friday's 7-1 win over the Angels. It was the fourth straight game in which Diaz had homered.

and shortstop Jeremy Peña made a diving catch on Kevin Pillar's line drive for the final out.

Diaz connected for a two-run shot moments after Álvarez put Houston ahead, giving him nine RBIs in four games. Diaz homered in every game of the Astros' series against the St. Louis Cardinals last week, and his blast to left off the Angels' Hunter Strickland was his seventh of the season.

"When you put in the effort and you get really focused, the results come in ways you're not even expecting," Diaz said through an interpreter.

Before this week's power surge, Diaz had just one homer in his previous 51 games, and none in 39 games since April 11. He hit 23 homers last year in his first full season.

"There might have been a little anxiety there, doing a little too much to try to help the team," Diaz said. "Now I'm being more of the player that I really am. Just trying to be calm and knowing what I can do."

José Abreu also homered in the eighth for Houston.

Pillar homered for the Angels, whose three-game winning streak ended just short of matching their longest run of the season.

"We faced one of the best pitchers in the game, and he had to be at his best against us, and he was," Angels manager Ron Washington said.

Griffin Canning (2-6) gave up three runs and seven hits while pitching into the seventh inning.

Houston got only two runners past first base in the first six innings, but Trey Cabbage and José Altuve singled to chase Canning in the seventh. Álvarez then put a long double in the gap off Strickland moments after Alex Bregman drew a walk with help from what appeared to be a missed third-strike call by plate umpire Jonathan Parra.

"I thought it was down the middle, but what can you do about it?" Washington said. "It might have made a difference. Get him out there, we probably could

pitch around Álvarez. But it didn't happen. ... We still had an opportunity to get out of that inning without giving up five."

Pillar tied it on the first pitch of the second inning, blasting it 411 feet for his seventh homer of the season and his sixth in his first 24 games with the Angels.

## Notes

Anthony Rendon took grounders at third base before the game in his gradual return to baseball activities. The \$245-million third baseman has been out since April 20 because of a hamstring injury. ... Astros outfielder Kyle Tucker went on the 10-day injured list because of a bruised right shin after fouling a ball off his leg Monday against St. Louis. The move is retroactive to Tuesday. ... Javier and fellow starter Jose Urquidy both had Tommy John surgery last week. Houston team officials disclosed.

Beacham writes for the Associated Press.

# How an NFL trial could dictate path for MLB's future

[**Baseball**, from D1] accomplish this: an expansion of the league's streaming service so that you could see every game, for every team, at the same place, for one price.

What if that turned out to be illegal?

The commissioner's office should be paying close attention to a trial that started Thursday in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, in which the NFL is the primary defendant against allegations that its Sunday Ticket package violates antitrust law.

The Sunday Ticket package offers access to every out-of-market game, for every team, at the same place, for one price.

The issues at trial: Bar owners allege they have to pay too much for the package because the NFL lets only one provider carry it; and individual sports fans allege they have to pay too much for the package because they have to pay to watch every team, even if they only want to watch one team.

If the NFL wins, that would be one less challenge for Manfred to worry about, on a long list of challenges before MLB could get its all-in-one place, all-for-one-price streaming service up and running.

However, if the NFL loses, how MLB might have to adjust its plan to comply with the law could depend on why the jury reached its conclusions.

MLB declined to comment on the NFL case or its potential implications for baseball. But, if the NFL loses, the first thing MLB likely would say is, "We have an antitrust exemption, so this wouldn't apply to us."

Maybe, or maybe not. "There was and is a current vulnerability to baseball's antitrust exemption," said Christopher Deubert, a Massachusetts-based expert in sports law and the former general counsel for the Major League Soccer team D.C. United.

"Whether the broadcast agreements would be covered by baseball's antitrust exemption, I think, is uncertain."

That federal antitrust exemption has survived for more than 100 years, but courts repeatedly have expressed concerns about it, and legislators regularly threaten to repeal it.

In 2021, Supreme Court Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh all but invited a challenge. In an opinion about a college sports case, he pointedly wrote that the baseball exemption had not been extended to other sports and had been based on the notion that "exhibitions" of "base ball" did not involve interstate commerce "even though teams regularly crossed state lines (as they do today) to make money and enhance their commercial success."

In 2022, in a case involving the contraction of four minor league teams, the Dept. of Justice urged a federal court to "define the exemption narrowly." MLB and the four minor league teams settled the case this year, before the Supreme Court could decide whether to address the issue.

What would be an example of defining the exemption narrowly? This is what Manfred told me two years ago: "I can't think of a place where the exemption is really meaningful, other than franchise relocation, right now."

The NFL claims an antitrust exemption for broadcasting, citing a 1961 law that allows America's four major sports leagues to sell their rights for "sponsored telecasting" as a league, rather than on a team-by-team basis. The plaintiffs challenging the NFL allege that

"sponsored telecasting" means free, over-the-air commercial broadcasts, not pay-TV options such as satellite and streaming. If the jury agrees, that could imperil Manfred's streaming vision.

And so could this: In a case against MLB and the NHL, one that ultimately was settled, U.S. District Judge Shira Scheindlin wrote in 2012: "Making all games available as part of a package, while it may increase output overall, does not, as a matter of law, eliminate the harm to competition wrought by preventing the individual teams from competing to sell their games outside their home territories in the first place."

Your eyes are starting to glaze over. I get it. So here's the point, because this is the point of antitrust law: On balance, would the courts consider Manfred's plan good or bad for consumers?

Few would argue with Manfred's contention that putting all the games on one streaming service would be convenient for fans.

"Having to search around for where the game is every day is a pain in the butt," said Penn State professor Steve Ross, who has written extensively about sports and antitrust law.

"I do it every single day. I go online and say, 'Where is this game? Is it on MLB Network? Is it subject to blackout restrictions? Where do I go to watch it?'"

But would the convenience of an exclusive home for baseball provide fans with a good deal?

"Would a complete takeover by Major League Baseball actually increase output by making this available everywhere at a decent price," Ross said, "or reduce output because Major League Baseball would just be charging a boatload of money?"

"That is a factual question that would be subject to antitrust challenge."

The current MLB streaming package offers access to out-of-market games: \$119.99 per year for games of all 30 teams, or \$104.99 per year for the games of whatever one team you want to watch.

That might or might not be a better deal than letting each team sell its own streaming rights.

"Maybe the Yankees would charge \$500 and the Twins would charge \$20," said Deubert, the expert in sports law.

It is impossible to know what baseball's broadcast future might look like next year, let alone over the next decade. Bally Sports, home to the Angels and 11 other MLB teams, is mired in bankruptcy proceedings and might not exist next year.

It is impossible to know whether the Yankees and Twins might ever agree to pool streaming revenues, given how much more the rights to air Yankees games would be worth.

Still, Deubert said, every major American sports league will follow the legal proceedings in Los Angeles very closely.

"If the NFL loses," he said, "all the other leagues for sure will be forced to change their packages in some way."

"Major League Baseball would have some hard decisions to make in evaluating the degree to which they wanted to change their package or assert that it is exempted by the antitrust exemption. They could potentially be challenged on that, and then you would have a real live issue."

For now, you have a real live quandary: Could a law intended to protect consumers somehow prevent Manfred from giving baseball fans what they say they want?

## THE DAY IN SPORTS

# Taurasi to seek sixth Olympic gold

WIRE REPORTS

Five-time gold medalist **Diana Taurasi** will be going to her sixth Olympics after being selected to the U.S. women's basketball team, the Associated Press reported Saturday.

Taurasi, a former Chino Don Lugo High standout who turns 42 before the Paris Games, will break the record for most Olympics played in basketball.

Five players, including former teammate **Sue Bird**, competed in five.

Taurasi will be joined by Phoenix teammate **Brittney Griner** and Olympic veterans **Breanna Stewart**, **A'ja Wilson**, **Napheesa Collier**, **Jewell Loyd** and **Chelsea Gray**. **Kelsey Plum** and **Jackie Young**, who helped the U.S. win the inaugural 3x3 gold at the 2021 Games, also will be on the team.

First-time Olympians **Alyssa Thomas**, **Sabrina Ionescu** and **Kahleah Coppper** will join the team; all three played on the American team that won the World Cup in Australia in 2022.

**Caitlin Clark**, the top draft pick and top draw in the WNBA, was not selected.

The U.S. women have won every gold medal in women's basketball since the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. The U.S. team will train together for a few days in Phoenix in July.

Then it's off to London for an exhibition game against Germany before heading to France.

The Americans will play Japan, Belgium and Germany in pool play at the Olympics.

Ionescu scored 24 points, **Jonquel Jones** added 22 and the New York Liberty handed Connecticut its first loss, 82-75. ... In Friday's late WNBA games, Copper made a three-pointer with less than a second left and scored 34 points to rally Phoenix to an 81-80 victory over Western Conference-leading Minnesota in Griner's return to the Mercury. ... Clark tied a rookie record with seven three-pointers and equaled her career high with 30 points to help Indiana hold on for an 85-83 victory over winless Washington.



LINDSEY WASSON Associated Press

**DIANA TAURASI**, who turns 42 this summer, will be going to her sixth Olympics seeking a sixth gold.

## ETC.

### Scheffler leads, Morikawa in mix

**Scottie Scheffler** hit out of a bunker over the green and into the water. He hit a tee shot over a boundary fence and made a triple bogey. He three-putted his last hole. And he still posted a one-under 71 and increased his lead in the Memorial.

In his final start before the U.S. Open, Scheffler seized control despite a couple of blunders on a tough Muirfield Village course and built a four-shot lead, moving closer to his fifth PGA Tour victory of the year.

Scheffler was at 10-under 206, four shots ahead of **Collin Morikawa**, who played bogey-free for a 68, and **Adam Hadwin**, who made all of his mistakes on one hole and shot 72.

Scheffler answered with a birdie after both of his penalty shots, and Muirfield was tough enough that he never fell out of the lead, even after the triple bogey.

Morikawa will be in the final group with Scheffler, just as he was at the Masters. The former La Cañada High standout is a past champion at Muirfield Village, winning the Workday Charity Open in 2020 when the course **Jack Nicklaus** built hosted consecutive tournaments dur-

ing the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'm still going to have to go out and shoot a really good score tomorrow," Morikawa said. "But this course bites. You might look at some of these holes as birdie opportunities, but you miss the fairway, you're going to try to save par."

Hadwin stayed in range until he caught a wedge so fat it didn't reach the green on the 14th. He pitched on to about 15 feet and three-putted for double bogey. The bogey on the 18th was his only other mistake.

Defending champion **Viktor Hovland** also was lingering in range until an atrocious back nine that started with a shot in the water on the par-five 11th led to bogey. **Rory McIlroy**, who spent more than four hours on a video call for the PGA Tour Enterprises meeting with the Saudi backers of LIV Golf on Friday afternoon, had a 73 and was eight back.

**Nasa Hataoka**, who was tied for fourth place, was disqualified from the ShopRite LPGA Classic after officials reviewed videotape of her final hole in the first round and found she took too long searching for a lost ball. ... **Jon Rahm** withdrew from LIV Golf Houston because of an infection in his left foot, with the U.S. Open set to start in five days. **David Puig** had a six-under 66 for a four-way share of the lead.

## NHL PLAYOFF SCHEDULE

STANLEY CUP FINAL	
1A	Florida vs. 2P Edmonton
Best-of-seven series	
Gm 1	at Florida, late
Gm 2	Monday at Florida, 5
Gm 3	Thursday at Edmonton, 5
Gm 4	Saturday at Edmonton, 5
Gm 5	June 18 at Florida, 5*
Gm 6	June 21 at Edmonton, 5*
Gm 7	June 24 at Florida, 5*
*-if necessary   Times PDT, p.m.	
TV: All games on Channel 7	



DENIS POROY Associated Press

**MLB** broadcasts face an uncertain future, and giving fans what they want could violate antitrust law.



# Spiraling Golden Gate Fields at finish line

After 83 years, venerable Northern California track closes doors Sunday amid dwindling purses, gamblers

By JOHN CHERWA

Of all the great racehorses who have run in California, few had the magic attached to their reputation like Silky Sullivan. He was known for his come-from-the-clouds racing style, making up unfathomable amounts of distance in the last part of the race and usually making it to the finish line first.

Even though he gained most of his acclaim by winning the Santa Anita Derby in 1958, making up 28 lengths, it was at Golden Gate Fields as a 2-year-old that he won the Golden Gate Futurity by coming from 27 lengths behind.

After he retired, he was bought by the Golden Gate owner Kjell Qvale and starting in 1965 he was paraded out on St. Patrick's Day at Golden Gate and Santa Anita Derby day in Arcadia. It's even said, but not verified, that Silky Sullivan had his own secretary to answer fan mail.

So, what's all that have to do with Sunday's final day at Golden Gate Fields after 83 years of racing? He's buried in the infield between the tote board and far turn of the grass course.

"It's one of my main projects after this week," said David Duggan, chief operating officer at Golden Gate Fields. "This summer we will be moving Silky Sullivan to Georgetown, Kentucky, to Old Friends [horse retirement park]. We'll get him re-interred. He has a lot of fans around the country that have been inquiring and that's the plan."

"There is some speculation that Lost in the Fog is out there [in the infield], but I can absolutely, categorically assure you he is not. We know exactly where he is and he will be going to Old Friends also. He's with his previous trainer."

A grave and Lost in the Fog somehow fittingly describes the current state of Northern California racing. Except unlike the remains of Silky Sullivan and Lost in the Fog, racing doesn't know where it will end up.

::

Sunday's final day has eight races with 54 horses. It's a far cry from 1949 when a 19-year-old Bill Shoemaker started riding at Golden Gate. Or the following year when Noor defeated Triple Crown winner Citation in a series of races, including those at Golden Gate and Santa Anita.

Longtime horse players will shed a tear and the memories will come flooding back about what makes Golden Gate so special.

"Golden Gate Fields is a beautiful small track built into Fleming Point, it's a natural amphitheater," said Alan Balch, currently the executive director of the California Thoroughbred Trainers who formerly headed a company that did advertising, marketing and public relations for Golden Gate and Bay Meadows from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s.

"It's a tremendous place to watch the races. It's very accessible to all of Northern California because it's right on the freeway and faces the Golden Gate Bridge. It's just a great place."

Racing in Northern Cali-



ERIC RISBERG Associated Press

**RUSSELL BAZE**, right, riding Two Step Cat, wins a 2008 race at Albany's Golden Gate Fields. The Northern California race track permanently closes its doors Sunday after the day's final race, scheduled for 5:20 p.m.

ifornia started in the 1930s with the fair circuit, a series of small meets held in conjunction with county fairs. It was as much a byproduct of trying to stimulate the economy after the Great Depression as anything else. Building grandstands for racing and supporting the local agriculture community was the real impetus.

Ground was broken in late 1939 on 130 acres of prime property that sat both in Albany and Berkeley. On Feb. 1, 1941, the track opened, but it lasted only five race dates before the racing surface washed away, the track went bankrupt and it transitioned to a far more noble role.

As the United States entered World War II, the facility was an equipment depot for the military. It reopened as a race track in 1947 and has been running every year since ... until next week.

"It was a huge contributor to many people, thousands of people started thousands of careers here," Duggan said Tuesday. "It was a part of the war effort shortly after it opened and the old girl did a great service to anyone in America who was involved in horse racing. So, the accolades it will get are very well deserved and they will be played out over the next few days, weeks, months and even years."

Jamey Ough, a former intra-track announcer and now a handicapper, feels for the area after Golden Gate closes.

"It has meant that there has been a place for people in Northern California to get to know horse racing and enjoy it," Ough said. "At Golden Gate we've sometimes done some good things to bring that along. Sometimes we haven't paid as much attention as we should have. It's its own ecosystem like many race tracks."

"It used to be a bigger economic boon to the area, but it still is. When Golden Gate goes away, the trainers will go away and the grooms will go away. They will stop buying things. They will stop going to their favorite restaurants, their favorite bars."

Frank Mirahmadi, who called the Belmont Stakes

on Saturday for Fox and also serves as the regular race caller at Santa Anita and Saratoga, worked parts of the Northern California circuit for almost a decade.

"Any time a historical venue leaves, it takes a part of you away, no matter what," Mirahmadi said. "It won't be the same without Golden Gate Fields. Hopefully the plans [for a replacement circuit] will be successful. It's a legendary location. It's sobering and there's also an element of sadness to this happening. It's a beautiful facility that had some incredible moments. ... There is nothing that can replace Golden Gate Fields, it's just going to be different. We need the industry to figure this out and stay strong."

So, if everyone loves Golden Gate Fields, why does it have to go away?

::

Golden Gate Fields, like much of horse racing, has been in decline for a while. Competition from other gaming and a lack of public appetite for racing has provided obstacles. No problem is bigger in California than it has no supplemental income from gaming sources, such as Kentucky. It leaves fewer horses running for smaller purses and fewer gamblers because many don't like to bet races with just a handful of horses.

No one would have been surprised that Golden Gate was closing until, of course, when it happened.

The Stronach Group, which owns Golden Gate and Santa Anita, bungled the closure by keeping it secret even from the owners and trainers who built the sport. It wasn't until The Times called TSG executives on July 16 of last year, a day before it was scheduled to be announced, that they hurriedly told longtime employees and tried to break the news to stakeholders ahead of the story.

The feeling for TSG, the racing arm now rebranded 1/ST Racing, is intensely negative among racegoers. There was even discussion of a trainer boycott on the last day, but it didn't develop.

Nobody could make a strong business case for

keeping the track open. It needed a new synthetic racing surface and many improvements to the infrastructure, all with declining revenue. Stronach executives, at times, told stakeholders the track was making money, while the opposite was true. They told the California Horse Racing Board that losses over the last 10 years have been \$30 million. The track was originally supposed to close at the end of last year. But TSG made a deal with stakeholders that if they didn't oppose legislation that would funnel Northern California simulcast money to Southern California, meaning Santa Anita and Del Mar, that it would keep it open until June of this year.

Golden Gate made more money by not running every race card this meet. It canceled several Friday cards because of a lack of horses. It even had an underpayment, a surplus of money designated for purses, of about \$250,000. That money will be paid back to owners whose horses finished first through fifth in races run this meeting at Golden Gate.

The purses declined so much that the Pleasanton fair meet and Turf Paradise in Arizona, paid bigger purses.

Santa Anita faces the same challenges for survival as Golden Gate, but it hopes the diverted simulcast revenue money can help stave off what could be the end of the self-titled Great Race Place.

::

The recurring theme about what people will most miss about Golden Gate is the sense of community.

"It was a blue-collar track," said Robert Hartman, who was general manager at Golden Gate from 2005 to 2011 and currently heads the renowned Race Track Industry Program at the University of Arizona. "It was welcoming to everyone, every ethnicity, every demographic, every socio-economic status. It was really kind of the track for everyone and felt welcome there no matter your background. It was great to see that because sometimes in life we don't get to see that mixture, as

people tend to stay in their own groups, but it was a melting pot for the Bay Area."

Ough remembers how he was assimilated into Golden Gate.

"The cool part is if you went there long enough, you could be part of the family," Ough said. "You could be an extended part of the family as just a weekend warrior. Back in the day there was a community of family that came in through the free gate, waiting for the gate to open five or 10 minutes before the eighth race. Then there was the feature race and then the last race where you had a chance to go from the \$5 exacta to the \$2 exacta, which was more my speed back then."

"All those people who lined up at the gate started to know each other. All of it meshed and there were all of these little community or family groups. It just depended on where you wanted to be. If you were a weekend warrior you could end up meeting a trainer, who would ask you to come by. I've known plenty of bettors who ended up as hotwalkers for a while just to try it out."

That feeling of community is also what Balch remembers.

"One of the advertising lines, probably from Sam Spears, is 'Where the Bay Comes to Play' because it was in the East Bay and was a great melting pot," Balch said. "Horse players of all ethnicities would make Golden Gate a great place to be. All the different languages, it was just that kind of place where everybody was there loving the races. That's what I love about Golden Gate because it was such a magnet. The content of the crowd was just fantastic."

::

Horse racing loves its longshots and that might be the story of Northern California racing.

A group called Golden State Racing is likely to get a license to operate 26 race dates from Oct. 19 to Dec. 15 in Pleasanton, where the fair also operates a meeting. The problem is there is no turf

course at Pleasanton and about half of all racing at Santa Anita and Del Mar is on the turf.

A proposed agreement, or set of benchmarks, between Golden State Racing and the Thoroughbred Owners of California calls for a minimum of three days a week, 24 races a week and purses of no less than \$4.42 million. This weekend (Friday through Sunday) at Santa Anita, the track has only 12 dirt races with the rest on the turf. It would take something very unforeseen for Golden State Racing to meet its benchmark of 24 dirt races a week.

There were about 1,000 horses at Golden Gate and 2,000 at Santa Anita.

Larry Swartzlander, who is one of those heading up the Golden State Racing effort, was asked in December about the chances for success.

"I'm a positive guy, so I say 60% is good number," he said.

::

Golden Gate has always known its place, at least recently, in the California racing ecosystem.

"I think the people in Northern California understood the level of racing we had," said Calvin Rainey, who has been at the track for 40 years, serving as general manager for many of those and is now a safety steward. "A lot of riders grew up here. Victor Espinoza is an example of one who did their early years here. Juan Hernandez is a good example. A lot of these riders as they got better had the opportunity to move to Santa Anita. This was a training ground for many of them to get started."

Balch sees the track as vital to California's flagging breeding industry.

"Mother nature only makes so many great horses, just like mother nature only makes so many top baseball players, golfers or anything else," Balch said. "Just as Major League Baseball has its minor leagues, horse racing has its major leagues and minor leagues and it's critically important that wherever the top horses are racing that there is a place for the other horses to go."

"California Chrome became the best horse in the world and he was a California-bred. I don't want to say California-breds are inferior, but they can't always compete at the highest levels and they have to have a place to run. Trainers and owners have to find a place where their horses can win and build confidence."

The absence of Golden Gate Fields is tough on everyone, with the track probably headed for a date with bulldozers.

"It's like those stages of grief," Hartman said. "First it's denial and then you are angry about it and then you get to that acceptance phase and I'm there. But I've gone through those stages. I never thought there would be a closing day but thought there would be some white knight at the last minute, but here we are. It hasn't happened and I hope it's not going to happen."

If it does, and it likely will, the last race is scheduled for 5:20 p.m. on Sunday. A one-mile allowance on the turf. There are eight horses entered.

# Dornoch, a 17-1 long shot, wins Belmont Stakes

[Belmont, from D1]

Clearly there was no Triple Crown on the line at this year's Belmont Stakes, but if the same horse had won the first two races, there would have been a huge discussion about a possible Triple Crown containing an asterisk. The Belmont Stakes is usually a 1½-mile race, called the test of champions. It might be the only time in a horse's life that they will run 1½ miles on the dirt.

With the race moving to Saratoga because of major construction at Belmont Park, the race was made 1¼ miles, the same distance as the Kentucky Derby. Since the circumference of Saratoga is smaller than that of Belmont, the New York Racing Assn. decided to shorten the race so that the horses wouldn't have to break on a

turn.

The race will be at Saratoga next year too.

While there were no California horses in the Belmont Stakes, Bob Baffert-trained horses made their mark in the undercard. National Treasure proved to be very dominant in winning the \$1-million Metropolitan Mile by 6¼ lengths. The 4-year-old clearly has emerged as the best horse in Baffert's barn with wins in last year's Preakness Stakes and this year's Pegasus World Cup. He was second in last year's Breeders' Cup Mile, losing by a nose to Cody's Wish, who went on to win horse of the year.

Baffert was not in New York but stayed in Southern California.

The pressure was coming from Hoist to Gold, who finished third. White Abarrio,

winner of the Breeders' Cup Classic, was never a factor, finishing fifth in the six-horse race.

National Treasure had been off for 105 days since finishing fourth in the Saudi Cup in February. The colt paid \$4.70 to win. Post Time finished second.

Baffert had two other horses on Saturday's stakes-rich card. Prince of Monaco finished second in the \$500,000 Woody Stephens Stakes at seven furlongs. Prince of Monaco was making his first start of the year after finishing fifth in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile on Nov. 3.

Imagination, coming off a disappointing seventh-place finish in the Preakness, was equally disappointing on Saturday, finishing seventh in the 11-horse race.



JULIE JACOBSON Associated Press

**DORNOCH**, with Luis Saez riding him, finishes just ahead of Mindframe (10), with Irad Ortiz Jr. up, to win the 156th Belmont Stakes at Saratoga Springs, N.Y.





FRANK FRANKLIN II Associated Press

**TEOSCAR HERNÁNDEZ** gets ready to slap hands with teammates after his eighth-inning grand slam blew open the game in the Dodgers' 11-3 win over the Yankees.

## Hernández center stage for Dodgers again

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

This is what the baseball world was desperate to see.

Shohei Ohtani and Aaron Judge trading big hits early. Two talent-rich lineups keeping opposing pitchers under constant stress. And the sport's two most star-studded squads turning a routine June weekend into a gripping mid-season spectacle.

A day after neither team scored a run until the 11th inning, the Dodgers and New York Yankees traded early jabs in a back-and-forth game Saturday night at Yankee Stadium, before the Dodgers pulled away late for an 11-3, series-clinching win.

Teoscar Hernández had the biggest night, collecting six RBIs and two home runs, including an eighth-inning grand slam that served as the knockout blow.

The result, however, was just as memorable as the scene that surrounded it.

For a sport that craves more national attention and doesn't lend itself to many show-stopping series

over an annual 162-game grind, this weekend's matchup provided a much-needed "shot in the arm," as Dodgers manager Dave Roberts put it Friday.

And if the series opener was a tense, tactical, extra-innings marathon, Saturday offered more of the power-packed prize fight everyone around Major League Baseball was hoping to see this weekend.

"This is a little bit different," first baseman Freddie Freeman said in an on-field interview with Fox moments before first pitch, having to lean in to hear reporter Ken Rosenthal's question over the buzz of the crowd in the Bronx.

"It's exciting," Freeman added. "This is what we play for."

For the first seven innings, the teams traded body blows to keep the score tight.

Hernández followed his winning double Friday with a second-inning solo blast into the Dodgers bullpen to open the scoring.

The Yankees (45-21) countered and knotted the score on two singles and a run-scoring grounder in the bottom of the inning.

In the third, Ohtani lined an RBI single the other way, putting the Dodgers ahead 2-1. Minutes later, Judge came to the plate and smacked a center-cut sinker from Gavin Stone just over the left-field wall, leveling the score again.

