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Sarah  
McLachlan



# THE WEEK

THE BEST OF THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

## Forever stained?

What Trump's felony  
conviction means for the  
election, and for America

Pages 4, 6, 15, and 16



JUNE 14, 2024 VOLUME 24 ISSUE 1187

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**Naj Srinivas**  
Executive Vice President

## Editor's letter

The Covid pandemic witnessed an extraordinary politicization of science. Masking up in parks became a sign of being on the right side of reason. Cities and unions insisted on keeping schools closed long after it became clear that the danger to school-age kids was minimal, claiming they were following the science. Epidemiologists warned about the dangers of mass gatherings, even outdoors, then backed away from the warnings to leave room for racial justice protests, because racism was a health emergency. Questions about the origins of Covid, most especially any suggestion that it could have been accidentally released from a laboratory in Wuhan, were dismissed as a conspiracy theory (it isn't) and racist (it isn't that either). Any debate on lockdowns, or the projections for deaths that justified them, was shut down with "trust the science." And on the Right, lawmakers recklessly dismissed the value of vaccines—a strange reversal on an actual scientific breakthrough for which the Trump administration could claim credit.

Covid ended up killing more than 1.1 million Americans, and there is every reason to get a full accounting of the pandemic. Unfortunately, this week's congressional hearings (see U.S. map, p.7) are not giving us that. The circus of Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) telling Anthony Fauci, the nation's Covid response chief, that he should be imprisoned for mass murder evidenced zero real truth-seeking effort. There is value in tracing the history of the virus and reckoning with the pandemic's failures and successes. But we are missing our chance. After the Kennedy assassination—as fertile a soil for paranoia as is imaginable—the nonpartisan Warren Commission made a heroic and largely successful effort to untangle fact from speculation. A similar Covid Commission now could go a long way toward restoring faith in science and resolving the pandemic's many lingering questions. It's a sign of just how damaged our science and politics have become that nobody has even dared to ask for that.

**Mark