The Dodgers (41-25), however, eventually pulled away.

They regained the lead on Kiké Hernández's solo home run in the fifth. They tacked on another run in the sixth, when Freeman hit a leadoff double to left that ex-Dodger Alex Verdugo badly misplayed.

Then, in perhaps the biggest sequence with the Dodgers leading only 4-2, left-handed reliever Alex Vesia escaped a bases-loaded jam in the sixth inning, before returning to the mound in the seventh and retiring Verdugo, Judge and Giancarlo Stanton in order — including a strikeout of Judge on three whiffed fastballs.

Teoscar Hernández launched his grand slam in the next inning, setting off a raucous celebration in the bullpen (where his home run again landed), dugout (where Vesia jumped up from his seat and held an index finger to the sky) and

stands (where waves of blue-clad Dodgers fans erupted as many Yankees faithful quietly filed out).

This series hasn't been *everything* baseball fans hoped for, not with Yankees star Juan Soto out of the lineup again Saturday, and unlikely to play in Sunday night's finale, because of a forearm injury.

It still will count as only three games in the standings, as well — relatively low stakes for a first-place team such as the Dodgers enjoying a healthy eight-game lead in the National League West.

Just don't tell that to the thousands who packed the ballpark, or a lagging baseball industry at large looking for an early June spark.

— JACK HARRIS

### ANGELS

#### Álvarez and Astros batter Anderson

Yordan Álvarez continued his hot streak with three more hits, including a two-run homer, Hunter Brown tossed six shutout innings

and the Houston Astros defeated the Angels 6-1 on Saturday night.

Nolan Schanuel supplied the Angels' run with a solo homer to right-center in the seventh, the second time in three games the first baseman has homered.

Álvarez, who also had two doubles, has hit safely in 10 of his last 11 games. The left fielder has gone 19 for 43 with four home runs and 11 RBIs, raising his batting average 31 points to .296.

After Alex Bregman got aboard on an infield single in the fifth, Álvarez drove a sinker from Tyler Anderson (5-6) into the elevated stands in right field to give the Astros a 4-0 lead.

Brown (2-5) had his fourth straight quality start. He gave up two hits, walked four and struck out six.

The only serious traffic the right-hander faced came in the first inning when the Angels had the bases loaded with two out. But Brown struck out Matt Thaiss to end the inning.

Anderson gave up four runs for only the second time in 13 starts.

— ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Panthers shut down Oilers in Game 1 of Stanley Cup Final

BY STEPHEN WHYNO

SUNRISE, Fla. — Goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky put on a master class against Connor McDavid and every other player who dared shoot the puck at him, his teammates pounced when given the chance, and the Florida Panthers are off and rolling in the Stanley Cup Final.

Bobrovsky was unbeatable in stopping all 32 shots he faced from every angle and in every situation in one of the most memorable play-off goaltending performances in recent history, Carter Verhaeghe and Evan Rodrigues scored and the Panthers beat the Edmonton Oilers 3-0 on Saturday night in Game 1 of the NHL's best-of-seven championship series.

Eetu Luostarinen added an empty-net goal.

Chants of "Bob-by!" repeated themselves over and over as the goalie everyone simply calls "Bob" turned aside multiple breakaways, stopped McDavid when the reigning and three-time most valuable player went into turbo mode and flew all around and outside the crease to make Florida's net an im-

penetrable fortress.

At one point, Bobrovsky lost his stick for 30 seconds and still managed to make saves.

Bobrovsky, a two-time Vezina Trophy winner for his stellar regular-season play, registered his second shutout of this run and third in the playoffs over his 14-year career. Thanks to him, the Panthers have a lead in the Stanley Cup Final for the first time in franchise history and are three wins away from hoisting hockey's hallowed trophy for the first time.

It didn't even matter that they were outshot 32-18.

Back in the final for a second consecutive season and healthier and more prepared for the moment than in the five-game loss to Vegas last season, Florida showed experience on this stage does matter, handling pressure and tense moments throughout like most of its players have been this far in the playoffs before.

The goals by Verhaeghe and Rodrigues came on the first five shots on net against Edmonton's Stuart Skinner, who was left out to dry by a slow backcheck and a lost race to the puck.

Skinner, who has had his ups



WILFREDO LEE Associated Press

**THE PANTHERS'** Evan Rodrigues (17) celebrates with teammates after scoring in the second period of Game 1 of the Cup final. The Panthers won despite being outshot by the Oilers 32-18.

and downs this postseason and whose play looked like the biggest question in the series, was hardly to blame for either one.

Edmonton controlled much of the game five on five, extended its streak of penalties killed to 30, and its power play did just about everything right except score.

Despite all that, the Oilers find themselves trailing in the first appearance in the Final for this core group led by McDavid and Leon Draisaitl.

It's a series featuring the farthest distance between teams meeting for the Cup, eclipsing the previous record set in 2011 by Boston and Vancouver.

The trophy was brought out on to the ice before puck drop, similar to what the league did by shining a spotlight on it in the empty stands in Edmonton four years ago when the playoffs went on in pandemic bubbles.

This was the polar opposite of that eerily quiet scene, with a sold-

out crowd of 19,543 screaming fans juiced up for a fifth consecutive Final featuring a team from the Florida.

While 20 playoff games have been played in Canada over the last 20 seasons, this was the 22nd in the Sunshine State over that time.

Another one is set for Monday night when these teams return for Game 2.

Why no writes for the Associated Press.

latimes.com/sports

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Los Angeles Times

# CALENDAR

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024 # LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR

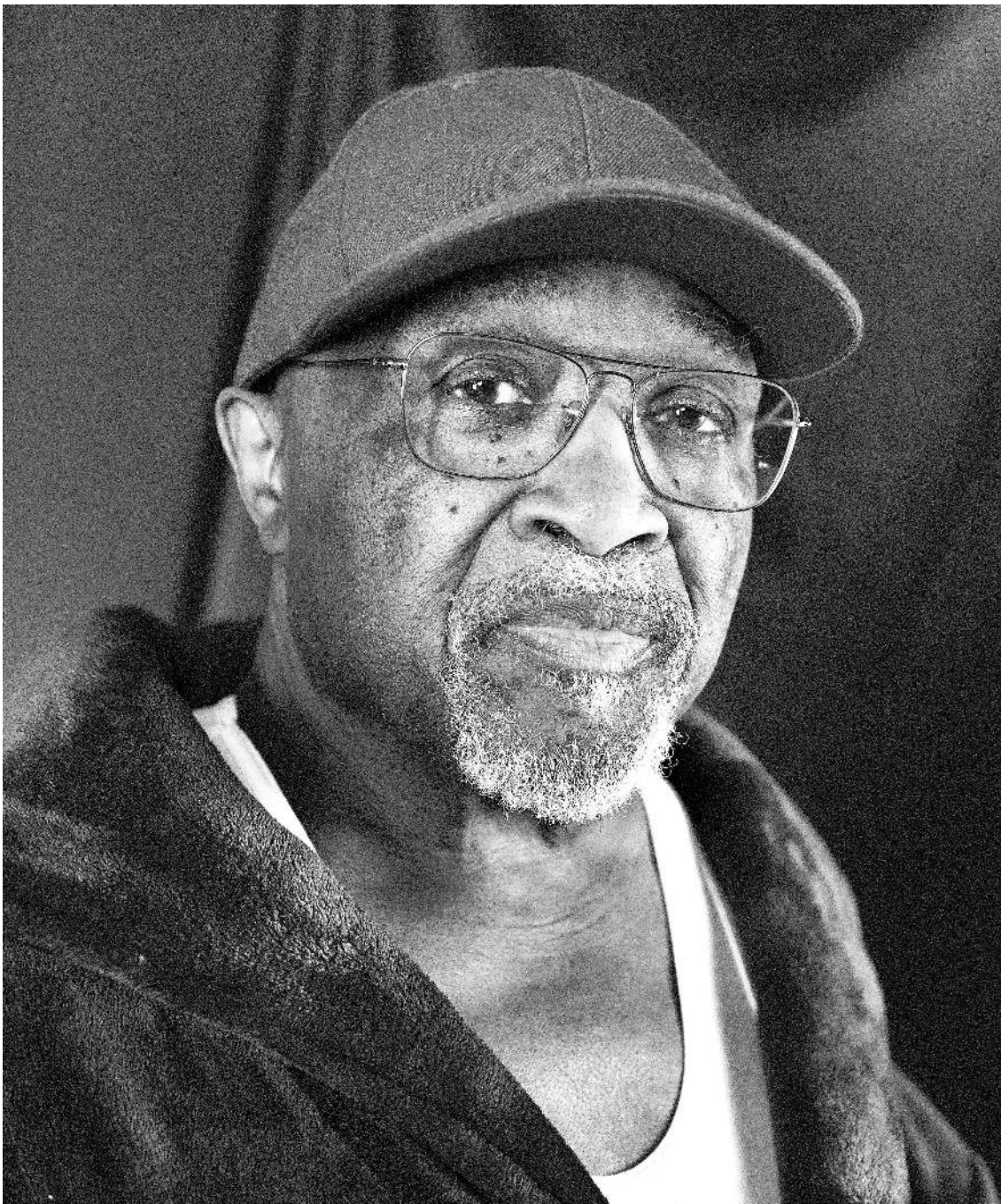


A RISING  
HANNAH  
EINBINDER  
LOOKS  
BEYOND  
'HACKS'

E4

CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times





SAM MULLER FOR THE TIMES

# Bluegrass the Swamp Dogg way

THE R&B LEGEND BREAKS NEW GROUND AT 81 WITH THE CHEEKILY SOULFUL ALBUM ‘BLACKGRASS.’ **BY JEFF GAGE**

**J**ERRY WILLIAMS JR. has a simple reason for deciding to record a bluegrass album: He doesn’t know how much more time he has left to do it. At 81 years old, the cult R&B singer, songwriter and producer, best known for his sleazy, wisecracking alter ego Swamp Dogg, can’t take anything for granted. ¶ “I figured at my age, I don’t have that much longer to be running around here on Earth, no way,” Williams says over a Zoom call from his home in Porter Ranch. He leans back in his office chair, hands folded in his lap and baseball hat cocked high on his head. The blinds are drawn behind him to block out the afternoon light. ¶ So, Williams says, “I’m gonna really go where I feel.”

“Blackgrass: From West Virginia to 125th St.,” Williams’ 26th studio album as Swamp Dogg, continues a renaissance that began in 2018 when he teamed up with producer Ryan Olson for the acclaimed “Love, Loss, and Auto-Tune.” Gone are the vocal effects so cheekily displayed on that and his last album, “I Need a Job ... So I Can Buy More Auto-Tune,” replaced here with banjo, fiddle and a more raw, earthy brand of storytelling. There’s the trademark sex and humor that Swamp Dogg is known for on album openers “Mess Under That Dress” and “Ugly Man’s Wife” and guest spots from Margo Price, Jenny Lewis and Vernon Reid, plus some of today’s finest bluegrass pickers, including Chris Scruggs and Sierra Hull. There’s even the odd love song, in which Williams’ grizzled voice shades in the heartbreak with wearied affection.

“I wanted to depart from where I’m usually at musically and to make an album for *me*,” Williams insists, with his slow, sticky drawl. He points to 1970’s psychedelic funk classic “Total Destruction to Your Mind,” his first as Swamp Dogg, as the only one “made for me, by me” until now. “That’s what I had in mind,” he says. “As I was doing this, I said, ‘Well, don’t nobody like it, don’t nobody like it.’ But it was time.” That excitement was palpable from the earliest demos, according to collaborator, band member and roommate Larry “Moogstar” Clemon. “I was just amazed,” says Clemon, who’s lived and worked with Williams for over 15 years. “It was like, wow, he’s really fired up. This is something you’ve been waiting for. You made it. You did it now.” Williams has long dreamed of making an album like this one. Ever since he was a kid in Ports-

mouth, Va., in the 1940s, he was infatuated with country and bluegrass, which he often heard played on Norfolk radio station WLOW by DJ Sheriff Tex Davis or on the records his grandfather brought home. The first song he learned to play was Red Foley’s version of “Peace in the Valley.” “I just loved it. I loved the music, I loved the tempos of the mandolin and ... I loved the fiddles too,” Williams says. “To me, it was just great music. And it was mixed with the rhythm and blues. Between hearing the rhythm and blues and the bluegrass, I always wanted to put ‘em together.” The new album does that with the help of Williams’ extensive back catalog — reputedly 2,000 songs that he’s written, recorded or produced — including reinterpretations of songs he originally wrote for artists like the Commodores and the Drifters. There are also covers of songs he loved in childhood, like “I Gotta Have My Baby Back” by Floyd Tillman or “Have a Good Time,” a pop hit for Tony Bennett in 1952. “If it was a hit one time, I don’t care how long ago, it can be a hit again,” Williams believes. Williams has had hits in the country sphere before, though he never received the credit he was due. Most notably, he co-wrote “She’s All I Got,” which

“I’m gonna really go where I feel,” says Swamp Dogg.

reached No. 2 on the country charts with Johnny Paycheck in 1972. But as a Black artist, he was caught between two worlds: When he attended that year’s Country Music Assn. Awards in Nashville, he was initially mistaken for a member of the kitchen staff.

**M**ARGO PRICE, who duets with Williams on the “Blackgrass” cut “To the Other Woman,” which he originally wrote for Doris Duke, was a devoted fan well before she knew of his country back-ground. “He’s always thinking about music, always reinventing himself, and just super funny and down to earth. And he’s got great stories,” she says. “Just hearing what he went through as an artist, as a Black artist especially, trying to break into the country music world and his experience at the CMAs — he’s been through a lot, and he’s just really an unsung hero.”

Still, Williams says, country was at the root of many of the songs he wrote over the years, even when they bore the appearance of R&B or soul. “I was really leaning on country when I wrote ‘em. It’s just that once I put all those horns and [other touches] on there, it kicked country back into the corner — which is what I wanted to do,” Williams says. “I liked the country feel, but I knew Black radio wasn’t gonna touch it with a 10-foot pole.”

Calling the new album “Blackgrass” was a conscious attempt to reclaim bluegrass’ heritage and reframe its importance to Black listeners.

“I wanted Blacks to know that when they were making fun of bluegrass, it was the Africans — not white Africans, [but] Black Africans — that brought that [music] to this land,” he says. He scoffs at anyone who would dismiss it as “hillbilly music,” saying, “To me, that’s prejudice.”

Throughout his career as Swamp Dogg, Williams has made a habit of addressing racial issues from a provocative, and often controversial, standpoint. Some of his best-known songs bear titles like “I’ve Never Been to Africa and It’s Your Fault” and “Call Me [N—],” which he says featured a Ku Klux Klan member on banjo. “It really pisses people off, because I guess that’s what kept my career at a certain level,” he says with a chuckle. “They tell me, ‘You say [the N-word] too much.’ Look, didn’t but five Blacks come to my show. I had 300 whites. So, hey, I’m going with what they like,” he adds, jokingly.

Price believes Williams’ messaging was visionary, even though it got him kicked off Elektra Records in the 1970s. “He was saying some incredible things — you know, socially, politically — and they dropped him,” she says. “And he never changed or compromised his artistic integrity. He kept it all the way, and he has always been fully himself. I strive to be like him.”

The social commentary on “Blackgrass” is of a softer variety, highlighted by “Songs to Sing,” a track originally written for protégé Charlie Whitehead. It’s transformed here into a shimmering epic with echoes of Sam Cooke and the civil rights movement. There’s also the newly penned “Murder

Ballad,” a chilling reimagining of an old folk song trope that’s dripping with racial tension and class violence. “We weren’t thinking about killing anybody in particular. I don’t think there’s but a couple people that I’d like to kill,” Williams muses, before promptly rattling off the name of one of his former label bosses.

Indeed, Williams has a lingering fixation with hits, money and status, a legacy perhaps of opportunities missed and others that were denied him. He boasts about owning nine cars at one point (“All of ‘em luxury except one,” he says) and a mansion on Long Island. Those things, he concedes, are just secondary. “Success, to me, is people listening and liking it. I made [the music] for me but where other people could enjoy it,” he says.

It’s telling, then, that for the first time in his career, Williams decided to relinquish creative control on “Blackgrass” to his producer, Ryan Olson. It’s their third album together and the first since 2020’s country-soul collection “Sorry You Couldn’t Make It.”

“It’s pretty great,” Olson says of working with Williams. “He’s really trusting. It’s like, there’s no ego going on about it. He’s just happy to get fresh ideas into the mix. He’s been doing it so long. If all relationships were like that, everything about music would be a lot funner.”

Olson also produced, directed and scored the film documentary “Swamp Dogg Gets His Pool Painted,” which premiered at South by Southwest in March.

“He’s family,” Olson says. “It’s hard to shake family, you know?”

Olson and Price agree that Williams’ close entourage, including Clemon, help keep him motivated, but Clemon emphasizes his fierce inner drive as well.

“I think the thing that keeps him fresh is he believes in himself,” Clemon says. The particular purpose of this album enhanced that motivation. “This is something that he really wants to push and spread, you know? He wants to leave things to help people. And music is a healer.”

Beyond the personal history, “Blackgrass” is poignant for Williams because it’s being released by Oh Boy Records, the label founded by his longtime friend, singer-songwriter John Prine, who died in 2020 from COVID-19 complications. The two had been close ever since working together at Elektra, with Prine’s “Sam Stone” a staple of Williams’ live performances. Prine made some of his final recordings for “Sorry You Couldn’t Make It.”

“That’s another reason I feel successful: What record company is signing up an 81-year-old?” Williams says, breaking into laughter.

But he sees “Blackgrass” as just the beginning of a new phase for Swamp Dogg.

“I want to do a straight country album,” Williams says. “This is me getting the door cracked open. Now I want one with no doors.”

He spreads his hands out in front of him, as though parting the seas.

“I’m hoping to get out at least five or six more albums before I depart,” he adds. “I already got the songs. Gotta put melodies to some of ‘em. And I got some thoughts I want to write about.”

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# POLISHING A NEW ‘JEWEL’ AS A TRIBUTE TO GEORGE BALANCHINE

AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY BALLET DIRECTOR LINCOLN JONES AIMS TO GET INTO THE MIND OF THE MASTER

BY JEFFREY FLEISHMAN

**B**ALLERINAS STIR in the early afternoon light that shines through a fountain and into the studio. A jeté flashes in silhouette, a pirouette vanishes like a whisper. The dance is not there yet, but choreographer Lincoln Jones sees glimmers of grace as he counts to the music and imagines what George Balanchine might have done had he added a fourth act to his famous ballet “Jewels.” ¶ It is provocative to aspire to slip into the mind of one of ballet’s great masters, but Jones, director of American Contemporary Ballet, sees it as a progression in his long devotion to Balanchine’s art. Jones, who rides a BMW motorcycle, aims for a degree of risk in his work. He once had his ballerinas — dressed elegantly as if on the set of “Mad Men” — saunter onto the stage and gather around a pie before falling to their knees like resplendent crows and devouring it.

“That came to me in a single instant,” he said at his studio on South Hope Street in downtown Los Angeles. “They’re walking in heels and it’s supposed to look like a runway walk, but it’s extremely slow until this element comes out that clearly shouldn’t be there and suggests something’s going to happen, and then it happens very fast. It’s the buildup.”

No pastries were expected upon the opening of Jones’ “Sapphires” last week. The piece is his rendering of a dance Balanchine thought about but never realized for “Jewels,” a plotless ballet composed of three movements that evoke the beauty of precious stones and places significant to the Russian emigré: “Emeralds” for France set to the music of Gabriel Fauré, “Rubies” for America set to Igor Stravinsky, and “Diamonds” for his native imperial Russia with a score by Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

“‘Jewels’ was a walk through the musical geography of Balanchine’s life,” Jennifer Homans wrote in her biography “Mr. B.” The ballet was “a gift to his dancers” and the production, with its gem-studded costumes, was intended as “a play of windows and mirrors, real and reflected, appearances and light.”

When the New York City Ballet premiered “Jewels” in 1967, the New York Times praised it as “a whole-hearted spectacle not to be missed.”

As he watched his ballerinas rehearse “Sapphires,” Jones, who grew up in Fullerton and once danced for the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in New York, suggested that a dance, especially one Balanchine might have summoned, should flow like the cadence of a sentence or an unbroken contrail. A precise conspiracy of gesture and timing. Then he stopped the music and told one of his dancers, “Don’t race too quickly.”

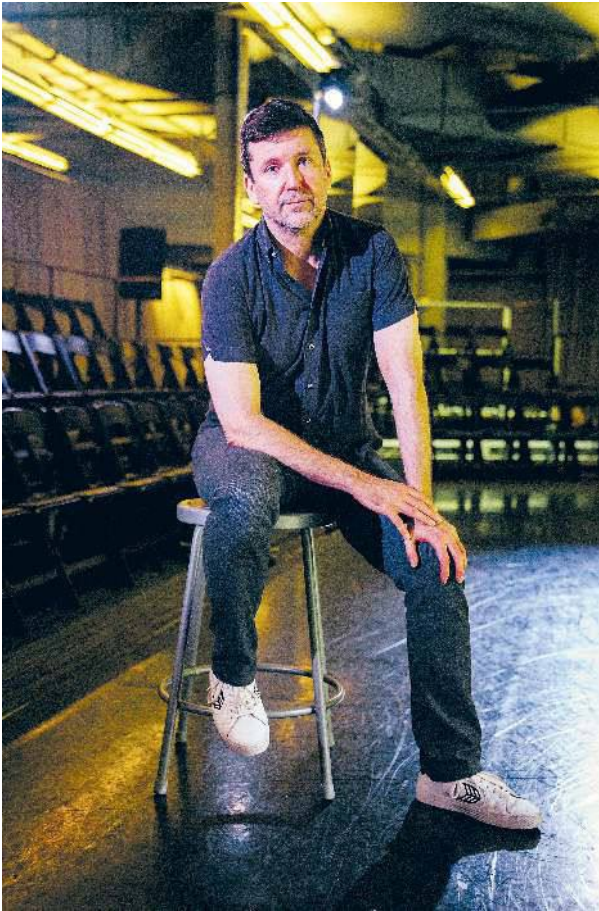
Jones is at once affable and intense — a polite slyness radiates off him. He studies his dancers as if breaking down and reconfiguring elements in works that can be both seductive and playful. He is artist and nomad, choreographer and businessman who, in a perpetual search for studio space and favorable leases, has moved his company 10 times since co-founding it here with Theresa Farrell in 2011.

Jones took a break from rehearsals the other day to talk about “Sapphires,” Balanchine and how a trip to Disneyland as a child taught him about aesthetics.

This conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

**What was the genesis of “Jewels”? What was Balanchine trying to convey?**

The idea was supposedly suggested by Claude Arpels of the jewelry firm Van Cleef & Arpels. I think Balanchine was hoping to get funding from him. The ballet worked perfectly in creating a unified idea to give you three things that were very different and to explore what made them the same. If you see “Jewels” live, as you shift from the colors of



green, red and diamonds, it has this huge visual impact. Balanchine was so good at drawing out simple elements that could be abstracted into other things.

**The “Sapphires” section was never realized. Balanchine, who died in 1983, had reportedly said that the color was too hard to get across onstage. What was difficult about that?**

My guess is because of the darkness of blue. For our intimate venue [Jones’ dancers are often only an arm’s length from the audience] it works. But for a larger stage I can see it not popping as much as the other jewels. That was way more than enough to deter him. Balanchine was a very theatrical thinker, but he did it with such limited means. It’s one of the things that makes his art so great — the efficiency with which he creates such impressive effects.

**Is it a bit brash for you to imagine what Balanchine might have done? Like a writer taking on an unfinished Hemingway chapter?**

Or stupidity. [Laughs]

**Why are you doing it? Is it an imagining of his influence on you?**

Choreography is unusual. Of the classical arts, there is little intellectual history in terms of how to do it. If you study music, you can find a million books on theory. But not in ballet. The best way for me to train was to study a master and try to learn everything I could to [understand] his work. Throughout the 20th century, you were supposed to be born as an artist and invent a new

**LINCOLN JONES**, above, has choreographed “Sapphires” for his American Contemporary Ballet company, top. The work started as an unrealized section of George Balanchine’s “Jewels.”



language. I very much disagree with that. I think that you have to master what came before and then maybe you’ll have something to say. The idea of taking a specific world of Balanchine’s and trying to make an extension of it is [like] trying to make a sequel to “Star Wars.” What made “Star Wars,” “Star Wars”? It holds your own work under an intense microscope. How much do you know about one of the most impactful ballets and what will that look like?

**Where do you see Balanchine’s imprint in your work? Where is it the same — and different?**

I’m trying to learn from him. Not his vision but his craft. His ballets are effective in ways no one else’s are. Why is that? How is he matching steps to the music? How is he constructing step phrases? If you look at any visual artist’s work, you’ll see they’re attracted to certain lines and line shapes. I’m attracted to a different set of lines than Balanchine is but I don’t want to give up any of the technology that he’s left us. Whenever anybody asks me about Balanchine, I think of what Jack Nicholson said about Stanley Kubrick: “Everyone pretty much acknowledges him as The Man, and I still think that underates him.” Dancers everywhere love to dance his work. I think he’ll come to be the only choreographer remembered from the 20th century.

**Your “Sapphires” is set to the music of Austrian American composer Arnold Schoenberg, who fled the Nazis in the 1930s and immigrated to the U.S. Why did you choose Schoenberg?**

Balanchine did plan to choreograph it to Schoenberg. It’s the first piece Schoenberg wrote when he moved to Los Angeles. It’s very unique. Many would call him the master of modern [atonal] music — music that for most people does not sound melodic. But Schoenberg said he often longed to write in the old style. The piece is called “Suite for String Orchestra in G Major.” There’s only two recordings of it that I know of. The music references what the Baroque composers were doing — the precursor to the modern symphony. It would be a collection of dances because at the time that’s what you did, you went out and danced. This is explicitly a throwback to that. I thought it was the right time to do it. It’s the 150th anniversary of Schoenberg’s birth. We’ll have a live 16-piece string orchestra.

**You’re paying homage to Balanchine, but he is a revered figure. Any trepidation about putting this show on?**

Absolutely. You want it to look like him but not a copy of him. I cannot fully channel what he would have done. When you’re imagining what Balanchine would do, your mind is going to what his ballets were. But then are you pulling too close to his steps? You have to go the

other direction a little bit.

**The core of your work is ballet, but since you came from New York to Los Angeles more than a decade ago you’ve expanded. You write skits. Your dancers sometimes look like they stepped out of Vogue magazine. In your show “Homecoming,” they were dressed as cheerleaders. In your most recent performance, you created a New Orleans jazz club with a live band and a stand-up comic. What are you trying to bring to ballet?**

I think it’s more of trying to bring ballet back to its natural state. Ballet has evolved into something that is a bit anachronistic and not ideal for the art. If you go back to the 15th and 16th centuries, ballets were like a party, like combining the Met Gala with a high school prom and a giant party — that’s what it was. That’s why we have dances with the audience after our shows. That participatory element.

My goal is to create an experience today that has the depth of [the art of the past] but also the immediacy of what those things had in their own time. Any good performance surprises. I enjoy having elements people aren’t expecting. I like to draw themes out into different mediums, to be immersed in something. When I was a kid going to Disneyland, it was such a huge thing. It was the first time I had ever seen an aesthetically unified world.

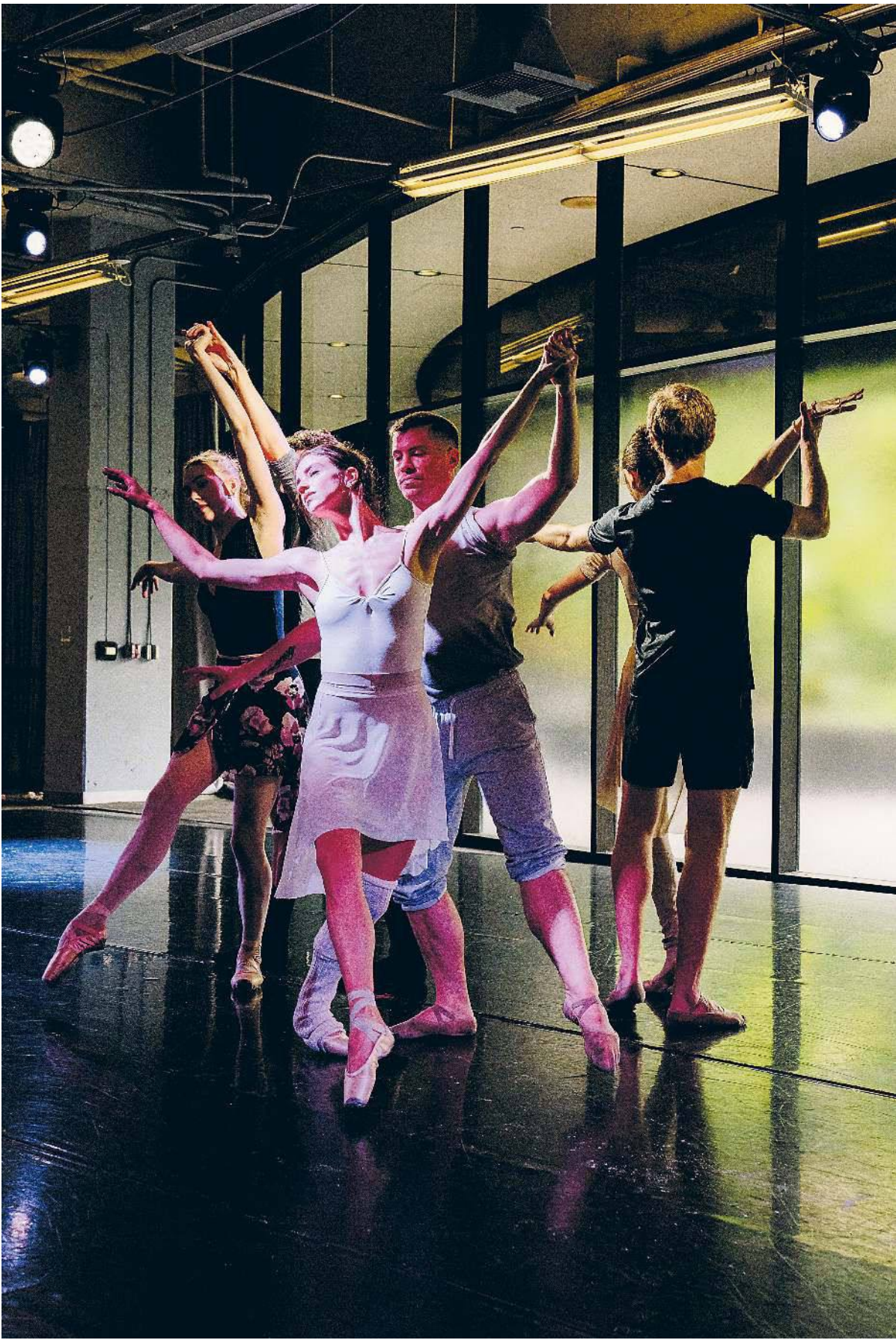
**Much of your work is cinematic. Why?**

I want to use elements from the world that people live in so they can ease into the work, and you’re not immediately presenting a stylistic barrier where they have to get through the barrier to then get into the art. I want it to go straight through. It’s really what I want to see visually.

**How difficult is it to keep a ballet company running? There’s fundraising, expiring leases and economics balanced against what you want to say artistically.**

It used to drive me crazy that I couldn’t spend all my time on art, but I’ve actually learned about art from doing the other stuff. I still do a lot of fundraising myself. [The company’s ballets cost between \$90,000 and \$250,000, including live musical ensembles, to present.] I oversee the marketing because the company’s creative photos are so incredibly important to me. One of the things that slows us down is that everyone is waiting for answers from me while I’m working on the ballet.

Economically, it’s a challenge. Philanthropy has changed over the years. I think a lot of times the goal of art is now seen as education or having a social purpose and a lot of the funding ends up going in that direction. It used to be for funding pure art. My goal is to show people that the funding for the sake of art itself is very valuable.



Photographs by JANE KIM For The Times





# Stand-up comedy is her ‘Everything’

HANNAH EINBINDER BECAME A BREAKOUT STAR ON ‘HACKS,’ BUT HER PASSION IS LIVE PERFORMANCE. A NEW SPECIAL ON MAX SHOWS HER COMING INTO HER OWN.

**W**HEN I TOLD Hannah Einbinder at the start of our interview that I had seen her new comedy special, “Everything Must Go,” a look somewhere between terror and elation crossed her face, which momentarily turned bright red. ¶ “It feels like the most intimate extension of myself, being and soul that I am sharing,” she said when I asked what she was feeling. “So to hear you say that you’ve seen it is the first time I’ve heard someone say that they have seen it. It filled me with joy and excitement and anticipation and a little shock.” ¶ At 29, she described the hour, premiering Thursday on Max, as her “very short” life’s work. “So,” she said, launching into a sarcastic tone, “no presh. It’s casual.”

Einbinder became known to audiences as the overworked comedy writer and underling Ava Daniels on “Hacks,” the Max series starring Jean Smart, which just wrapped up its third and most acclaimed season to date. However, stand-up has long been her main artistic passion and pursuit.

She remembers the exact date of her first open mic in Los Angeles — Jan. 3, 2018, at the Silverlake Lounge — and she considers this special the culmination of her entire time doing stand-up. It’s an hour that’s both deeply personal and couched in a performance style she has carefully crafted. She wears a sleek, all-black look and an expertly cut bob, but she uses her body to both bare her innermost feelings and to become various characters ranging from a witch-like hypnotist to planet Earth embodied as Marisa Tomei in “My Cousin Vinny,” who is angry at humanity for climate change. Einbinder’s “greatest love is the natural world,” she said over Zoom, wearing a sweatshirt with the rolling paper icon the Zig-Zag Man.

If you want to get to know Einbinder, the special, which opens with her birth and ends with her grandmother’s funeral, is a good place to start. It starts with a bit she has done before on camera, notably on “The Late Show With Stephen Colbert” in 2020, when she became the youngest comedian to ever perform on the show. She explains that many comics, when they start their set, begin by telling the audience “a little bit about me.” Her version of that is sultry, with a jazz score, the result of watching a lot of Turner Classic Movies at the time she wrote the gag. Everything she

**BY ESTHER ZUCKERMAN**

Since then, she’s become much more comfortable being honest with the crowd. Sandy Honig, a comedian who directed the special and has toured with Einbinder, has seen her friend and collaborator grow since they first met about six years ago. “Just watching her really come into her own and love herself and be confident, it’s all you really want for someone you love,” Honig said.

The material in “Everything Must Go” covers Einbinder’s bisexuality, her Judaism, her passion for the environment and her period, in addition to different eras of her life, from her stoner days to her time as a competitive cheerleader. She describes the intensity of cheering and how it ruined her body, holding up the microphone to her knee so you can hear it crack like a “gambling addict juggling dice.” The sound is awful.

Yes — perhaps surprisingly given her lack of pep — Einbinder was extremely serious about cheerleading, a result of having seen “Bring It On” at an impressionable age.

“It was a huge chunk of my life and it was my first real passion for performance,” she said, speaking in her typically deliberate fashion and explaining that she was a “flyer,” one who is held aloft. “I was very dedicated to perfection. I think my work ethic can be very, obviously to me at least, be attributed to my time as a cheerleader.”

Growing up, Einbinder competed in the sport throughout Los Angeles, including at Beverly Hills High School, which she attended. She still considers the city her home base. “I love being in my car,” she said. “I wish they made a scented candle of the 405, I’d light that s— up every day in my home. I love Los Angeles. It is a huge part of my identity.”

In fact, the beginning of “Everything Must Go” is a tribute to Einbinder’s love of driving and her romantic vision of Los Angeles. She pulls up to the El Rey Theatre in a vintage red Mercedes as a French tune plays in the background.

For this story, the photo shoot was held at beloved West L.A. burger joint the Apple Pan, one of her childhood favorites. I was confused by the location because in the special she identifies as vegan, but she explained that during the taping, she forgot to say the line she added about how she no longer adheres to that diet, a joke about her own hypocrisy. “That is my bad,” she said. “That’s on me.” She does believe in reducing meat consumption, but being vegan is not her choice anymore.

Einbinder grew up in Westwood where she was, in her words, an “ADHD child” who gravitated toward the comedy of Jim Carrey. “I had a lot of energy and I was very hyperactive,” she said. “There are many studies that examine the differences in ADHD between little boys and little girls, and I definitely fall on the little boy ADHD side of the spectrum. I was really rambunctious and really I think Jim Carrey’s physical style spoke to me and I kind of started to mimic him.”

These days, “Hacks” co-creators Jen Statsky, Lucia Aniello and Paul W. Downs compare her to Robin Williams, highlighting her ability to combine acting and character work with intimate revelations about herself in her stand-up.

She first tried stand-up in college at Chapman University, where she initially enrolled in the broadcast journalism program. She was doing improv but didn’t think comedy would be a path until comedian Nicole Byer came to Chapman and was looking for someone to open for her. Einbinder volunteered.



EDDY CHEN

HANNAH Einbinder, right, in her Max comedy special, “Everything Must Go,” and above at West L.A.’s Apple Pan restaurant.





CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times

“That was when it became very clear to me,” she said. “I didn’t really view it as, ‘This is my career.’ I just maybe naively viewed it as like, ‘I’m obsessed with this and I’m going to pursue this and I can’t stop doing it.’”

After college she moved in with her mom, worked as a barista at the now-closed Alfred Tea Room on Melrose and started doing open mics. Newman was “brutally honest” in her opinions about her

daughter’s chosen field, saying, in Einbinder’s telling, “Good luck, girl. It’s tough out there. Go off, girl, do your thing.”

Getting the role of Ava on “Hacks” not only raised Einbinder’s profile as an actor — it was her first time acting on television — but also boosted her stand-up career, allowing her to pursue it at a pace she wanted. Because of the fame the series brought, she could work out material while touring instead of trying to

play the game of internet recognition that so many stand-ups do these days.

“It is never lost on me how fortunate I am and how much being on ‘Hacks’ has made it possible for me to take my time and not have to put my clips up on Instagram or TikTok and to be able to just go right to the road,” she said.

Einbinder approaches acting with the same studied intensity she approaches stand-up. “She’s always been innately talented and had this thing inside her that is just so raw and you can’t teach it or learn it,” Statsky said. “But she also takes the job of being an actor on the show so seriously and she’s so prepared.”

Downs added that Einbinder has notebooks filled with preparation for her scenes. Still, her seriousness about the job hasn’t stopped her from befriending everyone on set. Downs said that he and his co-creators always joke that she is No. 2 on the call sheet but has the energy of a production assistant.

“She’s the kind of person who immediately makes friends with everybody on the crew and knows everything about everybody and hangs out with them and they’re buds,” her “Hacks” co-star Smart said.

That’s evident in how she brought the “Hacks” community along for her special, using cinematographer Adam Bricker as well as the crew of grips and electricians that worked the series. Smart remembered walking in to watch the taping and being greeted by the grips parked outside. Arranging the work for her “Hacks” co-workers was “textbook Hannah Einbinder,” Smart said.

“She fights for her people so hard in a way that I’ve never encountered with anybody else in this industry,” Honig said. In Honig’s case, it meant that Einbinder advocated for the director to receive a fair fee in order to make a healthcare minimum. Einbinder specifically wanted to “shout out to the artisans,” who quickly learned the lighting cues for her act so she and Honig could turn the set into a cinematic experience, where the stage transforms each time Einbinder takes on a different persona.

The ending of Season 3 of “Hacks” sets up new shades of Ava for Einbinder to play in the fourth season, which Max has already ordered. In the final moments of Season 3, Ava

blackmails Smart’s Deborah Vance into letting her be the head writer on her new late-night talk show, after Deborah tells her it’s going to someone else.

Smart said that Einbinder made her cry while filming one of the season’s most intense scenes — the confrontation between Ava and Deborah, in which Ava reveals her heartbreak over not getting the job.

“She is up for the challenge no matter what it is that we throw at her,” Downs said. “Because she has deepened her understanding of the character and because it’s been three seasons now, we knew that we



JAKE GILES NETTER Max

wanted the character to level up.”

But as for what’s next for Einbinder, she plans to use her privileged position to take her time and choose what’s right. Smart even said that Einbinder turned down a meeting with an unnamed director on a “big, big movie” because of ethical issues with the project.

“I just went crazy when she told me,” Smart said. “But that’s the kind of person she is and I have to respect that. She’s an extraordinarily principled and kind person.”

For her part, Einbinder said she is trying to remove herself from a “capitalist timeline” where artists are required to churn out material when they have a level of heat in their careers. She wants to take her time to workshop new material with an eye toward quality above all else.

“I have been given the incredible gift of being able to make art and to be a part of art for a living and I hope to maintain that level of quality,” she said. “Cut to me in a Shell Oil commercial.” I said I don’t see that happening. She added: “No, just kidding, folks.”

**SEASON 3** of “Hacks” finds Ava (Hannah Einbinder), left, confronting Deborah (Jean Smart).

|||||||

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JUSTIN JUN LEE For The Times

# IT’S MERRILY ROLLING ALONG — AT LONG LAST

JONATHAN GROFF, STAR OF BROADWAY REVIVAL, AND DIRECTOR MARIA FRIEDMAN FINALLY CRACK THE RIDDLE OF STEPHEN SONDHEIM’S PROBLEMATIC MUSICAL

CHARLES McNULTY  
THEATER CRITIC

**B**ROADWAY LOVES nothing better than a happy ending, and that yearning for redemption was richly satisfied by this season’s standout production of “Merrily We Roll Along,” the Stephen Sondheim-George Furth musical that flopped when it premiered on Broadway in 1981 and has been desperate to prove itself ever since. ¶ That there hasn’t been a Broadway revival of the show until now tells you all you need to know about the musical’s traumatic history. Sondheim, whose storied partnership with director Hal Prince went bust over “Merrily,” spent years toiling to fix the show. ¶ There were a few successful outings along the way, most notably Michael Grandage’s Olivier Award-winning production at the Donmar Warehouse in London in 2000. But not until now has anyone made the case that “Merrily” isn’t merely a favorite of Sondheim cultists but a musical masterwork that deserves to be placed in the same category as “Sweeney Todd” and “Sunday in the Park With George.”

How did director Maria Friedman finally solve the riddle? Casting, casting, casting is the obvious answer, though there’s a bit more to it than that. Based on the play of the same title by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, “Merrily We Roll Along” tells the story of three friends — composer Franklin Shepard, playwright Charley Kringas and writer Mary Flynn — whose professional and personal dreams are tracked in reverse chronology. From the cynicism and compromises of middle

age, the show wends its way back to the innocence and idealism of young adulthood. Much can go wrong with a musical that has three central characters vying for your attention. But with its dream triumvirate — Jonathan Groff as Franklin, Daniel Radcliffe as Charley and Lindsay Mendez as Mary — the revival achieves a triangular balance that would have impressed Euclid. (All three performers, along with their director, are justly nominated for Tony Awards.) The actors, idiosyncratic power-



JOAN MARCUS

**LINDSAY MENDEZ,** Katie Rose Clarke, Groff and Daniel Radcliffe in off-Broadway run of “Merrily.”



houses, exude the chemistry of old chums. Yet what truly sets this ensemble apart is the way Groff, Radcliffe and Mendez draw your sympathy without dulling the musical’s sharp edges. “Merrily” in the wrong hands can be a dyspeptic experience. But at the Hudson Theatre, where the revival has been enjoying its status as the season’s must-see hit (after a triumphant run off-Broadway at New York Theatre Workshop), the biting wit and thinly disguised rage coexist with implacable affection.

**“MERRILY”**  
director Maria Friedman and star Jonathan Groff at Hudson Theatre.



The sourness of the characters isn’t artificially sweetened, but bad behavior is shadowed by vulnerability. Hopefulness and regret are calibrated to perfection in a revival that ought to be filmed before it closes July 7. I’ve seen the New York production twice, and the psychology only deepens on subsequent viewing. “I want to give huge thanks to the original production,” said Friedman, speaking on Zoom from a New York apartment on a busy afternoon that had her up and down to answer the door and turn off alarm reminders. (When you’re the toast of Broadway, life is one big happy interruption.) Before she said anything about her own production, she wanted first to give credit to the 1981 company, whose roller-coaster ride with the musical was brilliantly captured in the 2016 documentary “Best Worst Thing That Ever Could Have Happened.” “Like all great things, this piece belongs to everybody,” she said. “Anyone who’s ever had anything to do with ‘Merrily We Roll Along’ — it touches them in a way that I think few other pieces of theater do.” “Merrily” has certainly had a busy afterlife. “Most things that don’t work are buried,” Friedman said. “This show has emerged and emerged, because at its core it’s about the idea of time passing, friendship, the universality of compromise — things we can all relate to.” The journey for Friedman, an esteemed actor who has made a stellar transition into directing with this musical, has been a long one. She played Mary in a 1992 British production at Leicester’s Haymarket Theatre, where Sondheim and Furth were tinkering with the show away from the New York-London spotlight. She was later invited to direct the musical at a drama school. Working with a cast of students, she came upon the same problem that foiled Prince’s original Broadway production. “How can you expect an audience to believe that a 21-year-old is a double divorcée, an alcoholic, a sell-out with a huge success under his belt?” Friedman asked. “These students hadn’t even started yet, so it looked like they were all dressed up in their mommy’s clothes, pretending. And it broke my heart, because I was like, ‘There it is. That’s the issue.’” When asked to name her career highlights, Friedman naturally begins with Sondheim. She won an Olivier Award for her performance in “Maria Friedman: By Special Arrangement,” her Sondheim-heavy one-woman show, and another for her performance in Sondheim’s “Passion.” Playing Dot in the British premiere of “Sunday in the Park With George” is another Sondheim milestone for her. She feels indebted to his memory on both a personal and a professional level. “I owe him my friends, my house, the adventures I’ve had,” she said, acknowledging that it was through his artistry that she reached new heights of her own. When the opportunity arose to direct “Merrily” at the Menier Chocolate Factory, an intimate London venue whose pocket-size stage has allowed directors to zoom in on a work’s dramatic essence, she understood both the gift and the responsi-



cal revival.) The British cast was different, but Friedman has been building on her understanding of the musical, probing deeper into its secrets and untangling its interpretative knots.

One facet of the show that has been clear to her all along is that “Merrily” centers on Franklin. “This is Frank’s memory play,” she said with mathematical conviction. A central challenge of “Merrily,” she said, has to do with numbers: “With so many protagonists, who are you going to relate to?”

When she played the part of Mary, Friedman naturally operated on the understanding that this was Mary’s musical. As a director, she saw the bigger picture. Her goal was to streamline the experience for the audience “so that we could have a perspective” and not be flitting haphazardly from one character to the next.

In the back of her mind was an awareness, gleaned from having worked directly with Sondheim and Furth, of just how painful the musical’s initial reception had been for them.

“The number ‘Opening Doors’ is the most autobiographical thing that Steve ever wrote,” she said. “And it was about George, Hal and him making this show — through the night, playing, singing, daring, dreaming, eating, drinking. I mean just everything you want when you’re young. The shock, the shock of the response they got when the show opened, they really couldn’t work it out.”

‘This show has emerged and emerged, because at its core it’s about ... things we can all relate to.’

**Maria Friedman,**

Director, on successful revival of “Merrily We Roll Along”

“Merrily” begins at Frank’s swanky Bel-Air home in 1976. A hit movie producer, he’s hosting a party full of Hollywood swells and hangers-on. Frank’s gaga young mistress is there along with his second wife, a demanding diva unaccustomed to taking a back seat to anyone.

Watching it all with a gimlet eye, Mary — his old friend who’s still helplessly in love with him — takes Frank to task for sacrificing his theatrical partnership with Charley for hollow Hollywood success. Wobbly and waspish from booze, she makes a toast: “To Franklin Shepard, the producer. The man who has everything. And fat, drunk and finished, I would rather be me any day.”

When I casually remarked that for Sondheim, the idea of switching from composing to producing must have seemed like the ultimate compromise, Friedman vehemently disagreed. “I do not think that this is a piece about selling out,” she said. “And the issue isn’t that he’s producing but *what* he’s producing.”

Sonia Friedman, Friedman’s sister, happens to be not only one of the most highly regarded theater producers working today but also a lead producer on this revival. But Maria Friedman wasn’t simply defending family honor. She was making a larger point about Frank’s dilemma.

“Charley comes from a wealthy background, Jewish background, good parents,” she said. “He can afford integrity. In my version, Frank is a scholarship boy. He goes into the army and comes out looking for life and friends. He finds his friends. Right at the start of his life he says he wants success. Mary and Charley don’t have the courage to live life like Frank does. But Frank doesn’t have a choice.”

Sondheim may have come from an affluent family like Charley’s, but according to Friedman, the biographical parallels with Frank are unmistakable. “He’s got extraordinary charisma, real talent, and he likes having hits,” she said. “Steve wanted them too. Frank shares his belief that musicals are meant to be popular. They’re a way of stating important ideas, ideas that might make a difference. He believes in it. When he’s making music, he’s whole. He says, ‘If I didn’t have music, I

would die.’ And we watch him die.”

The key to making this work — which is to say making us care — is the performance of Groff, who humanizes Frank’s choices without sentimentalizing his arc. Frank can come off as a narcissist, a guy who can’t resist whatever shiny object happens to be in front of him. But Groff, who received Tony nominations for his performances in “Spring Awakening” and “Hamilton” and deserves to win for his beautifully layered work in “Merrily,” reveals what Mary and Charley see in him and don’t want to give up on: an answer to their dreams of fulfillment — romantic in Mary’s case, artistic in Charley’s.

Groff was fresh from filming HBO’s “Spring Awakening: Those You’ve Known,” a reunion concert with the show’s original cast and creative team, when casting director Jim Carnahan asked him about his interest in “Merrily.” He immediately watched the London production on YouTube and was struck by an image from the opening number that matched something he had just re-created for the “Spring Awakening” doc.

“Frank walks out with a red folder, and Mary and Charley come out and stand in the exact positions that John Gallagher Jr. and Lea Michele stood in at the end of ‘Spring Awakening,’ with the girl over the left shoulder, the guy over the right,” he said, speaking from his dressing room at the Hudson Theatre. “That is the final bit of ‘Spring Awakening’ and I was like, ‘Oh, that’s so weird. I just lived that.’ ”

But it was one of Frank’s lines that really clinched the deal for Groff: “I’ve made only one mistake in my life. But I made it over and over and over. That was saying ‘yes’ when I meant ‘no.’ ” “When I heard that,” Groff said, “I went, ‘Oh, my God. I have to play this. I have done that. I’m just learning how to not do that. Yeah, I get him.’ ”

“I cast Jonathan for many reasons,” Friedman said. “One, because he’s absolutely brilliant. But I cast a big heart, a beating heart.”

Under a strict moral accounting, Frank can’t help coming up short. In “Finishing the Hat,” part of his two-volume set of collective lyrics and commentaries, Sondheim observes, “The overriding problem in every version of ‘Merrily We Roll Along’ is that Frank, the central figure, is entirely unsympathetic for the first half-hour of the show. He is arrogant, an adulterer, a betrayer of his best friend and the cause of near-suicidal alcoholism in the woman who loves him unrequitedly.”

While working with director James Lapine on a later version of the show, Sondheim added the song “Growing Up” to serve as a “progress report” on Frank’s “moral state.” “We should see him torn between decisions — making, as he always does, the wrong one,” Sondheim writes.

Friedman insists that Frank is not guilty: “Nobody in my play is guilty. They’re making decisions, like we all do. They make mistakes, mistakes that we can all make.” But she recognizes the crucial role “Growing Up” plays in revealing where Frank is coming from.

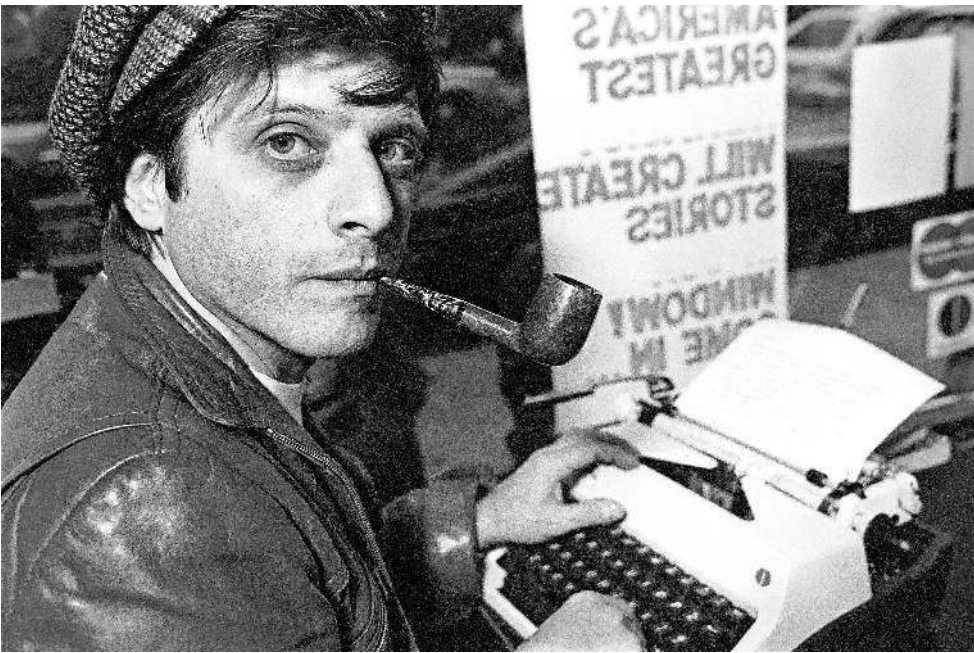
“The amusement and bafflement of having a go at life and everyone wanting a piece of you — that is the place that Jonathan works from,” Friedman said. “Everyone wants a piece of Frank. That’s what happens with brilliant people. Jonathan is not just brilliant and beautiful but also one of the kindest men. And kindness is central to this production.”

Groff, who was exceptional in the short-lived HBO series “Looking,” about a group of young gay men living in San Francisco, said that, from “a queer perspective,” he could identify with the way Frank represses parts of himself to please others.

“Growing up closeted, I became an expert at dodging questions and shining a light on other people,” he said. “This can create a relationship dynamic where you’re in a constant state of service to others — like the perfect son who’s hiding something. That stereotype feels connected to the way Frank supports everybody’s dreams, talents, neuroses and needs. He’s able to do it because he’s full of passion and genuine love for those people.”

So how exactly did Friedman, Groff & Co. finally solve the riddle of “Merrily”? By approaching it the way they might a play by Shakespeare or Chekhov, sifting through the lyrics as though they were lines in “Hamlet” and digging into the psychology of the characters as though mining subtext in “Uncle Vanya.”

This revival, fittingly, has been a team effort. And the ensemble’s collaborative joy only reinforces our sense that, however much Frank, Charley and Mary may bitterly disappoint one another, their bond will always be the best thing that ever happened to them.



BARBARA ALPER Getty Images

# A WINDOW INTO THE SOUL OF SCI-FI PIONEER HARLAN ELLISON

INSIDE THE AUTHOR’S LONGTIME HOME AS BOOKS ARE REISSUED

BY BETHANNE PATRICK



ON A HILLY STREET in Sherman Oaks, writer and producer J. Michael “Joe” Straczynski gestures to a row of gray gargoylesque heads mounted above an entryway. “If you look carefully, you’ll see they are the Watergate figures,” he says. “Nixon in the middle, surrounded by Mitchell, Dean, Haldeman, all of them.” He smiles, knowing that the mind that created this funky tableau belonged to none other than his closest friend, the eccentric author of speculative fiction Harlan Ellison. † Ellison’s career spanned six decades. His work garnered multiple Hugo, Nebula and Bram Stoker awards, among other honors. Willing to approach subjects that others deemed taboo or too complicated, he influenced a generation of writers, including George R. R. Martin, Stephen King and Neil Gaiman. This year will see the publication of four Ellison books, beginning with the all-new “Harlan Ellison’s Greatest Hits” in March, which has now gone through four print runs, to the anthologies “Dangerous Visions” (March), “Again, Dangerous Visions” (released last week) and the long-awaited “The Last Dangerous Visions” in October.

Straczynski’s introduction to the new edition of “Dangerous Visions” includes something of a call to action: “ ‘Dangerous Visions’ ... was needed. And it may be just as needed now, at this moment, which has seen the return of a new generation of censors, banners and burners. Because the war for free expression is never truly won, only postponed until those on the other side of the barricades try again through different organizations, under different names, but always with the same tactics: fear and fire.” Ellison died in 2018 at age 84. As literary executor of Ellison’s estate, Straczynski hopes that he can help keep alive not just Ellison’s artistic legacy, but also his politically progressive ideals (the author’s words were even used by the Writers Guild of America in support of its 2023 strike). Straczynski understands, from his long relationship with Ellison and countless visits to his house, that its structure, appearance, decor and contents tell stories about both his legacy and those ideals.

The Watergate grotesques form a small portion of the weird and sometimes wacky, but always carefully curated, world of Ellison. The largest portion of the facade features stone-intaglio pictographs that at first glance might be Egyptian hieroglyphs or Aztec sun symbols; closer examination reveals all sorts of imaginative creatures, from tiny robots to taloned divinities to monsters. Every piece of the house was carefully chosen by Ellison, and many pieces, including carved doors, staircases and even hinges and handles, were designed to his specifications. Next to the doorbell hangs a small framed sign: “Dig. Or split.” The author had no interest in catering to people who did not share his enthusiasms or worldviews.

Born in 1934, Ellison was a self-described “street rat” from a small Ohio town who moved to New York City after a brief stint in college, served in the Army and wrote his first novel before his 1962 arrival in California. He wrote for numerous TV shows — his “Star Trek” episode “The



BETHANNE PATRICK

**ELLISON**, top, in 1977. Vintage jelly glasses fill a room in his Sherman Oaks home.



City on the Edge of Forever” is considered the original series’ best — and was even featured in Gay Talese’s famous Esquire piece “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold” in 1966. He wrote fiction and nonfiction himself, and in 1967 edited “Dangerous Visions,” which Isaac Asimov deemed a “second revolution” in science fiction.

“Harlan told me that when he was young, people called it ‘skiffy,’ ” Straczynski says. Ellison adopted the term and used it his entire life.

“No one took it seriously. Science fiction mainly involved white men arriving on other planets and attempting to colonize them, or survive insurmountable odds,” Straczynski said Ellison told him. “Before ‘Dangerous Visions,’ it’s fair to say sci-fi was technical, but Harlan dragged previously taboo subjects into the arena of science fiction.”

As Straczynski moves through the rooms of the house called “Ellison Wonderland,” his deep affection and respect for his friend remains evident. He points out the care with which more than 250,000 books are shelved, each hardback jacket fitted with transparent archival covers, the dust-free groupings of comic-book figurines, the room full of shelves specifically made to hold jelly glasses from the 1960s. He touches only the things he must, in order to make something visible, such as when in Ellison’s office proper he opens a tiny door in one of

the Bram Stoker Awards given by the Horror Writers Assn. and takes out the tiny plaque inside that holds the winner’s name and book title.

Everything, he says, is just as Ellison and his wife, Susan, arranged it. “Harlan believed that books were a form of art, and that his house was also a piece of art,” says Straczynski. “He was a neat freak. Sometimes I’d arrive to find him cleaning the grout on a tile floor with a toothbrush! He loved and honored art, whether that was framed art hanging on the walls or the books, and, of course, those were all about honoring other writers.”

Each room or wall or nook is covered with artwork, movie posters, books, ceramics and toys, but there are more serious surprises too. A gorgeous burl wood half moon bar, commissioned for but never delivered to the Titanic, conceals the entrance to a room containing Ellison’s archives, organized on accordion library shelves. A short distance away is a shelf of vintage mystery paperbacks that, when pressed in the correct spots, opens onto a kind of grotto. “Harlan lived by his principles, and so in the early 1970s, he had this constructed as a stop on the route some Vietnam draft resisters could take to Canada,” says Straczynski. Young men did stay in the room, which still holds blankets, canned goods and, of course, more books.

Ellison and Straczynski met in the late 1970s, when the latter decided to call the telephone number in one of Ellison’s books. “I couldn’t believe it when he picked up and barked, ‘Yes?’ into my ear,” Straczynski recalls. “Later I asked him why he would print his real phone number in a book. He looked down, kind of sheepishly, and said, ‘Chicks.’ ” Straczynski mimes Ellison making an embarrassed shrug.

At first, the two men communicated sporadically, with Ellison giving his trademark brutal feedback: “Here’s the deal. If it was any good, it would sell. If it’s not selling, it’s s—. My advice to you is stop writing s—.” As time passed and Straczynski became a regular guest at the Sherman Oaks dinner table, the feedback could still be tough (“No one wants to sit with someone who doesn’t have anything to say, Joe”), but their connection grew stronger. Straczynski’s career took off as he moved from journalism to radio to horror fiction to cartoons to network shows to TV and big-screen films.

Straczynski pauses. “Harlan and I came from the streets and when you come from the streets you gotta look out for your buddy. For me, that was Harlan, and for Harlan, that was me.” Not only are the new editions Straczynski’s idea; he is petitioning the city of Los Angeles to give “Ellison Wonderland” landmark status so that it might be opened as a museum.

“When you walk into this house,” he says, “you are walking into Harlan’s brain. He loved the film ‘Lost Horizon’ and the concept of Shangri-la, a place where everything that gave you joy would exist. This house is Harlan’s Shangri-la, a place where a man who made his own rules lived.”

Patrick is a freelance critic, podcaster and author of the memoir “Life B.”



**SUNDAY**  
**California Turkish Festival**  
A free celebration of the nation's culture, cuisine and, yes, coffee.  
● 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. Shoreline Aquatic Park, 200 Aquarium Way, Long Beach. [atasc.org](#)

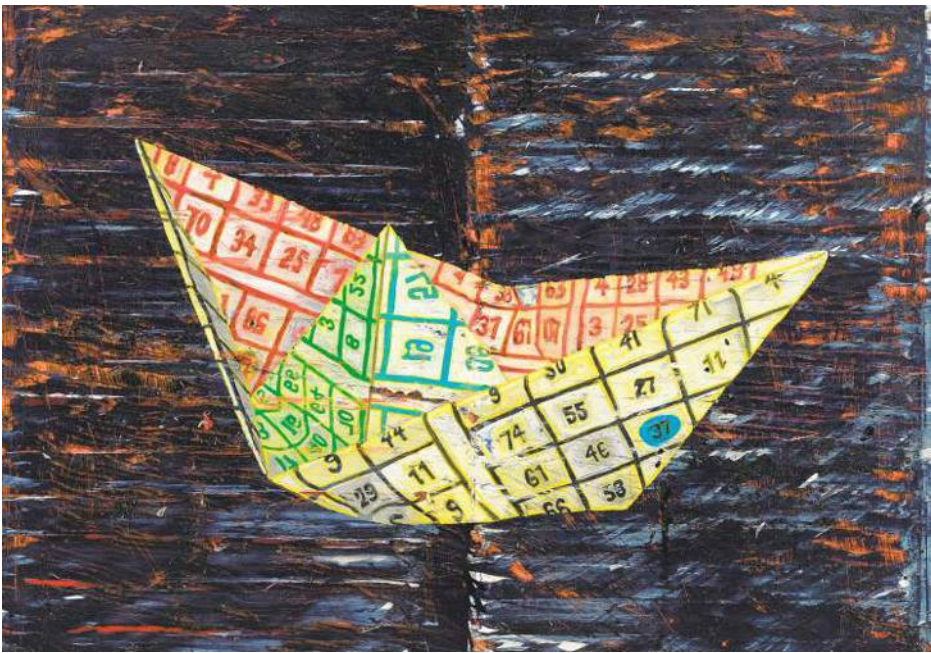
**Graphic Tales: The Art of Visual Storytelling** Starting with ancient Greek, Moche, Maya and other pottery, speakers contemplate the fundamentals of visual literacy and its societal interactions.  
● 1-4 p.m. Sunday. The Getty Villa (and online via Zoom), 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades. [getty.edu](#)

**Mineo Mizuno: Homage to Nature** A site-specific sculpture crafted from fallen timber gathered in the forests of the Sierra Nevada by the California-based Japanese American artist.  
● Through May 25, 2029. The Huntington, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino. [huntington.org](#)

**Angel Otero That First Rain in May** The artist's paintings and sculptures utilize magical realism and abstraction to conjure recollections of his growing up in Puerto Rico.  
● Through Aug. 24. Hauser & Wirth, 8980 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood. [hauserwirth.com](#)

**TUESDAY**  
**The Book of Marvels: Wonder and Fear in the Middle Ages** A 15th-century manuscript from northern France illustrates the medieval worldview that contributed to Western stereotypes of the "other" that still exist today.  
● Tuesday–August 25. The Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Drive, L.A. [getty.edu](#)

**Mrs. Doubtfire** The national tour of the Broadway musical based on the



THOMAS BARRATT From the artist and Hauser & Wirth.  
“CARIBE Bingo” by Angel Otero. Artist’s work is on exhibit at Hauser & Wirth.

# THE WEEK AHEAD

A CURATED PREVIEW OF WHAT’S HAPPENING IN MUSIC, MOVIES, THEATER AND THE ARTS

hit 1993 Robin Williams comedy shows the lengths to which an unemployed actor will go to be near his kids.  
● Tuesdays-Sundays, through June 30. Pantages Theatre, 6233 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood. [broadwayinhollywood.com](#)

**WEDNESDAY**  
**Vampire Weekend** The English Beat and Voodoo Glow Skulls opens for the Grammy-winning rockers.  
● 6:30 p.m. Wednesday. Hollywood Bowl, 2301 N. Highland Ave., Hollywood. [hollywoodbowl.com](#)

**THURSDAY**  
**Blackbird** David Harrower’s intense drama about a conflicted young woman confronting the man who sexually abused her when she was 12.  
● Thursdays-Sundays, through June 23. Chance Theater, 5522 E. La Palma Ave., Anaheim. [chancetheater.com](#)



DANIA MAXWELL Los Angeles Times  
**VAMPIRE** Weekend hits the Bowl on Wednesday.

**Hollywood Fringe Festival** The annual open-access, theatrical free-for-all brings the performing arts to neighborhood theaters, parks, clubs, churches, restaurants and other unexpected places.  
● Thursday through June 30. Multiple venues throughout Hollywood, bounded by Franklin, Normandie and Melrose Avenues, and Gardner Street. [hollywoodfringe.org](#)

**FRIDAY**  
**Luke Combs** The country star’s “Growin’ Up and Gettin’ Older” tour riffs off his last two studio albums, including his cover of Tracy Chapman’s “Fast Car.”  
5:45 p.m. Friday-Saturday. Sofi Stadium, 1001 Stadium Drive, Inglewood. [sofistadium.com](#)

**Inside Out 2** Now a teenager, Riley deals with even more complex emotions in Pixar’s sequel to the 2015 Oscar-nominated animated feature.  
● Starts Friday (with Thursday previews) in theaters. [movies.disney.com](#)

**Tuesday** Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Lola Petti-crew star as a mother and daughter facing mortality in writer-director Daina O. Pusic’s emotional, allegorical debut film.  
● Starts Friday (with

Thursday previews) in theaters. [a24films.com](#)

**SATURDAY**  
**Hollywood Bowl Jazz Festival** Arsenio Hall returns to host this two-day cornerstone of the L.A. summer music season, headlined by Jodeci and Kamasi Washington, respectively.  
● 3:30 p.m. Saturday-June 16. Hollywood Bowl, 2301 N. Highland Ave., Hollywood. [hollywoodbowl.com](#)

**Jasper Marsalis** The artist and musician blends hip-hop, jazz, electronic and avant-garde elements in “Slauson Malone 1” as part of the “Off the 405” open-air concert series.  
● 7:30 p.m. Saturday. The Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Drive, L.A. [getty.edu](#)

**Last Remaining Seats** The Los Angeles Conservancy’s annual series showcasing classic movies in historic theaters concludes.  
● 2 p.m. Saturday. “From Russia With Love” (1963); 8 p.m. Saturday. “Mi Vida Loca” (1994). Palace Theatre, 630 S. Broadway, downtown L.A. [laconservancy.org](#)

**Tarfest 2024** “A Day in the Park” brings together eclectic music, art and food for all ages.  
● 2-8 p.m. Saturday. Pan Pacific Park, 7600 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles. [tarfest.com](#)

**This Bright Wilderness** An evening of readings celebrating Black theater at the Mark Taper Forum includes selections from works by Bill Gunn, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Anna Deavere Smith, Derek Walcott, Charlayne Woodard, August Wilson and Micki Grant.  
● 8 p.m. Saturday. Mark Taper Forum, 135 N. Grand Ave., downtown L.A. [centertheatre.org](#)

**JUNE 16**  
**Fac Xtra Retreat (FXR): Force Ghosts** Seven Asian American artist-educators based in L.A. convene for a performance “intervention” in direct response to the “Scratching at the Moon” exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.  
● 3-5 p.m. June 16. ICA/LA, 1717 E 7th Street, downtown L.A. [theicala.org](#)

## BESTSELLERS

- |                                                                                                                                                                                  |  | weeks on list |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------|
| <b>Fiction</b>                                                                                                                                                                   |  |               |
| 1. <b>The Women</b> by Kristin Hannah (St. Martin’s Press: \$30) An intimate portrait of coming of age in a dangerous time.                                                      |  | 17            |
| 2. <b>The Paris Novel</b> by Ruth Reichl (Random House: \$29) An adventure through the food, art and fashion scenes of 1980s Paris.                                              |  | 6             |
| 3. <b>All Fours</b> by Miranda July (Riverhead Books: \$29) A woman upends her life in this irreverent novel.                                                                    |  | 3             |
| 4. <b>James</b> by Percival Everett (Doubleday: \$28) An action-packed reimagining of “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.”                                                      |  | 11            |
| 5. <b>Table for Two</b> by Amor Towles (Viking: \$32) A collection of stories from the author of “The Lincoln Highway.”                                                          |  | 9             |
| 6. <b>The Ministry of Time</b> by Kaliane Bradley (Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster: \$29) A fusion of genres and ideas that’s part time-travel romance and part spy thriller. |  | 4             |
| 7. <b>Lies and Weddings</b> by Kevin Kwan (Doubleday: \$29) From the author of the “Crazy Rich Asians” trilogy: A forbidden affair erupts amid a decadent tropical wedding.      |  | 2             |
| 8. <b>You Like It Darker</b> by Stephen King (Scribner: \$30) The legendary storyteller’s new collection of short stories, many never before published.                          |  | 2             |
| 9. <b>Funny Story</b> by Emily Henry (Berkley: \$29) Two opposites with the wrong thing in common connect.                                                                       |  | 6             |
| 10. <b>Fourth Wing</b> by Rebecca Yarros (Entangled: Red Tower Books: \$30) A young woman enters a brutal dragon-riding war college.                                             |  | 35            |

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  | weeks on list |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------|
| <b>Nonfiction</b>                                                                                                                                                                               |  |               |
| 1. <b>The Creative Act</b> by Rick Rubin (Penguin: \$32) The music producer’s guidance on how to be a creative person.                                                                          |  | 76            |
| 2. <b>The Demon of Unrest</b> by Erik Larson (Crown: \$35) An exploration of the pivotal five months between Abraham Lincoln’s election and the start of the Civil War.                         |  | 5             |
| 3. <b>The Situation Room</b> by George Stephanopoulos, Lisa Dickey (Grand Central: \$35) Inside the place where 12 presidential administrations grappled with history-making crises.            |  | 3             |
| 4. <b>What This Comedian Said Will Shock You</b> by Bill Maher (Simon & Schuster: \$30) The host of HBO’s “Real Time” has written a vivisection of American life, politics and culture.         |  | 2             |
| 5. <b>In My Time of Dying</b> by Sebastian Junger (Simon & Schuster: \$28) A near-fatal health emergency leads to a powerful reflection on death from the war reporter.                         |  | 2             |
| 6. <b>The Wide Wide Sea</b> by Hampton Sides (Random House: \$30) The New York Times columnist explores the power of seeing and being seen.                                                     |  | 8             |
| 7. <b>How to Know a Person</b> by David Brooks (Random House: \$30) The New York Times columnist explores the power of seeing and being seen.                                                   |  | 25            |
| 8. <b>The Anxious Generation</b> by Jonathan Haidt (Penguin Press: \$30) An investigation into the collapse of youth mental health.                                                             |  | 9             |
| 9. <b>An Unfinished Love Story</b> by Doris Kearns Goodwin (Simon & Schuster: \$35) The historian recounts the emotional journey she and her husband embarked on in the last years of his life. |  | 7             |
| 10. <b>The Wager</b> by David Grann (Doubleday: \$30) The story of the shipwreck of an 18th century British warship and a mutiny among the survivors.                                           |  | 56            |

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*Fox11 Anchor & Reporter*

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# SCREEN GAB

This week, TV critic Robert Lloyd and staff writer Tracy Brown recommend a stirring music doc and a big-hearted anime series about volleyball.

**STAX: SOULSVILLE, U.S.A.**  
HBO, Max  
This marvelous four-hour documentary dedicated to the life and music of the great Memphis soul and R&B label in Memphis, Tenn. — home to Otis Redding, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Booker T. and the MGs, Sam and Dave, Isaac Hayes, the Staple Singers and others — does not feel a minute too long, though the ride can sometimes be rough and the lessons hard. After a brief period recording country music, Stax — founded by white siblings Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton — and its attached Satellite Record Shop turned to Southern soul, creating new sounds and becoming a magnet for young Black musicians and music lovers. (And, notably, some white ones: House band the MGs were integrated in a segregated city.) It’s the story of a company and a community, of personal and national tragedy, of music and the music business, of getting knocked down and getting up again. From local dances to Monterey Pop to Wattstax, it’s inspiring, heartbreaking and, unlike a lot of music documentaries, actually full of music. (R.L.)

**HAIKYU!**  
Crunchyroll, Netflix  
Finally hitting U.S. theaters is “Haikyuu!! The Dumpster Battle,” a movie that picks up where “Haikyuu!!” left off at the end of its fourth season. The anime series follows Shoyo Hinata and his high school volleyball team as they make their way to nationals. Hinata fell in love with the sport as a kid after catching a glimpse of Karasuno High School’s “Little Giant” — their small-in-stature volleyball ace — in action on TV. Short and energetic, Hinata is athletically gifted but never had the chance to be properly trained or compete in matches. He enrolls in Karasuno High to follow in the Little Giant’s footsteps, only to discover that his middle school rival is there too. The series is full of humor, heart and heartbreak, following the high-schoolers as the team gels through practices, training camps and competitions. It’s also plenty accessible to those who have no prior knowledge of volleyball. (And while watching the series is not required to enjoy “The Dumpster Battle,” familiarity with the show and its characters does enrich the experience.) (T.B.)

 For more of the TV shows, movies and moments everyone’s talking about, sign up for Screen Gab at [latimes.com/newsletters](#), and tell us what you’re watching by emailing [screengab@latimes.com](#)



Los Angeles Times

# WEEKEND

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024



## PAINT THE TOWN RAINBOW

Take part in L.A.'s vibrant queer community in an inclusive yoga class, on a pulsing dance floor or over a glass of orange wine. **L6-7**





# L.A.'S BEST THAI BREAKFAST SPOTS, FOR ANY TIME OF DAY

HEARTY RICE PORRIDGE, THAI TEA PANCAKES AND SAVORY SHRIMP PASTE CREPES ARE ON THE MENU

**BY KAT THOMPSON**

|||||

## Bea Bea's

The definition of Thai breakfast is stretched a bit at Bea Bea's, which definitely reads more like an American diner than a Thai breakfast joint. But upon closer inspection of the menu — and with a few tips — there are definitely options that lean Thai. Start with the lengthy pancake menu, which includes flavors like Thai tea, green tea and black sesame. Occasionally, pandan coconut pancakes make it to the specials board too — a classic Thai dessert flavor that is delicate and floral. The most Thai-adjacent thing to get (a trick learned from a Thai server) is the loco moco, a Hawaiian-inspired dish that begins with a bed of rice, burger patties and fried eggs smothered in gravy. Instead of the patties, ask for corned beef hash and a side of Thai chili sauce prepared with fish sauce, garlic and chiles. The sauce paired with the hash, rice and gravy is spicy, bright and hearty, almost like a classic Thai stewed pork leg dish called khao ka moo.

## Bhan Kanom Thai

Although *Bhan Kanom Thai* is technically a dessert shop, *Thais* don't mind something sweet in the morning and the treats here can easily double for breakfast. In fact, the banana-leaf-wrapped sticky rice that comes stuffed with either bananas or taro is a standard Thai breakfast for commuters due to its neat, eco-friendly parcel. You also can pick up pandan custard-stuffed buns, coconut pudding pancakes topped with green onion, and crispy Thai crepes folded with sweet egg yolk strands.

● 5271 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 871-8030, [bhankanomthai.com](http://bhankanomthai.com)

## Hollywood Thai

The English name of this strip-mall joint is Hollywood Thai, but underneath it the sign reads in Thai: “rice porridge of Hollywood.” Among Thai Angelenos, Hollywood Thai is known as the go-to spot to get simple rice porridge with all the traditional fixings: sweet radish omelets, salted egg and pickled mustard greens salad, and stir-fried morning glory, to name a few. Because the restaurant is open so late, it also serves as the place to sober up after a night of too many Singhas. Instead of plain congee, there’s kao thom — boiled rice porridge — with add-ins such as pork, fish, shrimp and chicken.

● 5241 Hollywood Blvd.,  
Los Angeles, (323) 467-0926,  
[hollywoodthairestaurant.net](http://hollywoodthairestaurant.net)

## Holy Basil

Breakfast might not initially come to mind at Holy Basil's new Atwater location, what with its electrifying beef tatakai and aromatic shrimp curry that should not be skipped. But the menu has one of the most nostalgic dishes that is commonly eaten for breakfast in Thailand. Grandma's fish and rice (even the name is evocative of a past time) is composed of fried and mashed barramundi tossed with smoky fish sauce, thinly sliced garlic, shaved shallots and plenty of Thai chiles. It's a humble dish that every Thai family has had, using leftover fish and rice for breakfast, as an afterschool snack or for dinner. And if that doesn't feel enough like breakfast, be sure to also opt for the kai jiew, or Thai omelet, which is served with a fish sauce loaded with sliced Thai chiles.

● 3170 Glendale Blvd., Unit C, Los Angeles, [instagram.com/holybasil\\_la](https://www.instagram.com/holybasil_la)

## Morning Kitchen

Order at the counter of this casual breakfast spot, which offers crispy Thai-style crepes that can be filled with savory items like roasted chile jam, imitation crab and pork floss, or fresh fruit and chocolate spread. The rainbow crepe, stuffed with sweet egg strands known as *foi thong* and sliced strawberries and bananas, is a colorful and unabashedly Thai option. There's also corn and coconut waffles, egg sand-

**T**HE CATEGORY OF breakfast in Thailand is loosely defined because, for the most part, Thais will eat just about anything for breakfast — fish curries, sticky rice loaded with custard, salted beef jerky and pork skewers are all fair game. ¶ Even the foods that are coded as breakfast can be eaten at any time of day, including past midnight to sop up a night of drinking. These dishes are generally on the plainer side: rice porridge with peppery meatballs, omelets filled with softened sliced onions, Chinese doughnuts dipped in condensed milk. Eggs are a main component and rice is a necessity in a standard Thai breakfast. ¶ In Los Angeles, where the diversity of Thai food is limitless, you can find these classics executed in true Thai fashion. Beyond that, there's also Thai breakfast influenced by American diner culture that arrives in the form of Thai tea pancakes and shrimp paste crepes. Whatever style of breakfast you choose, here are nine places to get a taste of mornings in Thailand.



STEPHANIE BREIJO Los Angeles Times



KAT THOMPSON



KAT THOMPSON



KAT THOMPSON



## OTUS THAI KITCHEN

KAT THOMPSON

wiches and honeyed brick toast. Finish it all with a hot Thai tea latte or syrupy pink milk.

● 5634 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles. (323) 798-4155

## Otus Thai Kitchen

For Thai breakfast and an excellent selection of freshly crafted coffee choices, head to Otus Thai Kitchen. Try the kai kata breakfast combination that comes with orange juice or with Vietnamese coffee slowly dripped through aphin over a puddle of condensed milk, plus a skillet dish boasting two runny eggs, sliced Chinese sausage, seasoned ground chicken and a dusting of white pepper. A griddled baguette comes on the side, perfect for mopping up the inevitable pool of yolk. The vegetarian-friendly jok, or rice congee, is threaded with slivers of ginger and bouncy bites of shiitake mushrooms. To add a Thai-Chinese flair to the morning, get the kanomjeeb: succulent steamed siu mai dumplings overflowing with ground pork and chunks of shrimp.

● 1253 N. La Brea Ave., West Hollywood, (323) 969-8611, [otusthaiakitchen.com](http://otusthaiakitchen.com)

## Siam Sunset

It is impossible to discuss Thai breakfast in Los Angeles without mentioning the cultural institution that is Siam Sunset. Here, you'll always find Thai grandfathers sipping their morning coffee and reading the Thai paper right when the place opens at 6 a.m. The television is tuned to a Thai newscast or popular drama series and the smell of fry oil from Chinese doughnuts hangs in the air. The go-to breakfast is jok, a porridge made with broken rice that's slightly lumpy and tastes like a warm embrace. Get the jok with white-pepper-spiced meatballs and a soft-boiled egg; the richness of the pork and runny yolk works to balance out strands of biting fresh ginger. Round out the meal with an order of Chinese doughnuts that you can dunk in condensed milk or a serving of gui chai, gooey and crispy rice cakes stuffed with sauteed chives that are steamed and then fried. Arriving early is recommended, as the Chinese doughnuts tend to sell out.

● 5265 W. Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 467-8935

## Sweet Rice

Marked by a glowing neon sign that reads “Thai Breakfast & Desserts” in a corner of a Gardena plaza sits Sweet Rice, which serves classic Thai favorites. There’s both jok and khao tom, two styles of rice porridge that differ in consistency (jok is a much thicker viscosity, like oatmeal, while khao tom is a watery rice soup). Khao tom is the star here, with a peppery and comforting broth and plenty of toppings that include plump slices of shiitake mushroom, Chinese celery and fried garlic. Both porridges come with a side of Chinese doughnuts. If eggs and rice are more your speed, the crab omelet — which arrives layered with plenty of sweet onion slices — is satisfyingly fluffy atop a hot bed of jasmine rice. And for noodle enthusiasts, try the yen-ta-fo, a rare and alluring pink noodle soup made with fermented beans and loaded with fish cakes.

● 1630 W. Redondo Beach Blvd., Suite 4, Gardena, (424) 344-2054

## Wat Thai

It's easy to spot Wat Thai in North Hollywood with its golden spires. This Thai temple opened in the early 1970s and has since served as a religious site, as well as Thai school, for decades (I attended school at this temple growing up). Each weekend, Wat Thai hosts a market full of food vendors that's open to the public beginning at 8 a.m. The breakfast options here are brazenly Thai: There's fish maw soup streaked with bamboo shoots and mushrooms, marinated pork skewers paired with sticky rice, and fried bananas coated in a nutty sesame batter. Make sure to bring cash, which needs to be exchanged for tokens at a marked booth.

● 8225 Coldwater Canyon Ave., North Hollywood, *watthai losangeles.com*



# RED WINE WITH SUSHI? PUSHING PAIRING BOUNDARIES

‘WE EMPLOY MORE SOMMS THAN SERVERS’ AT BEVERLY HILLS’ SUSHI NOTE, WHERE FINDING PERFECT WINE IS KEY. **BY JORDAN MICHELMAN**



**W**HY IS PAIRING sushi with wine so hard?

Most sushi bars put the drinking focus on sake, and while great wine is not uncommon in a sushi setting, it has often been offered by the bottle only, from traditionally revered appellations like Champagne, Burgundy and Napa. In the last several years sushi bars have become hubs for great wine drinking, with an increasing emphasis on wine pairings. But at the new Beverly Hills location of Sushi Note, in the Rodeo Collection parking garage beneath Givenchy and Bulgari boutiques (and at least two plastic surgery offices), the restaurant is pushing the limits of omakase sushi drink pairings. Here the focus is not on sake, whiskey, cocktails or traditional ideas about what wines go with sushi, settling instead on a kaleidoscopic barrage of obscure and esteemed wines.

“Each fish is so distinctively different,” says Sushi Note co-founder Dave Gibbs, who operates the restaurant in partnership with Andy Paxson and sushi chef Kiminobu Saito. “We believe there’s a perfect wine to go with each one, but it takes effort and time.”

The difficulty inherent to pairings comes down to three factors: wildly varying fish, from mild, buttery albacore to briny, oily mackerel; the vinegar in sushi rice; and strongly flavored condiments such as wasabi and pickled ginger.

At Sushi Note, the process of building wine pairings involves tasting, tweaking and taking chances with different wines from around the world, incorporating the work of a sommelier team across two Sushi Note locations, including the original in Sherman Oaks. A more ambitious omakase at the Beverly Hills Sushi Note called for a more ambitious wine pairing, and that’s what you’ll find here.

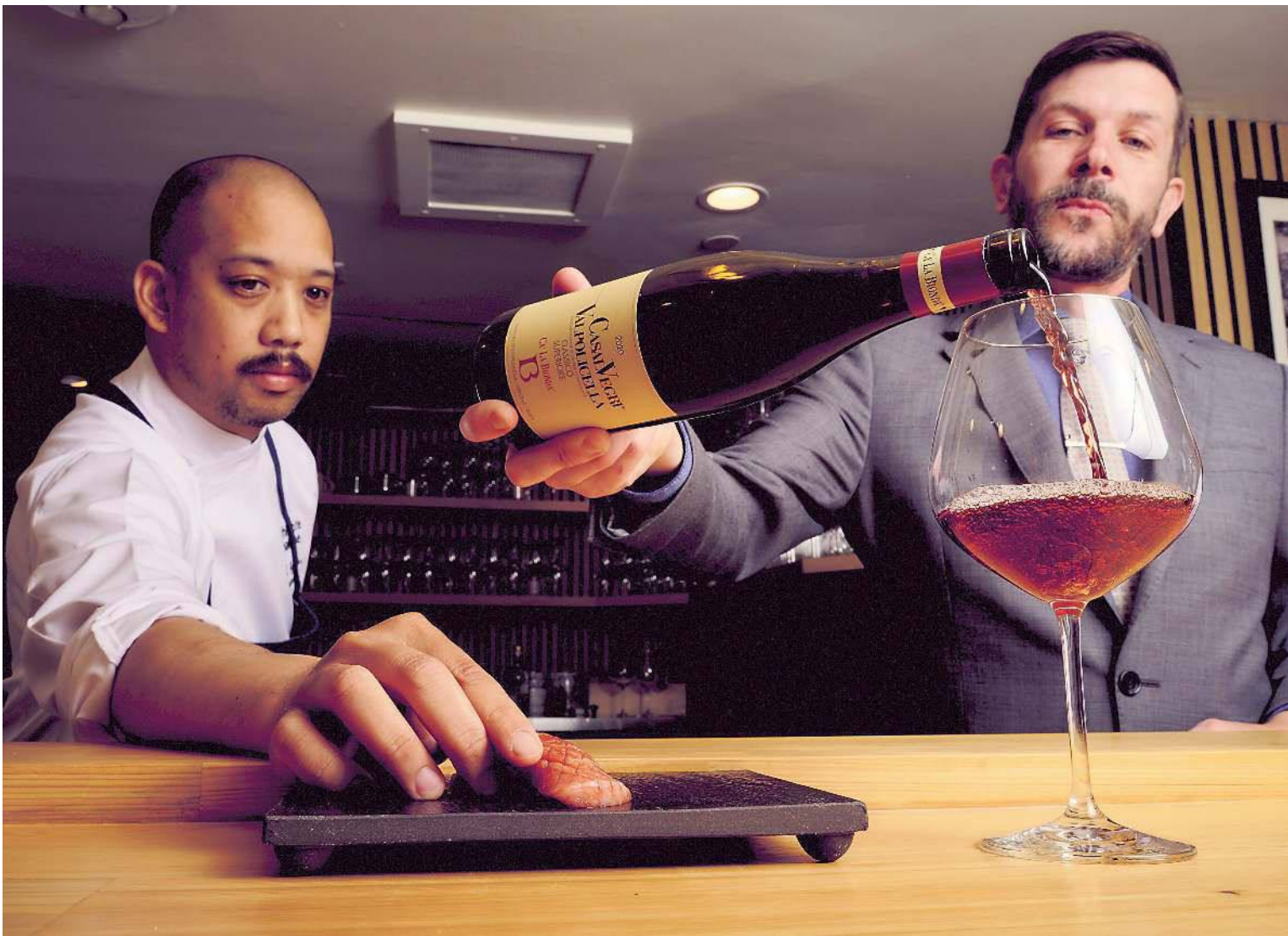
“Every night there’s stuff we shouldn’t be pouring at all, frankly,” says Gibbs. “There’s always a featured wine that normally no businessperson with a brain would pour by the glass. It’s a straight-up loss. I’m losing money on this bottle, but it’s worth it to enhance the overall experience.”

The detail is what sets this place apart: Led by beverage director Ian Lokey, a team of more than a dozen wine experts builds out a unique wine pairing series each week, incorporating rare labels of classic wines — including Champagne and Burgundy — alongside lesser-known bottles from anywhere in the world.

“We employ more somms than servers,” says Lokey, whose wine list has more than 350 labels. Lokey and his team taste and compare wines alongside fish each week, working directly with culinary director Earl Aguilar and chef Saito, tasting their way through different potential combinations before arriving at a pairing that precisely matches the fusion of fish, rice and condiments for each piece of sushi. Sake, the traditional fermented rice beverage that might be more popular in America than Japan for drinking with sushi, is served sparingly, and often as a counterpoint.

You could opt for only sake at Sushi Note — the restaurant’s bottle list gives you the option. But skipping the wine pairing here might be like dousing your chuturo with soy sauce from a little plastic packet.

Serving wine with sushi is no easy business. Restaurants such as two-Michelin-star kaiseki spot Hayato in the Arts District will accommodate guests’ requests for wine with smart pairings for its sushi courses. And the mini-chain Ootoro in Little Tokyo, Walnut and Irvine bills itself as a sushi and wine bar. Farther afield, Sushi Bar ATX in Austin and Soseki in Winter Park, Fla., have made wine service a focal point. But Sushi Note’s dedication to matching its omakase piece by piece with nightly changing wine pairings helps it to stand



Photographs by **SHELBY MOORE** For The Times



**EXECUTIVE** chef Kiminobu Saito, top; above, chef Earl Aguilar, left, places a piece of tuna as Austin Ferrier pours its pairing, an Italian red wine; a sommelier discusses wine with diners, left; sushi and wine.



out in the increasingly crowded market for top-end sushi in Los Angeles, and to grow a national reputation for its brand. A third restaurant, in Las Vegas, is in development.

## THE RIGHT WINE WITH THE RIGHT FISH

On a given night Sushi Note’s sommelier team will pour a dozen wines by the glass across the course of an omakase experience. This represents hundreds of hours of collaborative work by a sommelier team that includes Briana O’Connor, Sean Muramatsu, Jonathan Sanchez and Omar Lima, working together to find just the right wine to pair with a certain cut of fish.

“The level of oil, the garnish, the ratio of fish to rice ... each of these play a factor in finding a pairing,” says Lokey.

There’s also the push-and-pull balance between fish and rice, for which the wrong wine can easily clash.

“Some of our guests are still challenged by the notion of drinking wine with sushi,” says sommelier Omar Lima, “and in particular, red wine.”

This old orthodoxy — no red wine with fish — is being directly confronted by Sushi Note, whose wine team revels in the complexity that can be found in, say, the lighter-style red wines of the Loire Valley, or high-elevation Pinot Noir. You won’t find much Cabernet being poured at Note, but light, high-toned reds can be a revelation: A natural red Cabernet Franc from Saumur sings with chuturo, while a Burgundy wine from the village of Irancy — where up to 10% of the Cesar grape is allowed alongside Pinot Noir — subtly cuts and complements a glowing piece of yellowtail, flown in direct from Japan.

In practice the experience of

dining at Sushi Note in Beverly Hills is a blur — “an arsenal of bottles,” says Lima — with degrees of difficulty to the wine service that reward knowledge and interest. A 2008 Jacques Chopin Champagne, with toasted brioche notes from extended aging, is paired alongside Hokkaido uni and shiro ebi nigiri, offering layers of flavor: creamy, saline flavors from the uni, and a marked sweetness from the shrimp, all of it braced by an underlying sweet-sour texture-flavor interplay between expertly vinegared rice and toasty, breadly vintage Champagne.

Japanese king mackerel (saba) is served with an unusual Pinot Blanc from Alsace producer Marc Kreydenweiss, a relatively unknown and rule-breaking winemaker working with an unheralded grape, paired alongside a fish that few Americans would list as their favorite sushi course, with over-achieving results. The slight texture and understated funk of mackerel is cut like a lightning bolt by the Pinot Blanc, which

somehow mirrors the ever-slightly fatty lip-smacking quality of the fish itself.

A dizzying sequence of pairings allows the concept to accrue a kind of thermal mass over the course of one omakase seating. First, a glass of Aligoté — the forgotten white grape of Burgundy that’s all the rage right now for wine geeks — alongside delicately cured red snapper.

Then, one of chef Saito’s favorite pairings: Japanese wild-caught medai with a touch of yuzu, paired with Chablis, the flint-edged unoaked Chardonnay expression from the northernmost reaches of Burgundy. This is followed by Japanese bluefin otoro — the fattiest cut — served alongside a glass of Galician red wine, hailing from a corner of Spain that’s far better known for the iconic white wine Albariño but here offering a “sanguine, bloody” quality (in the words of Lokey) that sliced through the tuna as deftly as any yanagiba knife.

Finally, a yuzu and sushi rice vinegar gelato alongside Do-



maine Castéra “Caubeigt” Jurançon, a unique sweet white wine that hails from the far southwest of France, on the border with Spain. These wines are meant for dessert, yes, but with an electric spike of acidity that makes them unusually compelling; the combination melts into some sort of ambrosial marmalade alongside the gelato, sweet and bitter and endlessly long. “It’s the nectar of the gods,” Lima says and laughs.

## BIG IN JAPAN?

Ask the team members at Sushi Note and they’ll tell you they’re way out on a limb here — omakase wine pairing in this style is all but unknown in Tokyo, or elsewhere in the United States. To double-check I called in a ringer: Eric Asimov, longtime wine writer for the New York Times and the author of “Wine With Food,” a book dedicated to the art of food and wine pairing.

“I’ve never encountered an omakase sushi bar with wine pairings before,” Asimov tells me. Precision pairing at this level requires attention to every detail: the fish, yes, but also the condiments, the vinegar level in the rice (chef Saito’s vinegar level is softly balanced, and the grains of his rice, which hails from California, perhaps a touch larger than at other restaurants), alongside the impact of additional ingredients, the use of blowtorches to define texture, and myriad other influences that feed back to the effect of the wine, “all of which might change what might be considered the perfect pairing.”

Sushi Note might be one of only a handful of places pursuing the art of precision omakase wine pairings, but perhaps not for long.

Chef Saito tells me that in Tokyo, chefs are beginning to catch up to the idea of sushi and wine pairings, and that this sort of thing might not remain a Los Angeles exclusive for long. “Many more [sushi] chefs have been experimenting with wine,” Saito says. “I can see a restaurant like ours doing very well in Japan!”



PLANTS

# SHE TURNED AN EMPTY L.A. LOT INTO A GORGEOUS FLOWER FARM

ON A FRIEND’S PLOT OF LAND, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER KATHLEEN FERGUSON GROWS ‘CLIMATE-APPROPRIATE’ BLOOMS. **BY LISA BOONE**



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times

**K**ATHLEEN FERGUSON grabbed a pair of pruning shears from a mailbox nailed to a garden bed and leaned down to cut bunches of *Orlaya grandiflora* on the flower-filled hillside. “This property has a pulse,” she said as she placed the white lace flowers into a bucket of water. “The wildlife is incredible here. I’ve caught bees napping in the sunflowers.” With limited land for green space in Los Angeles, many people are growing flowers for sale in surprising places — under power lines and in their front and back yards. In Ferguson’s case, the landscape designer is propagating flowers on a vacant lot offered by a friend, screenwriter Dalan Musson, whom she met while volunteering at the North Central Animal Shelter in L.A. “Just being able to walk outside and see monarch butterflies and bees flying around my backyard is amazing,” Musson said of Frogtown Flora’s effect on the wildlife on his 1.5-acre property in Eagle Rock. “It makes me feel viscerally connected to the natural world.”

It’s magical for Ferguson too, who over the last 11 months has built a colorful farm on the half-acre with flowers, including *Agrostemma*, iris, zinnias, cosmos, roses, sunflowers, sweet peas, French dianthus and ranunculus. White marigolds and green onions are planted to help deter the skunks, raccoons and squirrels that like to pull out her dahlias. Volunteer tomatoes and cilantro that materialized from the compost are left to bolt and blossom. “I like to mix it up,” she said of the variety of plant life. “If something comes up, I’m OK with letting it grow.”

Outside the farm’s perimeter and at the top of the hillside, she is experimenting with drought-tolerant California native perennials, including fragrant pitcher sage, buckwheat, mallows and the native rose *Rosa Californica*. She also grows native poppies — Matilija and California — penstemons, lupines and many different salvias.

Like many landscape designers used to working outdoors, Ferguson struggled with cabin fever during the COVID-19 pandemic. When she began listening to podcasts about locally grown blooms while tending to her own garden, she became “obsessed with flowers.”

“I would listen to podcasts all day long, ‘On Being,’ ‘Slow Flowers,’ ‘Cultivating Place’ and [‘Field & Garden’ from the Gardener’s Workshop] among them,” she said.

She was struck by the environmental impact of imported flowers related to pesticides, water and shipping, and her journey into urban flower farming was a natural progression. With a degree in horticulture from Cal Poly Pomona and a passion for the environment, she decided to grow what she describes as “climate-appropriate flower species” for Los Angeles.

She learned a lot from the local flower growers she contacted on Instagram: “I noticed that all of the flower farmers, who happened to be women, are so passionate about what they do and so generous with their

knowledge. I can reach out to any of them and ask, ‘What has been your experience with germination?’”

The flower growers hosted rotating potlucks at their farms and attended the San Fernando Valley Iris Society, of which Ferguson is a member.

Her first venture was a small plot at Jardin del Rio on Riverdale Avenue in 2022. But as her interest and knowledge grew, so did her ambitions. When Musson listened to how passionate she was about growing flowers locally, he offered a portion of his property as a new canvas for her urban flower farm.

“People are good,” Ferguson said of Musson. “People are generous; they want to help others realize their dreams. It’s

a win-win for both of us.” The challenge for Ferguson was the site. “I was excited,” she recalled, “but when I saw it was a slope, I knew it would be a lot of work.”

Once she understood how it might work, she built 12 4-by-10-foot raised beds on either side of a stairway with wood left over from a construction project at her house.

“My husband and I loaded the wood in a truck and brought it here,” she said. “Now, when I get extra wood, I can’t help but think about what I can grow here. We’re going to put in a greenhouse and add more beds. Everyone my age is into Pilates and strength training, and when they suggest I go, I tell them, ‘Do you know how much strength training I do on this slope?’”

Ferguson’s good luck continued when she realized the soil didn’t need a lot of work because the land had never been developed. “We used what was here,” said the designer and certified arborist, who avoids chemicals. She started with a weed barrier, on-site soil, worm

castings, compost and organic fertilizer. She tops the soil with her rabbits’ bedding when it’s time for it to be replaced and has been experimenting with sheep pellets to enrich the soil and help deter slugs, snails and weeds. She installed a drip irrigation system and pays Musson monthly for water, although she said she doesn’t use much. “The natives don’t require any once established,” she added.

She is a big fan of using rabbit waste as fertilizer because it doesn’t require composting like chicken manure.

“Rabbit poop is amazing and so good if you are trying to close the loop in your garden,” she says, “as you can feed them a lot of greens, and then what they produce goes straight into the garden.”

While some farmers choose what is trendy, Ferguson prefers to plant flowers she likes. It’s a strategy that is working.

“Kathleen’s flowers are dazzling,” said Lauri Kranz, who sells Ferguson’s flowers at L.A. Homefarm in Glassell Park. “When Kathleen pulls up in her



KATHLEEN FERGUSON



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times



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**KATHLEEN FERGUSON** sits among her flowers at Frogtown Flora in Eagle Rock. She fertilizes with her rabbits’ waste.

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car with buckets full of just-cut flowers, our customers start making a line to pull from the bounty that awaits.”

For Ferguson, a Los Angeles native who grew up in Koreatown, flowers are about more than just beauty.

There’s the feel-good aspect. “It brings so much joy,” she said. “Flowers have been in our culture for as long as humanity. Flowers symbolize so many things. It’s the whole cycle of life. They mean so much to so many different cultures. I love growing. I love the challenge. I also love that I’m making people happy.”

And then there’s the wildlife aspect.

During a recent visit, the contrast between the roar of the nearby 2 Freeway and the sound of birds chatting in the garden was startling. Over in a dense patch of sweet peas, Ferguson pointed out an example of her “nature first” philosophy in the way she strategically cut the flowers to preserve the privacy of a bird’s nest. “The flowers have brought so much additional life to this property,” she said. “I leave that section of sweet peas alone.”

In addition to selling flowers to Kranz and Gather Flora at the Original Los Angeles Flower Market downtown, Ferguson recently started bouquet subscriptions and organized a tour of eight flower farms in L.A. She expected 50 people to show up. “We had to shut down our reservations when it hit 800,” she said, noting the interest in locally grown flowers.

According to a 2023 National Gardening Assn. Survey, 63% of respondents indicated that locally grown blooms were important when purchasing cut flowers and arrangements, while 59% indicated that blossoms grown in the United States were important when purchasing cut flowers and arrangements.

Like the slow food and slow fashion movements, consumers want to know where their flowers come from, said Debra Prinzing, founder of the Slow Flowers Society.

“I think people want to engage more deeply with nature as an antidote to the general stress and chaos of life,” Prinzing said. “Locally grown flowers, like those from Frogtown Flora and other Southern California flower farmers large and small, provide the sensory connections we crave. They reflect the season, moment in time and location when we commemorate special occasions or everyday gestures.”

Ferguson, 55, also sells mixed vase arrangements and buckets of blooms to customers interested in fresh flowers but not necessarily a designed arrangement. “This is a great option for DIY weddings and celebrations and for those who just want beautiful, pesticide-free, fresh and locally grown flowers,” she said.

Walking up to the garden from the street along the long driveway, it’s clear why Musson is delighted with the plot’s transformation.

“Some days, when I’m exhausted, I’ll come up here and see a new flower that I’ve never seen before,” he said. “Sometimes I can’t believe I’m living in L.A. A Target is within walking distance, yet I have mature coastal live oaks, toyon and Catalina cherry trees. There are bats. I hear owls at night. ... It’s amazing to have a place for the bees and butterflies to go.”





Illustrations by AMIR MRZAE For The Times

# Prom night in L.A. is all about the splurge

SOME OF THE CITY’S MOST ELITE SCHOOLS TURN UP THE VOLUME AT VENUES SUCH AS HOT HOLLYWOOD CLUBS, WORLD-CLASS MUSEUMS



**BY ANDREW ZUCKER**

**I**N THE MID-2010s, celebrities such as Khloe Kardashian, Rihanna and Floyd Mayweather Jr. socialized at Lure Nightclub in Hollywood, drawing TMZ photographers and star-obsessed onlookers to the venue's curb. Inside, the now-shuttered hot spot offered a menu brimming with expensive drinks, such as a \$70,000 Champagne bottle. But on a spring night in 2014, a vastly different clientele descended upon the rented-out, 18,000-square-foot venue: high schoolers. “Sometimes I drive past it and I’m just like, ‘Oh, my God, my prom was there,’” said Tiffany Behnam, a Milken Community School alum, of the scene-y club. In Los Angeles, where the yearly price of tuition can rival the cost of a new convertible, some private schools go all out when booking venues for the spring bash. While public schools sometimes splurge on prom venues too — in addition to hotel ballrooms and sprucing up their gymnasiums — some of the city’s most elite schools regularly opt for world-class museums, studio lots and nightclubs, giving teenagers an only-in-L.A. prom experience. Booking these event spaces — not including decor, DJ and other amenities — can cost anywhere from \$10,000 to \$35,000. Prom ticket prices have ranged from around \$115 to \$175 over the years.

nightclub that they would typically never be eligible to go to.”

When Cody was a senior in 2017, her Coldwater Canyon high school held its prom at the Skirball Cultural Center. A popular prom destination for both private and public schools, the Jewish cultural institution also has been booked for weddings and galas. Cody said because her private school had nearly 300 students per class, it booked a large venue.

“It needed to be more convention center-y rather than nightclub,” she said.

In 2025, Harvard-Westlake plans to hold its prom at the Petersen Automotive Museum. Jasmine Gonzalez, the Petersen’s events director, said schools reserve dates nearly two years in advance.

Though some have a yearly tradition of holding prom at the Petersen, others book the space every other year to give students different locations for their junior and senior proms. The venue’s popularity among

L.A. schools has meant big business for the museum. “We host anywhere between 15 and 20 proms a year,” Gonzalez said, adding that it can cost up to \$35,000 to rent space at the museum. In 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum didn’t host any proms. The next year, it hosted a handful, including Harvard-Westlake’s, which took place outdoors. By 2022, Gonzalez said, the prom business at the museum had returned to normal levels.

With thousands of students piling into the Petersen in sparkly outfits in April and May, springtime visitors sometimes notice remnants from prom events while trekking through the museum. “When you go into our elevators, you’ll see some sparkles and that’s because of the dresses,” Gonzalez said, noting that the space now requests decor and dresses sans glitter.

Maddy Glick, a Brentwood School graduate who attended her junior prom at the Petersen in 2018, said the festivities were surrounded by “beautiful cars.”

“It was just a really cool space,” she added. The Petersen’s vast collection includes classic rides like a copper-colored 1959 Chevrolet Impala lowrider and a black-coated 1932 Ford Roadster.

Besides Brentwood School and Harvard-Westlake, private schools like Campbell Hall in Studio City and Milken Community School also have booked proms at the Petersen.

It’s not just private schools renting cultural institutions for prom. Some public schools host their festivities at the museum as well, Gonzalez said. But the smaller private ones may opt for a catered, sit-down dinner, adding at least \$4,500 to the bill if they use Someone’s in the Kitchen, one of the Petersen’s preferred catering vendors.

At the Grammy Museum, groups using the space work with its exclusive catering partner, Wolfgang Puck Catering. (Both declined to share

prom catering pricing.) This year, the all-girls Marlborough School in Hancock Park held its prom on the venue’s rooftop terrace, which has views of the iconic Hollywood sign and rents for at least \$10,000. Rita George, the museum’s chief program officer, said schools have increasingly turned to the museum for prom.

“We definitely do more now than ever, and the first one was probably a good 10 years ago,” she said. “I think it offers a more elevated experience, maybe, when it’s at a museum.”

George said schools also can reserve the museum’s exhibits, such as its Shakira showcase, giving students the chance to roam different floors during their event.

Prom planners sometimes pick production studios for the rite of passage. Last year, Chaminade College Preparatory, the Catholic private school in West Hills, held its prom on a soundstage at the Jim Henson Co. Lot in Hollywood, where shows like “Perry Mason” and “Adventures of Superman” were filmed. The company didn’t respond to requests for current pricing, but a 2015 flier showed that renting its soundstage and courtyard cost between \$8,000 and \$13,000 at the time.

For a change of pace, Brentwood School, whose alumni include actor Jonah Hill and Maroon 5 frontman Adam Levine, hosted its senior prom in 2019 at a nondescript, indoor-outdoor space in Hollywood. But student planners added accouterments like a wood-fired pizza oven and a taco station.

For these students, their prom location mattered less than enjoying the revelry. Glick, who planned the event with four other students, said the organizers toured many locales and ended up choosing a “less fancy” space in order to spend more money on the event itself.

“Prom was really fun. People had a really good time,” she said. “Or at least they told me they had a really good time because I planned it.”

“I was like, ‘Of course our prom is going to be there,’ because Milken is quite a prestigious school and they always strive to give us the best,” Behnam recalled.

Immediately after the prom at Lure, Behnam and her classmates ventured to Bootsy Bellows, a velvet-roped club in West Hollywood, which Milken student organizers had booked for the Bel-Air school’s after-prom party. Bootsy Bellows is popular among celebrities like Drake, and, it turns out, some L.A. private school prom committees. Crossroads School, a Santa Monica prep school, held a prom at Bootsy Bellows a few years after the Milken event.

“It was a nightclub that no one had been to but kind of had heard lore about and people were curious about,” said Molly Cody, a Harvard-Westlake graduate whose friends attended the Crossroads prom. “People got to go inside a







# 10 joyous L.A. spots to queer your weekend

FIND YOUR COMMUNITY WHILE ALSO SUPPORTING A VARIETY OF LOCAL, LGBTQ-OWNED BUSINESSES AROUND TOWN

BY CLAIRE O'CALLAHAN

TWO YEARS AGO, this sprawling city was completely foreign to me. I'd just made the nearly 2,800-mile journey from New York and was looking for a community. I soon found it at queer-owned restaurants, bars and shops across the county and, along the way, learned that L.A. is home to enough of them to fill multiple weekends. Maybe you start your day with a yoga class or lifting session at trans-owned Everybody gym and, once the endorphins are flowing, head to brunch to catch up with friends. My personal ritual is to visit El Sereno Green Grocer for my morning cup of coffee, perfectly airy square of focaccia and groceries for the week ahead. Or if you need to get some shopping done, spend the day visiting queer-owned stores like gender-inclusive skincare brand Noto Botanics and wine and gift shop Vinovore. As the sun sets, find your way to a queer-owned restaurant for dinner and drinks. Jewel, in Silver Lake, is open until 8 p.m. and has delicious plant-based fare and a wine bar. With your stomach full, head to East Hollywood, where you can dance across the checkerboard floor of one of L.A.'s two lesbian bars into the wee hours. What's special about these spots is more than just the opportunity to support local, queer-owned businesses (though you should definitely do that). Every business on this list offers a space to connect and build community — whether that be over food, a glass of orange wine or a shared passion for button-downs without a boob gap. Whether you're in town for Pride, a recent transplant like me or a local looking for a new haunt, this guide has something for you. Now let's get this weekend started!

**Everybody**

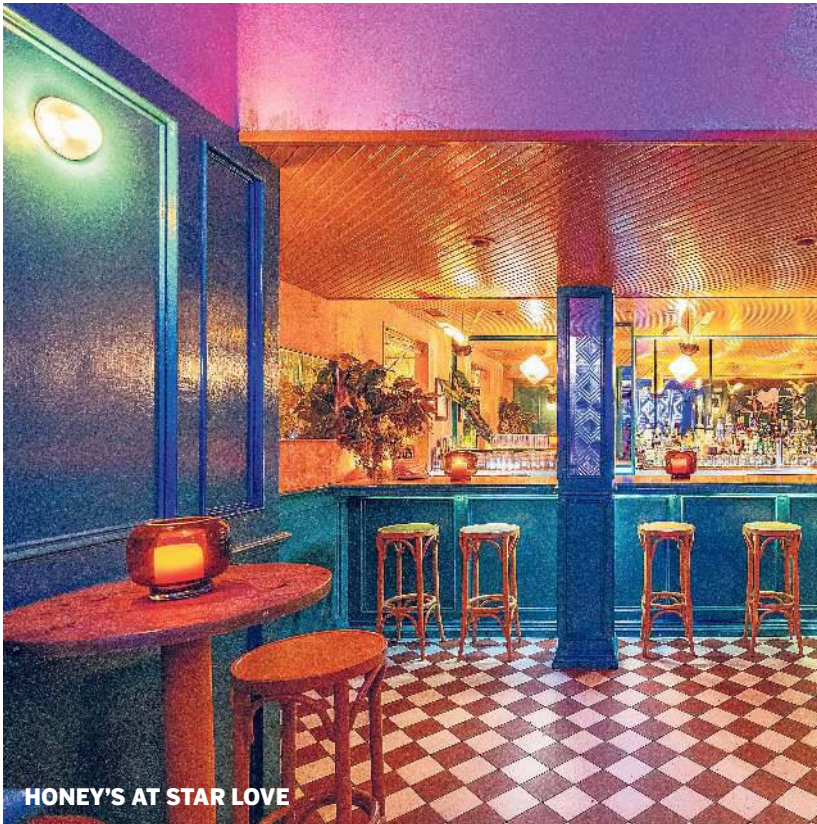
At Everybody you can flow on a yoga mat, master the basics of boxing or sculpt your quads on the outdoor patio. The gym, which is trans- and woman-owned, prioritizes an inclusive, accessible environment for people of all body types and gender expressions, which starts with reading a social contract on how to show up in the gym during your first visit. Unlike some gyms, this open, light-filled space is a place you actually *want* to work out in. There are potted plants throughout, a sauna and a variety of exercise and wellness rooms that cater to everything from yoga to sound baths. Camo-print murals by neighborhood artist Maria Piñeres add bursts of color to the white walls. “We’re here to get strong together for the inevitable battles of our lives that we face as communities that are marginalized and targeted,” co-founder Sam Rypinski said. “I like the way the artwork reflects that

mission of getting stronger and preparing for battle in a way.” Beyond an inclusive and beautiful place to work out, Everybody offers a variety of wellness services, including sound baths, nutrition counseling, massage and physical therapy. All the instructors and practitioners identify as queer or trans or are queer- and trans-friendly. If this piques your interest, drop in for a \$15 class or buy a membership, which starts at \$45 a month. Your first visit is free and memberships are discounted during Pride Month. **Hours:** 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. **1845 N. San Fernando Road, Los Angeles, (323) 352-8618, everybodylosangeles.com**

**Black Forest Bakery**

On Saturday mornings, a 1971 Ford Econoline parked at the corner of Hillhurst and Finley avenues in Los Feliz transports

customers to the mountains of southwest Germany. Trans and queer baker Djo Maurer greets customers through the van's pop-out window, bagging \$15.95 sourdough loaves and chatting with the queue of customers that curls around the block. Many are regulars who return to taste flavors that remind Maurer of home: jam-filled Berliners, pretzel buns and Schwarzbrot-esque bread. Black Forest Bakery is committed to the basics: flour, water and salt. Maurer bakes with a variety of flours, all organic, and avoids commercial yeast, instead placing his trust in the finicky natural fermentation process. This method tends to yield less consistent results than that used for mass production, but going home with a one-of-a-kind loaf is part of this food truck's charm. When you approach the window to order, you also have the option to do a good deed. To make the bread more accessible, Maurer started a pay-it-forward program, through



which customers can pay for a loaf and leave it behind for someone with fewer resources to pick up for free. Maurer also welcomes customers to pay what they can. He said he turns no one away without a loaf of bread tucked under their arm. “If we don't have free loaves available [I] just give them a loaf,” Maurer said. “I’ve been at a place where I literally had to count pennies to buy groceries and that was so difficult. ... Everyone should have bread.” **Hours:** 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Saturdays **2000 Hillhurst Ave., Los Angeles, (213) 246-9306, blackforestbakery.com**

**El Sereno Green Grocer**

The door of El Sereno Green Grocer, a vibrant little shop in northeast L.A., is almost always propped open. A sign on the window welcomes all *comelones* or food lovers to step inside. Xicana couple Patricia Torres and Erika Crenshaw opened the store last summer after discussions with community members about the lack of access to healthy, nourishing foods in the neighborhood. At the Green Grocer, baskets of ripe kumquats sit alongside pantry staples, cans of Spam and bags of Flaming Hot Cheetos. The store's mission is to be a place for daily nourishment, and that includes foods that





SHARKY MCGEE



BEN BASSU

Torres and Crenshaw say have kept their communities alive and happy for generations.

Torres and Crenshaw source their products from local, queer-, immigrant- or BIPOC-owned farms and brands. Each pint of lychee strawberry sorbet or box of crackers comes with a story that Torres or Crenshaw will share with you as you check out. The jars of lemon- and basil-infused olive oil, for example, are sourced from Canaan Palestine, a company that partners with more than 1,000 family farms in the West Bank to harvest olive trees that have been in their families for generations.

If you stop by on the weekend, you can browse the shelves with a cup of coffee from the pop-ups Torres and Crenshaw host with local coffee vendors such as Middle Eastern- and queer-owned Saffron Cowboy Coffee. Saturdays also feature a bread drop from Out of Thin Air, with delicious black sesame loaves and focaccia. If you arrive around 9 a.m., the loaves might even still be warm.

**Hours:** 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday  
● 5761 Huntington Drive N., Los Angeles, [instagram.com/elserenogreengrocer](#)

**The Ruby Fruit**

There's a reason why Ruby Fruit co-owner Mara Herbkersman refers to her lesbian bar — as “the planet.”

It's a reference, in both name and spirit, to the early-2000s TV show “The L Word.” In the show, a local lesbian-owned cafe, the Planet, bridges day and night, offering a gathering place for queer Angelenos to drink coffee in the morning and party when the sun goes down. The Ruby Fruit strives to do likewise. Mornings at the Ruby Fruit

begin at 11 a.m. During the week, the wood tables and green booths become desks for those looking to escape the office but still work communally. With sunlight streaming through the wide windows, you can spot the nods to sapphic culture that fill every corner. Books by Virginia Woolf, Katherine V. Forrest and, of course, Rita Mae Brown line the shelf above the bar and Indigo Girls songs play in an endless loop in the bathroom.

Weekdays or weekends, the Ruby Fruit also makes a great brunch spot. The menu rises to any occasion — whether that's a date for the whole family, kids included, or with friends to debrief the night before. Co-owner Emily Bielagus recommends ordering the fillet-not-fish sandwich or the popcorn chicken basket.

At 3 p.m., the Ruby Fruit begins its transition from campy diner to sexy wine bar. The sit-down lunch menu is replaced with a list of snack-while-you're-drinking options such as warm marinated olives and french fries. If you're looking for something a little more filling, make sure to order the signature hot dog — which comes on a cowboy boot pottery stand — with your drink. Bielagus sources all the wines and beers from women- and queer-owned businesses.

Fan-favorite cocktails include the Martha, an elderflower, citrus and white wine spritz, and the Miller Low Life (a Miller High Life served in a glass upside down).

The campy vibes and tongue-in-cheek humor don't disappear with the sun.

“The irony is not lost on us that a bunch of queer women are sitting around eating hot dogs,” Herbkersman said. “It's a place to let loose and just have a freaking good time.”

**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday through Saturday  
● 3510 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 522-6323, [therubyfruit.com](#)

**Wildfang**

Trust me, these fitting rooms aren't what you're used to. The lighting isn't overly bright and an encouragement or joke is likely scribbled on the mirror. Three hooks are labeled *yup*, *um*, *nah*, as a way to help you sort through your items.

That's Wildfang in a nutshell. The Portland, Ore.-based company is committed to subverting gender norms in fashion and instead making clothes — and shopping for them — fun, versatile and accessible. Take its corset, for example. CEO Emma McIlroy said the product can be worn in at least six different ways, including around the waist as a bustier, over the bust to create an empire silhouette and with the laces done up in the back or the front. The store's signature coveralls, recently modeled by Hayley Kiyoko, come in both high- and drop-waist styles. Like all Wildfang items, they are available in sizes X-small through 4X.

Shopping at Wildfang's bricks-and-mortar stores is an immersive and visual experience. A line of mannequins in the window spans a range of sizes and products are modeled in various ways — some leaning more masc, others more femme and some falling somewhere in between — throughout the store to offer inspiration. The Wildfang team also invites you to leave your mark on the carving wall, where you can find famous names like Nathalie Emmanuel and three-member rock group Boygenius. McIlroy said she designed the space so that every

customer can see themselves in it.

Whether you settle on a new suit or the brand's bestselling button-down, every purchase comes with a durable Wildfang bag. One side reads “feeling pretty,” the other “feeling handsome.” The side of the bag urges, “If found, please keep for yourself & luxuriate in limitless gender euphoria.”

**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Monday  
● 3430 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 522-3067, [wildfang.com](#)

**Project Q Salon**

Our hair is one of the most personal forms of self-expression, which is why it can be scary to trust someone else to bring our vision to life with scissors and a razor blade. At Project Q, founder Madin Lopez understands this and is committed to seeing the you behind your hair.

Lopez opened Project Q in 2012, after 10 years working in Black salons and traditionally white ones.

“I felt like there was a space missing for folks that identify as LGBTQ or same-sex-loving and also happen to have 4C or 4B hair,” Lopez said.

Buying a haircut at Project Q helps support the nonprofit side of the business. In addition to the services for paying customers, Lopez and their team offer free haircuts to queer youth of color affected by the foster care or juvenile detention systems. Lopez also runs a six-month internship, which includes free therapy and harm reduction groups, for the youth to gain work experience in the salon.

“When you come, you're helping other people feel good about themselves,” Lopez said.  
● 6370 W. Sunset Blvd., Suite 607, Los Angeles, (323) 407-6676, [projectq.me](#)

**Noto Botanics**

Looking to replenish your make-up stash or introduce something new into your skincare routine? Check out Noto Botanics, an L.A.-based company bringing gender inclusivity to clean beauty.

Gloria Noto founded Noto Botanics after working as a fashion and celebrity makeup artist for years. As a queer person, they noticed that the beauty industry remains tied up in the gender binary. Noto wanted to create a different relationship with selfcare through multiuse, “gender-free” products.

“In a lot of ways the product is a conduit to a bigger picture,” Noto said. “It's a conduit to feeling good in your body and skin. And it's a conduit to community.”

The merchandise at Noto includes the Deep Serum, a moisturizing vegan facial oil that Noto recommends as a gateway product. Also popular among customers is the Agender Oil, a hydrating vegan oil intended to “soften and protect your anywhere hair, wherever you choose to grow it.” Stop by to explore the spacious, light-filled space — which Noto said they chose because it reminds them of a favorite cafe in Portugal — and leave with a product or two of your own. They recently launched a “practice safe sun” SPF 30 perfect for days spent poolside.

**Hours:** noon to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday  
● 5005 N. Figueroa St., Los Angeles, (323) 507-2510, [notobotanics.com](#)

**Vinovore**

This queer-owned wine store, which champions women, queer

and trans winemakers, is a one-stop shop for all your party needs. Come for a bottle of wine or pack of beer and leave with ingredients for a cheese board, a Casey McQuiston novel and a new vibrator.

Coly Den Haan opened Vinovore in Silver Lake in 2016. Two years ago she expanded the business with a second location in Eagle Rock.

Den Haan is an expert in her selections. She knows the story behind each wine — who made it and the journey they took from grape to bottle. Among them is Camins 2 Dreams, a winery in the Santa Rita Hills of Santa Barbara county run by queer couple Mireia Taribó and Tara Gomez that specializes in naturally fermented wines with as little intervention as possible. Another is trans-owned and queer-run Ram Cellars, a Portland, Ore.-based winery that also practices natural fermentation and produces acid-forward wines. The winery raises money for organizations such as the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Trans Lifeline through sales of their VIV label wines.

Each bottle has a note card with details about the wine and its maker to guide you through your decision. And if you're still wading into the wine scene, the shopkeeper on-site will happily help you make a selection.

**Hours:** noon to 8 p.m. daily  
● 4627 York Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 274-4870, [vinovoreeaglerock.com](#)

**Jewel**

If you drive far enough down Lucile Avenue in Silver Lake, you'll find a rainbow streaming across the wall of a small restaurant. A regular painted the mural, inspired by the Progress Pride Flag, during the Black Lives Matter protests in summer 2020.

“One of the goals there, because we feel that it was such a dark time for a lot of people in a lot of ways, [is that] when people drive by, it gives a little joy,” said owner and head chef Sharky McGee.

At Jewel, an entirely plant-based restaurant, the motto is “Every flavor welcome.” In line with the quote from Ava DuVernay painted on one of its walls, the team's commitment to diversity is displayed in more than just a catchphrase.

It's also reflected in its menu, which is easy to navigate for both longtime vegetarians and newcomers to plant-based dining. Recipes draw on flavors and dishes from various cuisines. McGee recommends the sweet and savory chicken and waffles (made with gluten-free waffles and oyster mushrooms) and the Cocomari Baja taco, stuffed with marinated coconut meat, cabbage, red salsa, pickled onion and chipotle crema, and served on corn tortillas.

Though the menu leans toward brunch, McGee said the dishes eat well no matter the hour. If you're looking for lighter fare and a cozy, welcoming atmosphere, Jewel is for you.

**Hours:** 5 to 9 p.m. Monday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday  
● 654 N. Hoover St., Los Angeles, (323) 522-6927, [jewel-la.com](#)

**Honey's at Star Love**

If you're looking for a lively night on the dance floor, head through a door on the side of the East Hollywood Super 8 motel, where this lesbian bar took up residence in 2023.

A nightlife haven for queer, lesbian and trans folk, the colorful bar is known for throwing a spirited dance party on its checkerboard dance floor into the early hours of the morning. Themed evenings have included an emo karaoke and dance party, as well as a lesbian dating party, humorously called Uhaul. You might even turn to see a celebrity dancing alongside you — Boygenius was spotted there last year.

What it lacks in size, Honey's makes up for with vibrancy and charm. The interior is swathed in shades of teal and pink. Ferns dangle from the ceiling and antique lights illuminate the space.

It also boasts a full bar, with an array of cocktails, wines, beers and nonalcoholic drinks on the menu. When your feet tire from dancing, wander over to the lounge where you can take a seat in a cozy booth until you're ready to rejoin the throng.

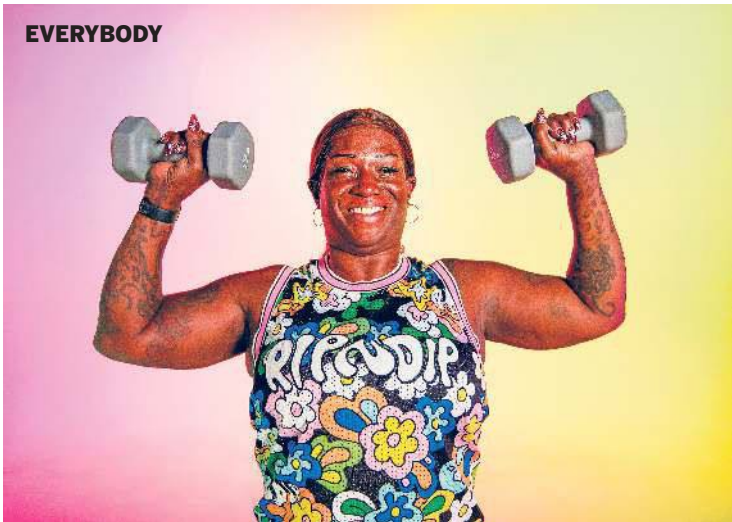
**Hours:** 8 p.m. to midnight Thursday and 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. Friday through Saturday  
● 1532 N. Western Ave., Los Angeles, [honeysla.com](#)



EMMA MCILROY



CHRIS BEHROOZIAN For The Times



SAM RYPINSKI





JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

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**WEST** Hollywood Drag Laureate Pickle, left, at her childhood home in Koreatown, keeps busy with gigs including hosting the José Sarria Drag Pageant in May, below, at left, and at bottom. Drag Laureate D’Arcy Drollinger, center, in San Francisco.



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

# The first laureates of drag play up community and culture

CALIFORNIA’S D’ARCY DROLLINGER AND PICKLE AIM TO ELEVATE LGBTQ+ VOICES

BY RAEF HARRISON

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**I**T’S JUNE and Pride Month is in full swing as LGBTQ+ communities around the world celebrate together as well as commemorating the Stonewall Uprising in New York City in 1969. Two prominent voices — the drag laureates of West Hollywood and San Francisco — are booked and busy. There are wigs to coif, dresses to steam and parties to attend. ♣ On their busy schedules this month are a host of events: Pride kickoff parties and official parade appearances in SoCal and NorCal, a panel about drag and cinema at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles, and the raising of the Pride flag at City Hall in San Francisco, among many others. ♣ The laureates — drag queen D’Arcy Drollinger from San Francisco and L.A. native Pickle, the one-name drag queen representing West Hollywood — sat down late last month to chat about their tenures, Drollinger on a video chat and Pickle in person over lunch in Hollywood.

**So what is a laureate? And what is a drag laureate specifically?**  
A laureate is a recipient of an honor or recognition for achievement in an art or science. The most widely known laureate program in the United States is in the field of poetry. The National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman rose to acclaim when she read her poem “The Hill We Climb” at President Biden’s inauguration in 2021.

So then, what exactly is a *drag* laureate? The answer for Pickle and Drollinger — they are the first two queens in the nation to hold this title — is that it’s a role that is still being defined. Their individual roles receive an annual stipend funded through West Hollywood Arts Council for Pickle and through the San Francisco Public Library for Drollinger. The role is meant for them to act as a spokesperson for local businesses and be an ambassador for their city. Also, during their tenure, they’re meant to highlight the LGBTQ+ community and elevate the art of drag.

**Why does having these roles in cities with large LGBTQ+ populations matter?**  
“The queer community continues to be the heartbeat of [this city],” says Drollinger, who thinks a position like hers shows a great commitment by San Francisco leaders to a group that has deep roots in the city and helped shape its identity. The queer communities in San Francisco and L.A. have been at the forefront of progressive change, with monumental protests at Compton’s Cafe-



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

teria in 1966 in San Francisco, Cooper Do-Nuts in downtown L.A. in 1959 and the Black Cat in Silver Lake in 1967.  
Both laureate programs were spawned from COVID-era worries about the declining state of small business and ravaged city cores, as is playing out in San Francisco. All across the country, downtowns have largely sat empty, a product of people conditioned to staying home during the pandemic shutdown. Turning to drag queens and kings, talented performers who are good at drawing a crowd and creating a festive environment, seemed like an obvious way to get the LGBTQ community and its allies back out.  
“The LGBTQ community has such a history with the city,” says West Hollywood Councilmember Lauren Meister, who helped draft the initial proposal for the Drag Laureate program in WeHo. “We wanted the drag laureate to be an ambassador to West Hollywood businesses but also promote art and culture. We wanted to do something that could bring some levity back to our city and keep things edgy.”  
Positions like this, in two of America’s most liberal cities, in a time when drag queens are



Rachel Z Photography

everywhere from TV to local bars, might not seem revolutionary. But around the country, the landscape can look a little different.  
This year alone, the American Civil Liberties Union is tracking 25 bills in state legislatures that are aiming to block children from drag performances, force venues that promote performances to register as adult businesses or ban drag altogether. And in California, drag performers are not immune from harassment by conservative groups.  
Pickle, who leads the Los Angeles chapter of Drag Story Hour that hosts story-time readings for children at local libraries, was met with angry protests at a story hour in the city of San Fernando last fall. Although it was a distressing experience, she tries not to let it rattle her too much. She continues to host story hours around L.A. County and is working with San Fernando city officials to investigate the incident.

**Who are these queens?**  
In July 2023, Pickle was selected by the West Hollywood Arts Council from a pool of applicants to be the city’s first drag laureate. In her official capacity so far, she has MC’d a Halloween Spectacular in support of the Bob Baker Marionette Theater, played host for an event celebrating the 39th anniversary of the city of West Hollywood, and just recently put together a drag pageant in honor of LGBTQ activist José Julio Sarria for Harvey Milk Day.  
Pickle, whose name was inspired by drag icon Hedda Lettuce and her favorite In-N-Out order (cheeseburger, extra onions, no pickle), is excited about uplifting other drag performers and showcasing the talent that’s bubbling up all around Southern California. “Drag is so much more than the bars and clubs people are used to seeing it in,” says Pickle, who has been performing for about a decade. “It’s a legitimate art form that deserves its spotlight.”  
Drollinger, who was appointed in May 2023, dons a big blond bouffant wig, expressive eyes and pouty lips. The San Francisco native is a veteran drag performer, writer and

actor who’s been performing since the ’90s. She’s also the owner of Oasis, one of the country’s largest drag cabarets. In her role as laureate, she has curated drag stages for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the music festival Outside Lands, and has helped develop drag performances in conjunction with First Thursdays, an effort to promote the businesses in downtown San Francisco.  
Drollinger has always tried to support other queer artists, mainly through her nonprofit Oasis Arts that provides mentorship, performance space and small stipends to queer artists of all genres. With the laureate role, she is excited to be able to spotlight her community even further.

**Is diversity and inclusion helping to shape the future of the drag community?**  
As with anyone who steps into the role of “first,” the question of who’s next as a laureate comes up regularly. Both drag queens say they are aware of the diversity of their communities and the need to bring representation to this new elevated position. But they are cognizant of the fact that while they were chosen by a selection committee from a diverse pool of individuals, they are white performers. Pickle and Drollinger say they are confident that diversity will be better reflected in the laureate appointments moving forward.  
“I’m just one flavor,” says Pickle of the breadth of talent in the drag community. “I’m spending a lot of my time connecting other drag artists to resources.” One of her initiatives as a drag laureate has been to set up quarterly drag round-



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

tables at Plummer Park Community Center to bring together drag performers of all backgrounds with resources that can help elevate their art.  
According to Pickle, there are local arts grants of up to \$6,500 specifically earmarked for trans and gender-diverse artists that most performers aren’t aware of. She feels artists and performers in the drag community would be strong candidates because they’re making art nobody else is making.  
She also has witnessed remarkable change. “We recently got a lot of the descriptions for these arts grants rewritten to specifically include drag performers,” she says. “It’s incredibly important to be able to see yourself mentioned in these grants to think, ‘Oh yeah, this is something I can utilize.’”  
In the Bay Area, Drollinger says creating space for trans and BIPOC communities is paramount. She often hears that there should be more trans and BIPOC nights at certain clubs in NorCal. “And that *is* important,” she says. “But why not include everyone in everything? ... Once we have a shift in consciousness, those who are considered outsiders become the insiders.”

**Who comes next?**  
The laureates still have time on their tenures: Pickle will end hers next summer; Drollinger’s tenure ends in November, but she’s discussing a six-month extension. However, they are starting to see the finish line and are thinking about what, or more important, who comes next. “The true measure of success for my time as laureate will be in the pool of applicants for the next round,” says Pickle. If she’s done her job well, she says the next laureate will be selected from a much larger number of applicants from all sections of the drag community.  
For Drollinger, she hopes to leave behind an event or two that can be replicated by her successors if they choose to. “On my way out, I want to put in writing what I think this program is, to give it a little more shape,” she says. “But ultimately, I hope the drag laureate role can be whatever that individual laureate wants to make of it.”







WE MET online in 2004 before Hinge, Bumble or even the iPhone existed. My friends thought I was as likely to get killed as I was to find a match. But I wasn't worried. I could tell from his profile that he was funny, absurd, modest, artistic and practical. We would get along beautifully. We met at Paru's Vegetarian Indian Restaurant on Sunset Boulevard. I got there a minute early, Matt a minute late. We joked for years that it was the last time I was on time and he wasn't.

After dinner, we drove to the Tiki-Ti. We drank mai tais and made each other laugh.

He didn't spend the night, which seems silly because he left at 5:30 a.m. It was the last time he didn't spend the night.

For the next 17 years, we were a unit: Matt & Amie.

Except I wasn't Amie. I was Ted.

...

We traveled together. We saw 50 states and nine of Canada's 10 provinces. (Had we stayed together longer, we were coming for you, Saskatchewan.)

We also walked a lot, from Echo Park to West Hollywood, from East Hollywood to the Music Center, from everywhere to the cheap seats of the Hollywood Bowl.

We threw strange parties: a garden party with a "make your own hat" bar, a dinner party full of spontaneous performance art and a birthday party called Lord Pontchartrain's Cosmic Saturnalia.

We sang a ridiculous amount of karaoke. We rented a six-bedroom house in East Hollywood for \$1,900 a month, subleased two of the bedrooms and still had space for a karaoke room. We built a stage and installed curtains and stage lighting. We had a smoke machine and costumes. We had 100,000 songs and sang them



LEVI HASTINGS For The Times

L.A. AFFAIRS

# Finding my real self had a high cost

BUT TRANSITIONING WAS THE BEST DECISION I'VE EVER MADE

BY SARAH AMIE DORSEY

into the morning.

We both worked hard but never prioritized our careers over a beautiful experience, a meaningful conversation, a unique meal, a practical joke.

And we made each other laugh. Matt is the funniest person I've ever known.

Then why did it end? The easy answer is that I transitioned. I was not the person I was meant to be. I was Ted, and Ted was too afraid to transition and too happy with Matt to take the risk.

The pandemic changed that. On June 8, 2020, during the COVID-19 shutdown, I said for the first time out loud that I was trans.

We were living on a farm between Solvang and Los

Olivos. It was a perfect place to weather a pandemic — it was hard to get within six feet of another person if you tried. The isolation from the shutdown also gave me freedom from social pressure. I had cross-dressed my entire life — never in shame but always in private. I now began to live as a woman full-time.

Matt asked if this was going to be an "everyday thing." I said yes.

So we confronted the great compromise of our relationship. Every day I imagined myself as a woman, and Matt is only attracted to men. For years, we'd had a mostly unspoken bargain: I would live my trans life after he went to sleep and whenever he was out of town.

But I couldn't keep it hidden any longer.

For all the chaos of our last year together, for all the sadness of watching a happy relationship end, we still cared a lot for each other. In January 2021, Matt said to me, "If you're going to live your life as Amie, you need to do it where you can be you, on your own, separate from me." That might be the kindest, hardest, best advice I've ever received.

As soon as I got my COVID-19 vaccine, I moved to San Francisco.

Two days before I moved, Matt and I took our favorite hike up Figueroa Mountain. We were married on that mountain six years earlier. Now, at our favorite vista, we took off our wed-

ding rings and buried them under a tree.

On Friday, Matt drove me and a medium-size U-Haul to my new apartment. We had takeout sushi and a bottle of wine. He spent the night with me in what used to be our bed. On Saturday, we sat in silence at our favorite Mexican spot, El Farolito, and together ate the saddest Mission burrito in California history.

Then we walked out to the street. And we said goodbye.

...

Matt said the best time to leave a party was just past its peak. No one will want you to leave, but it's the right call. Leave 'em wanting more.

That's what we did with our relationship.

That's the hard answer as to why we broke up.

I live in Las Vegas now. I'm Amie, and I'm happier than I've ever been. Transition isn't easy, but challenges and all, it's the best decision I've ever made.

I'm dating, and so is Matt. We both use the now-familiar dating apps. Every couple of weeks we hop on the phone to swap horror stories.

I'm planning to find love again. I hope my new person can live up to Matt. I'm not sure we'll be able to throw parties quite so absurd. I know he won't make me laugh as hard.

I'm grateful for the 17 years I got to spend with the man who is now my ex-husband.

It was quite a party.

*The author is a writer and founder of the education company Amie Teaches. She lives in Las Vegas. She's on Instagram: @amie\_in\_blue*

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PICKLES

by BRIAN CRANE

BLEEP!

WHAT'S THIS?  
OH, NO YOU DON'T!

DOONESBURY

By Garry Trudeau

CLASS OF '24! YOU ARE TO BE CONGRATULATED!

UNLIKE AT MANY OTHER CAMPUSES, YOUR PROTESTS AGAINST THE WAR IN GAZA HAVE BEEN UNCOMMONLY CIVIL!

AS A RESULT, OUR MUSLIM STUDENTS HAVE FELT SEEN, AND OUR JEWISH STUDENTS HAVE FELT SAFE.

IT IS THUS WITH GREAT PRIDE THAT I HEREBY CONFER DEGREES UPON ALL THOSE HERE ASSEMBLED.

YOUR DIPLOMAS ARE IN THE MAIL. SAFE TRAVELS HOME.

WAIT... WHAT'D HE SAY?

I THINK WE ALL JUST GRADUATED.

HEY! I'M ONLY A FRESHMAN!

OUT OF GAZA NOW!

CRABGRASS

By Tauhid Bondia

FOOL ME ONCE, SHAME ON YOU. FOOL ME TWICE, SHAME ON ME!

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

THE COMPUTER JUST WARNED ME THAT I HAVE TOO MANY WINDOWS OPEN AND I NEED TO CLOSE SOME.

NICE TRY, COMPUTER!

LAST TIME, I CHECKED THE WHOLE HOUSE, AND NOT A SINGLE WINDOW WAS OPEN!

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

By Stephan Pastis

ISN'T IT WILD THAT, BACK IN CAVEMAN DAYS, WE USED TO HUNT ANCIENT BEASTS FOR DAYS ON END JUST TO SURVIVE?

WE DON'T HAVE ANYTHING LIKE THAT NOWADAYS. A MODERN HUMAN WOULDN'T EVEN LAST AN HOUR IN CAVEMAN TIMES.

IT REALLY MAKES YOU WONDER IF WE'RE MISSING OUT ON SOME ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE, DOESN'T IT?

I MEAN, HUNTING IS IN OUR DNA, BUT WE DON'T ACTUALLY NEED TO HUNT ANYTHING ANYMORE. SOMETIMES I WONDER IF--

SHHH!

YOU HEAR THAT?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, RAT?

WELL, WITH SO MUCH ANGER AND DISSENTION IN THE WORLD, I'VE DECIDED TO STOP ARGUING ABOUT POLITICS WITH NEIGHBOR BOB.

THAT'S WONDERFUL. AFTER ALL, WE ONLY HAVE ONE WORLD AND WE ALL HAVE TO LIVE IN IT.

YES. AND TO SYMBOLIZE OUR COMMITMENT, I GOT US A PEACE DOVE THAT WE'LL FLY OVER HIS HOUSE.

THAT'S GREAT! YOU READY, NEIGHBOR BOB?

I AM!

KABOOM

IT'S A SAD DAY WHEN EVEN YOUR PEACE DOVES ARE VIOLENT.

LA CUCARACHA

BY LALO ALCARAZ

LALO ALCARAZ

6/9

LiO

6-9

MARK TATULLI

CLAM FLAVOR

ANCHOR

BOILED CARBAGE EXTRACT

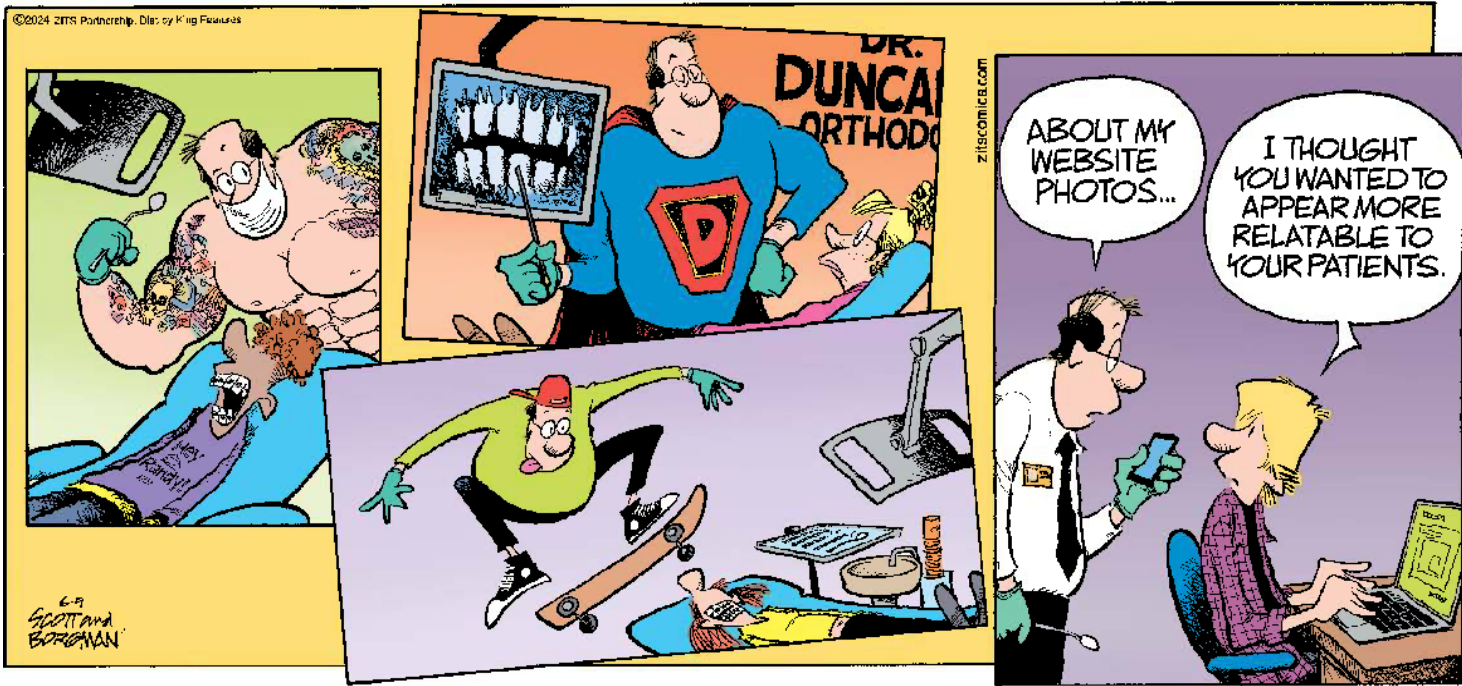
FUNKY BUBBLES \$1.00



MUTTS By Patrick McDonnell



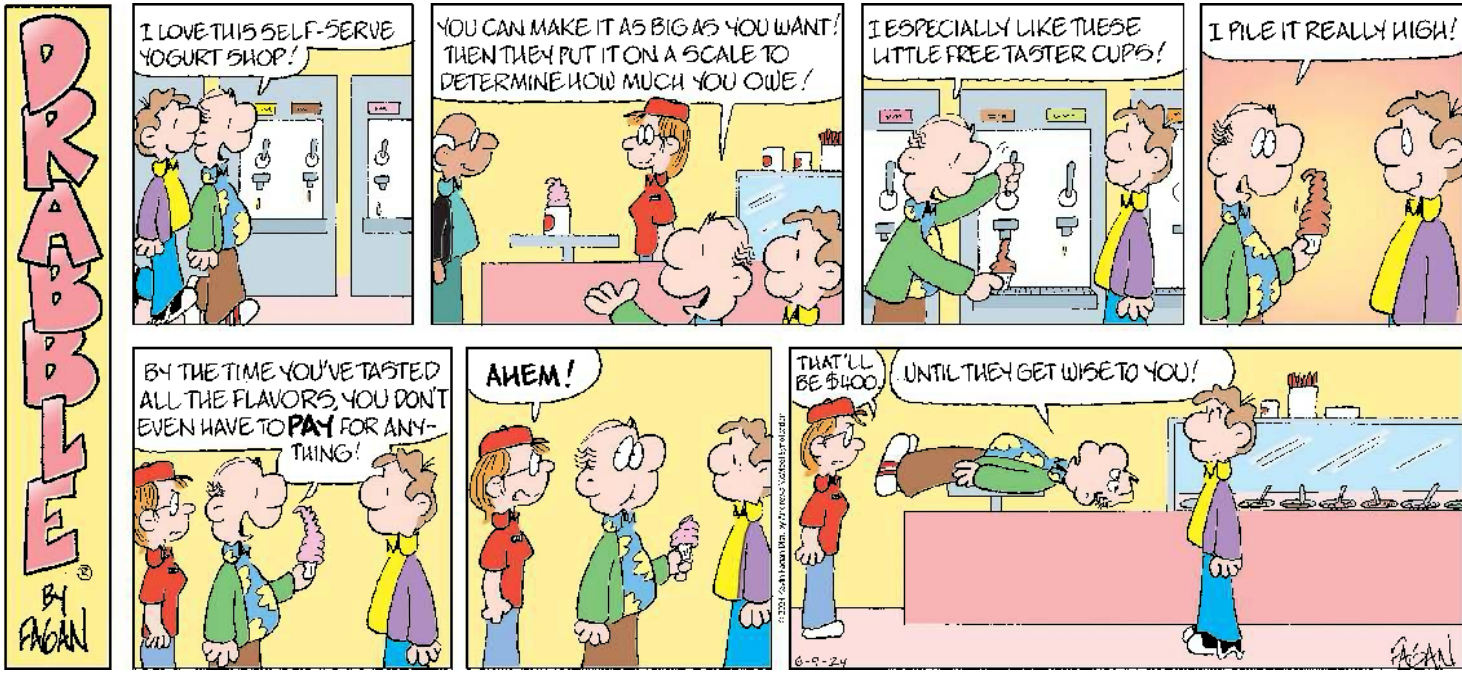
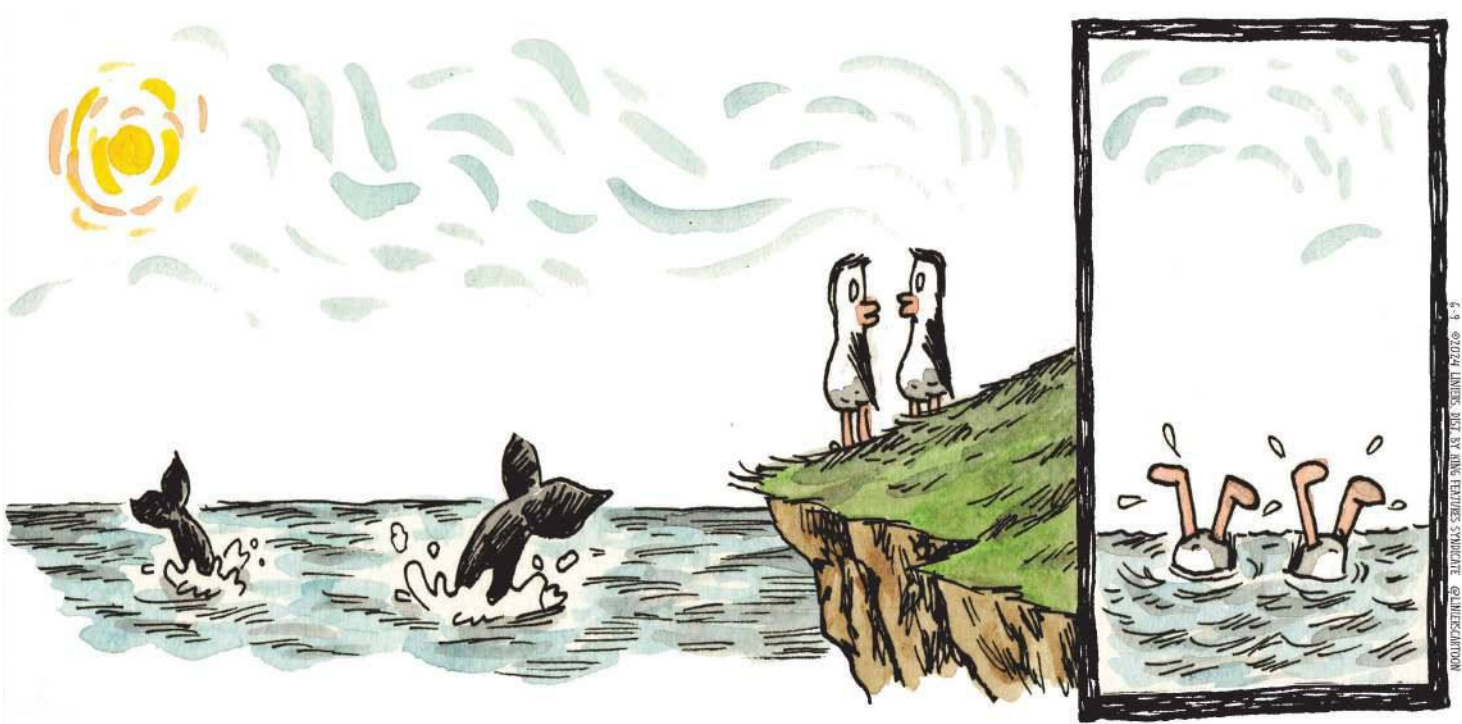
ZITS By Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman



BABY BLUES By Rick Kirkman and Jerry Scott



MACANUDO By Liniers



BLONDIE

By Dean Young & John Marshall



MARMADUKE

By Brad & Paul Anderson



**DOG GRAB FUNKY** VENICE, CA  
MARIANNE ROBIN-TANI HAD AN UNUSUAL SHIBA INU, ROXY. WHEN HER JAZZ MUSICIAN DAD PLAYED HIS SAXOPHONE, ROXY AROOOOED ALONG. IF DAD GOT OFF THE BEAT OR HAD A ROUGH TRANSITION, ROXY WIPPED TO GET DAD BACK ON TRACK. ROXY TOOK HER JAZZ VERY SERIOUSLY!



**HOROSCOPE**  
HOLIDAY MATHIS

**Aries** (March 21-April 19): Life works out. Love happens. These things occur in their own timing, and your trust is stronger today.

**Taurus** (April 20-May 20): There's a need lurking beneath the request that's made of you. If you don't sense and address the need, no matter how you fulfill the request, it will be wrong.

**Gemini** (May 21-June 21): Love will make you even more flexible than you are because your willingness to accommodate another person keeps you moving.

**Cancer** (June 22-July 22): Share your ideas and predictions; when they come true, you'll want proof that they were realities in your mind before they were objective realities.

**Leo** (July 23-Aug. 22): Most people have some kind of inner war to wage, and you certainly do too now, but at least you realize that on one side of the battle is you, and on the other side is also you.

**Virgo** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): If you feel you must posture or exaggerate your qualities to be accepted, it's a red flag about the other person. Maybe they don't make you feel seen.

**Libra** (Sept. 23-Oct. 23): You'll have a keen instinct about what matters and how to preserve it too. You'll cut out what's petty and unimportant.

**Scorpio** (Oct. 24-Nov. 21): You may be feeling underconfident, but that's OK. From this position you'll be inclined to work harder, pay more attention and check your work with greater care.

**Sagittarius** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): As cool as you are, there's still a slight uptick in adrenaline the first time you talk to someone, as is nature's way of giving you the energy to either turn on the charm or run.

**Capricorn** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): When things don't work and you don't know why, you are far from the solution. But if you can see what's not working that's something to celebrate.

**Aquarius** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Today requires you to prioritize as though you were stovetop cooking — the back burner is for simmering.

**Pisces** (Feb. 19-March 20): When you make a commitment, you make sure you have the time, resources and follow-through to keep it. Scheduling is key.

**Today's birthday** (June 9): You'll feel liberated to be whoever you want to be and to experiment as often as you like. But when you're sure of a goal, you'll stick with it until it's in hand. You've a talent for self-direction this year and will excel where the lesser disciplined fail. More highlights: The energy you put into your love life will zing back around and fortify you. Aries and Virgo adore you. Your lucky numbers: 10, 5, 23, 3 and 15.

Mathis writes her column for Creators Syndicate Inc. The horoscope should be read for entertainment.

**DJ Remix**

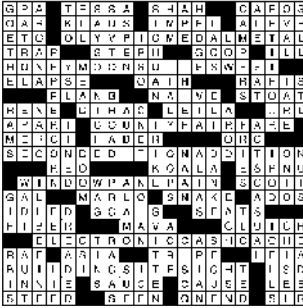
EDITED BY PATTI VAROL

BY AMANDA COOK & KELLY RICHARDSON

**ACROSS**

- 1 Center
- 6 Visibly nervous
- 11 BCBS offering
- 14 Beaker's sound
- 18 Wabbit hunter Fudd
- 19 Like a foggy graveyard
- 20 Brim (with)
- 21 Minnesota representative Ilhan
- 22 College administrators who never skip gym class?
- 24 Panache
- 25 Score symbol
- 26 Mattel product
- 27 Whoops
- 28 Mistake a bluebird for a blue bird?
- 30 Harder to hike
- 32 "Big yikes"
- 34 Court orders
- 35 — Talks
- 36 Shinbone
- 37 Podcast equipment
- 38 Iverson in the Basketball Hall of Fame
- 41 Finally breaking up with that no-good, pool hall hustler?
- 48 Nintendo Switch precursor
- 49 Carolyn Bertozzi, notably
- 51 One with niblings
- 52 Regret
- 53 Massachusetts state tree
- 54 "— Nagila": Hebrew folk song

Last week's solution: "Is There an Echo in Here?"



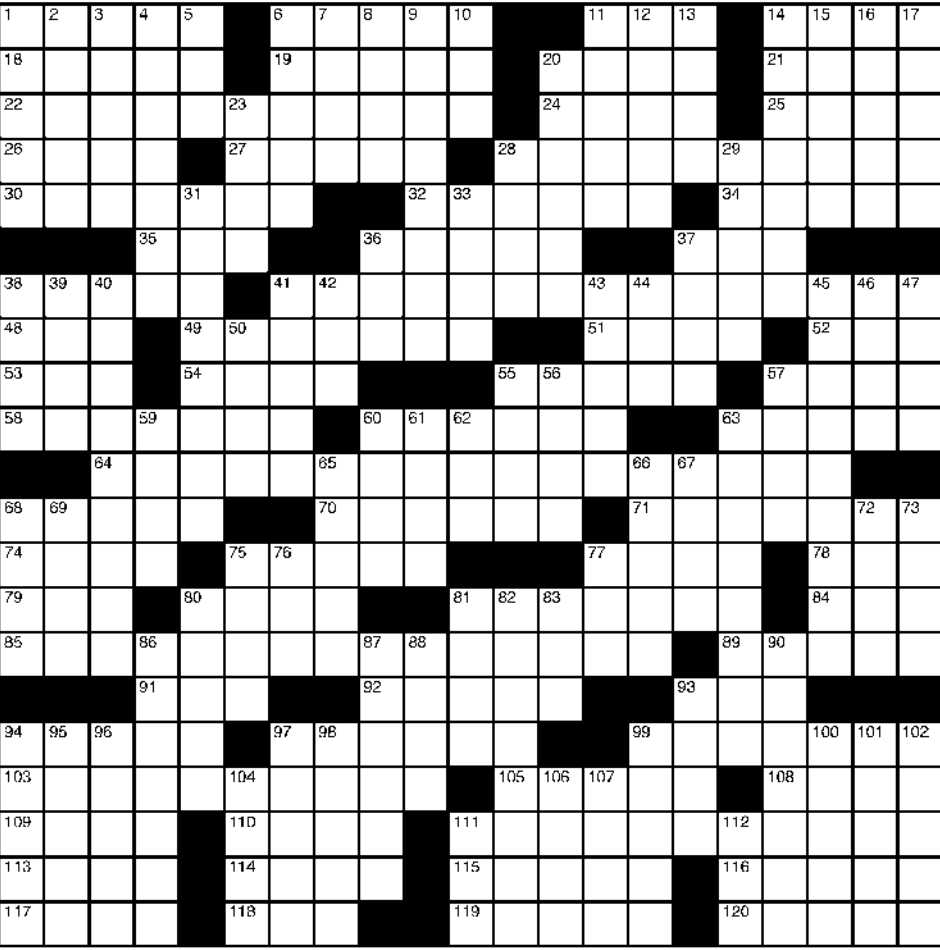
- 55 Made brownies, say
- 57 Crafty platform
- 58 Gwen of No Doubt
- 60 Penalty shot defender
- 63 Queues up
- 64 Tiny bells added to an ugly Christmas sweater?
- 68 Still-life subject, often
- 70 Man cave locale, maybe
- 71 In the spotlight for bad behavior
- 74 Freight option
- 75 Nick of "Cape Fear"
- 77 Purple bloom
- 78 Once called
- 79 "Exit full screen" button
- 80 "Toodles"
- 81 Indian flatbread
- 84 Some undergrad degs.
- 85 Honorific for San Francisco's top athlete?
- 89 Churchyard peals
- 91 Scrape (by)
- 92 Opera solos
- 93 Muscle mag muscle
- 94 Space Invaders console
- 97 Marzipan nut
- 99 Abandons
- 103 Beaver construction party?
- 105 Concert platform
- 108 Heavenly glow
- 109 NYC drama award
- 110 Vegan pho protein
- 111 "Good news! The animals living under the deck aren't skunks!"?
- 113 Bridesmaid's handful
- 114 Tinnitus docs
- 115 Balance sheet entry
- 116 Sty sounds
- 117 Lob
- 118 Director Anderson
- 119 Big bangs
- 120 Like a windbag
- DOWN**
- 1 Ranch groups
- 2 "Daniel Deronda" novelist
- 3 Bountiful
- 4 Brimming (with)
- 5 Three, in Trieste
- 6 Occasion to read the Haggadah
- 7 Tap location
- 8 North — Sea: Central Asian lake
- 9 Bonds between friends
- 10 "Absolutely!"
- 11 "Are you even listening?"
- 12 Like overripe apples
- 13 Hyatt competitor
- 14 Orange-and-black butterfly
- 15 Fire in a text?
- 16 Patronize, as a bistro
- 17 Hunts, with "on"
- 20 Rooibos pouch

- 23 Made an egg into an Easter egg
- 28 Invent, as a word
- 29 Chocolate-and-vanilla soft serve
- 31 Inclination
- 33 Memorial piece
- 36 "Ew, stop talking!"
- 37 Resew, maybe
- 38 Dazzles
- 39 Jaunty tune
- 40 Ceviche marinade
- 41 Crafty sort
- 42 Hindu goddess also known as Parvati
- 43 Activist known for his time aboard the Enterprise
- 44 Tinge
- 45 Small-batch
- 46 Used car concern
- 47 Florida —
- 50 Get together
- 55 Online journal
- 56 Assistant

- 57 Former Chief Justice Warren
- 59 Word in many a YouTube title
- 60 Little pest
- 61 D&D monster
- 62 "I'm an open book" Reddit sesh
- 63 Squarespace creations
- 65 Heavy-duty cooler brand
- 66 Venture
- 67 "What's — for you?"
- 68 Sitar ridge
- 69 Hasty
- 72 Wax closure
- 73 Harper of "No Country for Old Men"
- 75 French Riviera city
- 76 Iowa state tree
- 77 Many a Lagunitas brew, briefly
- 80 Roberts who was one of NPR's "Founding Mothers"
- 81 Helmet clip spot

- 82 Result of standing up too fast
- 83 Six-packs, sometimes
- 86 Game day tops
- 87 Nathan's — hot dogs
- 88 Jumbo suffix
- 90 Papua New Guinea region
- 93 Cuzco's country
- 94 Rescue, as a pet
- 95 Don't
- 96 Off
- 97 In concert
- 98 Rides
- 99 Balance sheet entries
- 100 Cuzco attraction
- 101 Does the Tour du Mont Blanc, say
- 102 Bold
- 104 Crockpot recipe
- 106 "The Lovebirds" actress Rae
- 107 Derive (from)
- 111 Chatter
- 112 Holiday party serving

Tribune Content Agency © 2024



**ASK AMY**

**Dear Amy:** You recently ran a question from "Jake From PA," who was hurt because his adopted daughter wanted to reach out to her biological family members.

Knowing the truth about a person's DNA is vital.

When my adult son's friend "Jack" introduced me to his mother, "Janet," she freaked out. Memory jogged and, to shorten a very long story, I am Jack's father.

Janet denies it, but I can name the date she and I were together — nine months (to the day) before his birthday.

It hasn't gone well, but at least the truth is out there. And we have a lot of family health issues Jack should address, or make sure his daughter is checked for.

I know this creates challenges for people, but the truth is the truth.

BEEN THERE

**Dear Been There:** You make very good points, but without DNA testing, it isn't actually certain that you are Jack's biological father.

I believe that knowing the truth about one's DNA is a basic human right.

**Dear Amy:** "Hoping for Companionship" is a widow, 77, who asked about dating.

Your suggestions: A museum? A coffee shop? Jeez, we're old — not dead!

How about playing nine rounds of golf, going fishing, watching the grandkids play sports? How about a street fair, county fair, mini-golf or karaoke? Do something fun and different.

Who pays the bill? Easy! One pays for dinner, the other tips generously. One pays for the show and the other buys the snacks.

If funds are limited, watch a minor league baseball game. Go to a farmers market, rent a movie and order a pizza, pick apples and make a pie. The sky's the limit, so put away the bingo cards and enjoy life!

DISAPPOINTED

**Dear Disappointed:** Great ideas! I've been a life-long geezer, so I suggested activities I enjoy that are simple and inexpensive.

Email questions to Amy Dickinson at [askamy@amydickinson.com](mailto:askamy@amydickinson.com).

**POKER** CHAD HOLLOWAY

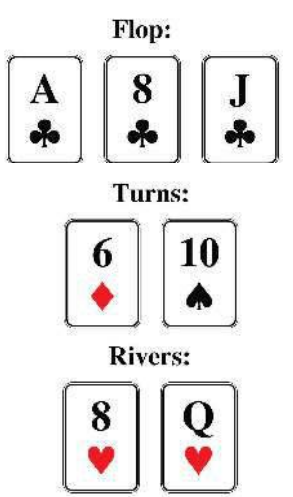
Poker starts as a simple game, but the more you play the more complex it becomes. If you've ever watched poker on TV, you may have seen some players "run it twice."

Running it twice is something that can only be done in cash games when two or more players are all in. What it means is running the remaining streets two times and awarding half the pot to the winner of each run out.

If the money goes in pre-flop, the two players could agree to run out two full five-card boards; whereas if it goes in on the flop, then just the turn and river are run twice. Likewise, if it goes in on the turn, then just the river is run twice.

If each player wins a run out, they each get half the pot. If one wins both run outs, then they "scoop" the entire pot. While players are not obligated to run it multiple times, many opt to do so in order to reduce variance.

Take a hand from a \$50/\$100/\$200 no-limit hold'em cash game from Hustler Casino Live. A player limped with pocket fours before



two-time bracelet winner Mike Moncek raised to \$1,000 with the A♠ A♥ in the hijack. Another called from the cutoff with queen-jack before a player nicknamed "Brazil God" three-bet to \$5,700 holding the K♠ Q♠ in the straddle. The limper folded, Moncek four-bet to \$14,500, and the player in the cutoff got out of the way.

Brazil God called the additional \$8,800 and the flop came down A♠ 8♣ J♠ to hit both players in a big way.

Brazil God checked the nut flush and Moncek, who flopped top set, bet \$18,000. Brazil God check-raised all in for \$85,500 and Moncek snap-called to create a pot of \$201,450.

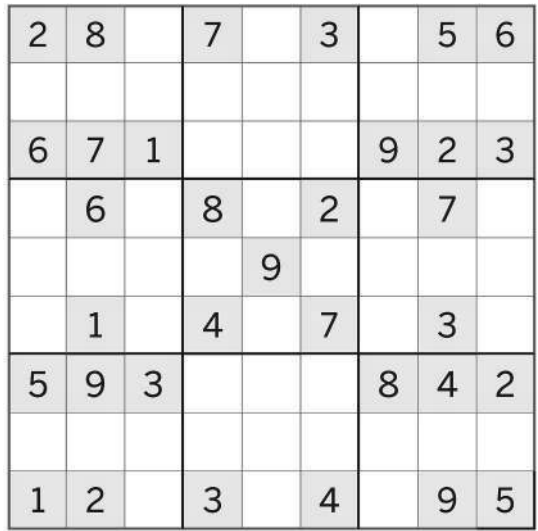
This was a high-variance spot — Brazil God was a 66% favorite while Moncek would win 34% of the time whenever the board paired — and with six-figures on the line it was a big pot. As such, the two agreed to run it twice.

The 6♠ turn and 8♥ river on the first run paired the board to give half the pot to Moncek, who improved to a full house. He was freerolling to win the other half of the pot, but that didn't happen as the 10♠ turn and Q♥ river on the second run out allowed Brazil God's flush to hold strong and give him the other half of the pot.

The two wound up chopping the pot, whereas had they run it just once, variance would've hit Brazil God hard as he'd have lost the whole thing.

Holloway is a 2013 World Series of Poker bracelet winner.

**SUDOKU**



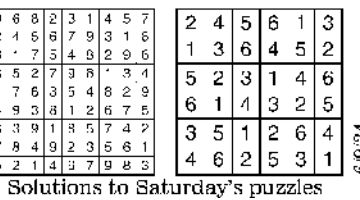
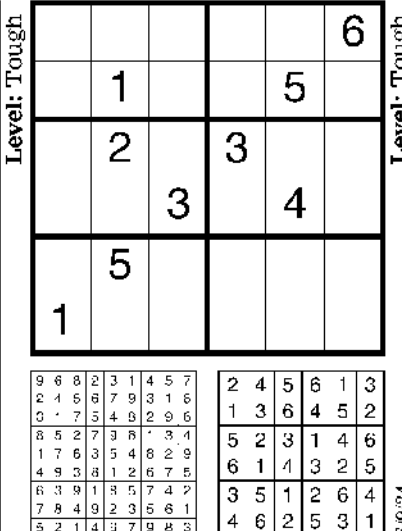
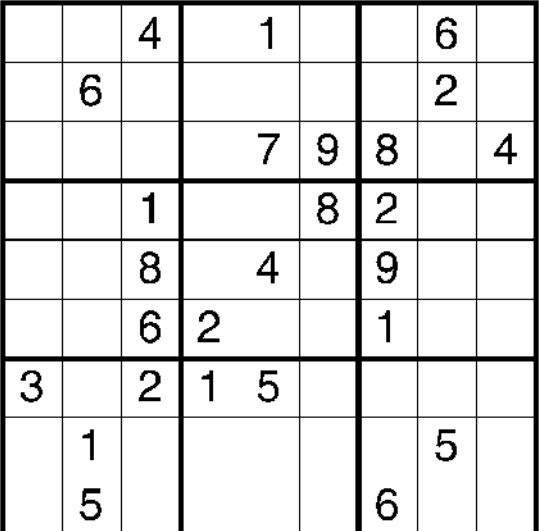
Level: Impossible

8	9	3	4	1	2	5	6	7
2	7	6	9	8	5	1	3	4
5	4	1	3	6	7	8	9	2
6	3	4	1	5	8	7	2	9
7	2	5	6	9	4	3	8	1
9	1	8	2	7	3	4	5	6
3	6	7	5	2	1	9	4	8
4	8	9	7	3	6	2	1	5
1	5	2	8	4	9	6	7	3

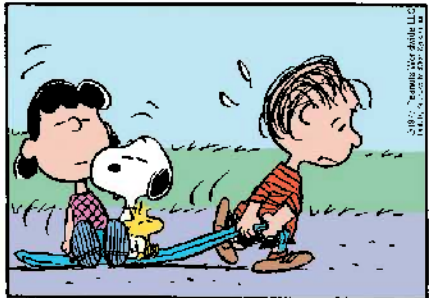
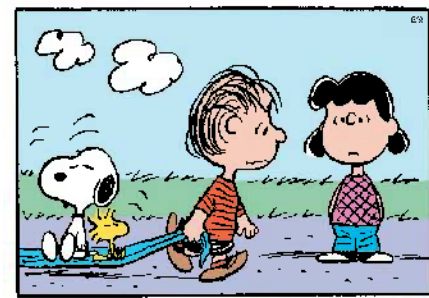
Solution to last week's puzzle

**More Online**

For other brain-teasing challenges, go to [latimes.com/games](http://latimes.com/games).



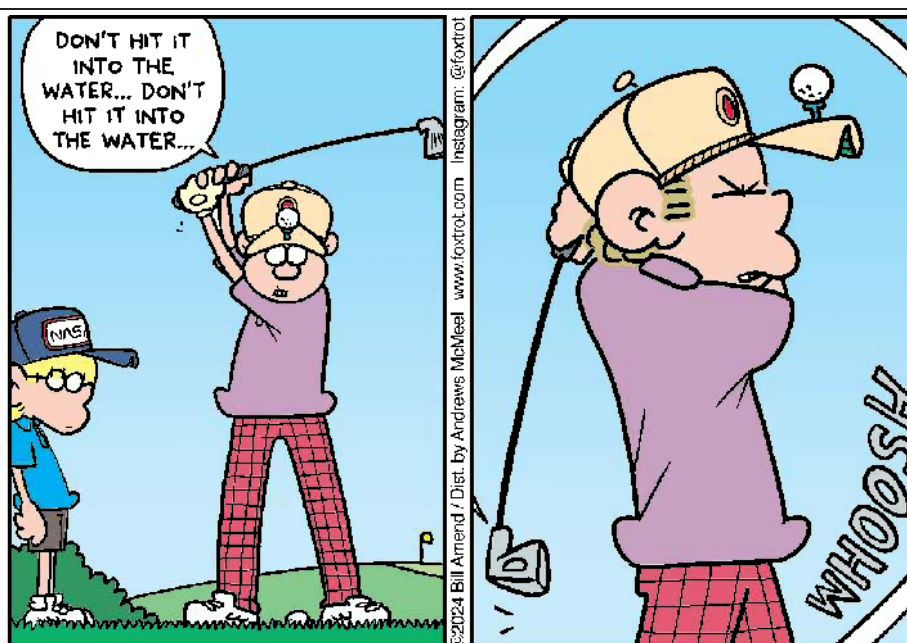
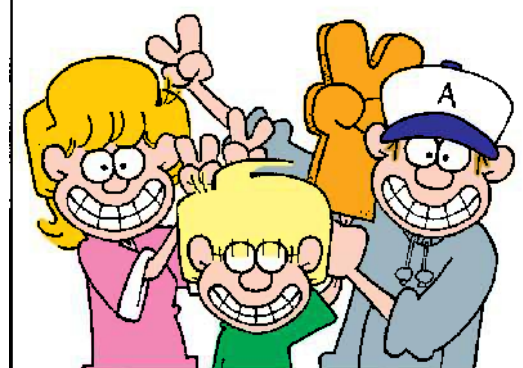
Solutions to Saturday's puzzles





# FoxTrot

by Bill Amend



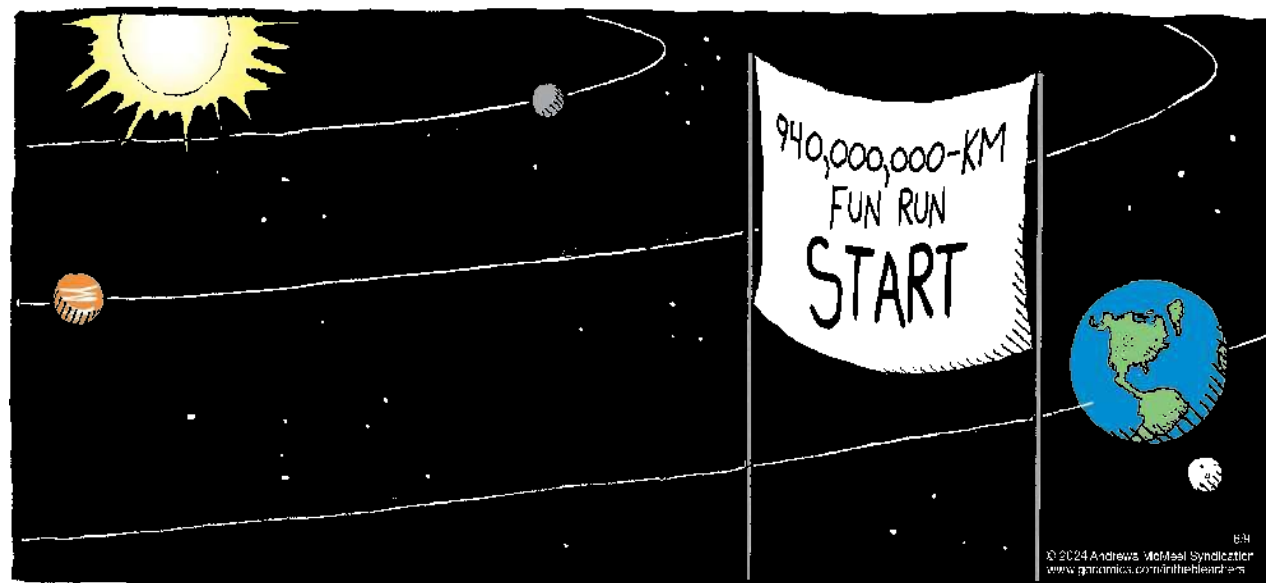
# JUMP START

**Starring**  
**JOE & MARCY**

BY ROBB  
ARMSTRONG



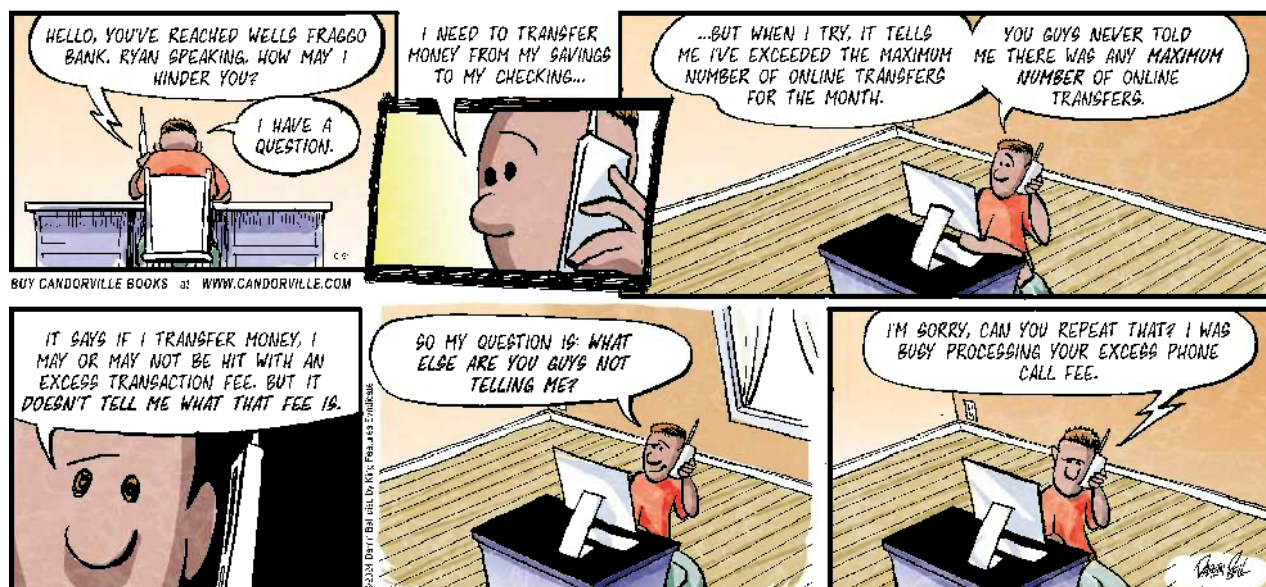
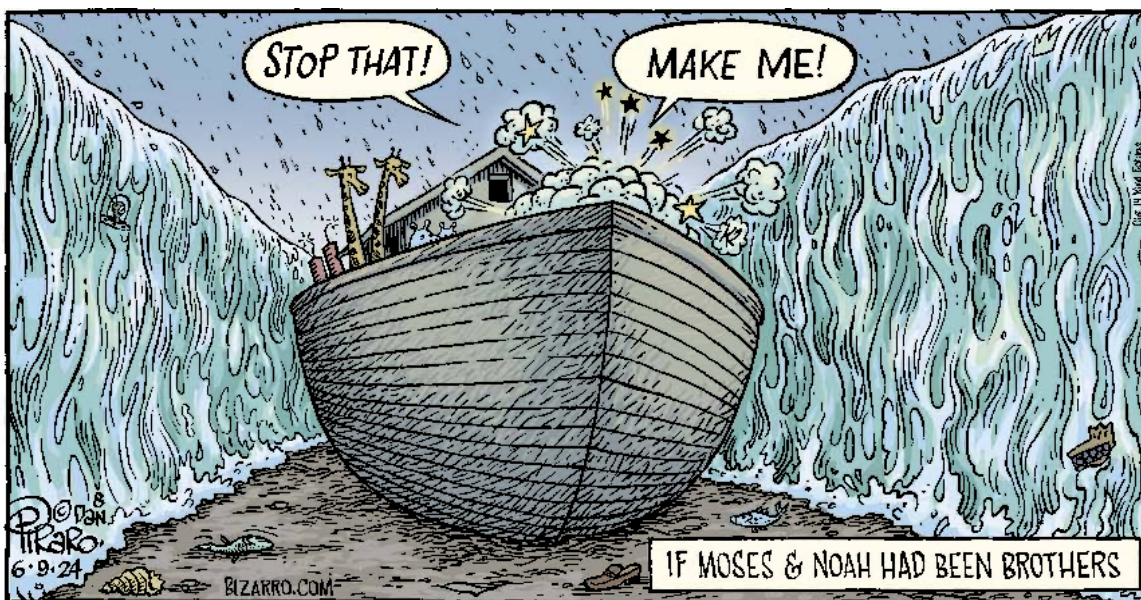
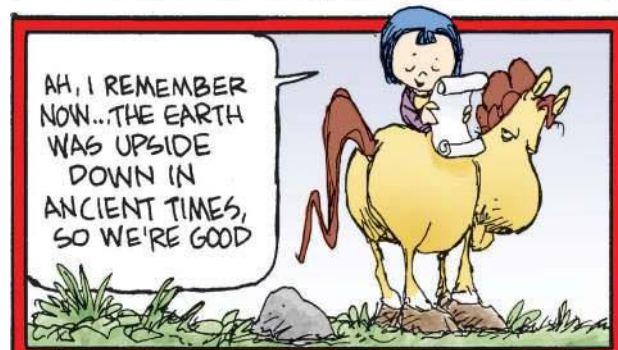
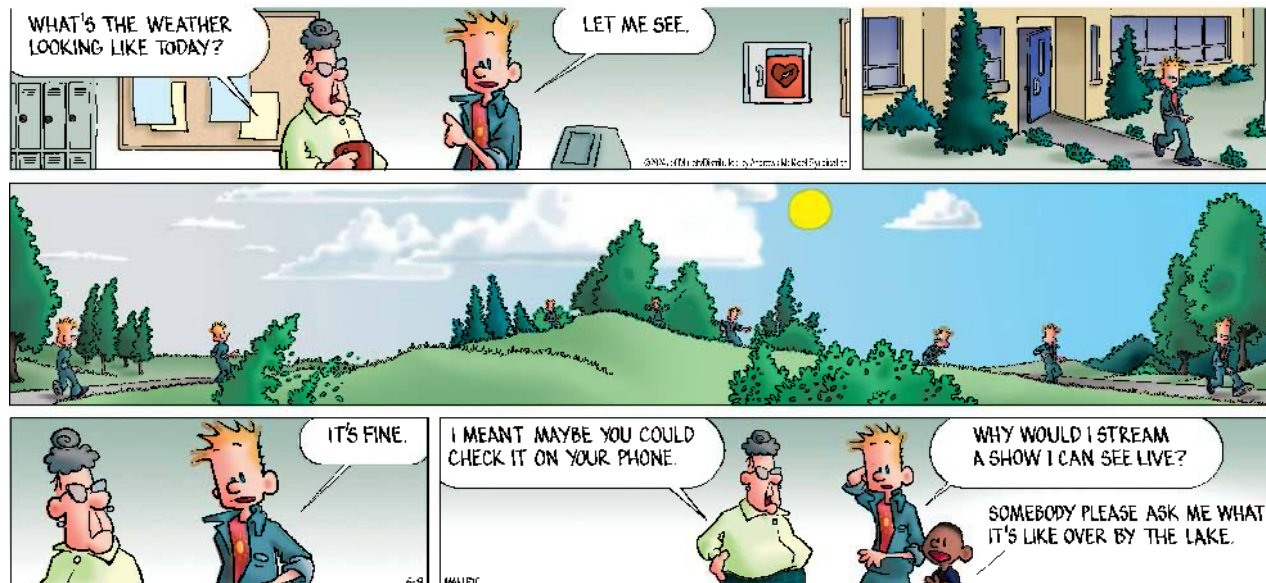
## IN THE BLEACHERS By Steve Moore



**NON SEQUITUR** By Wiley



## CANDORVILLE By Darrin Bell

**FRAZZ** By Jef Mallett





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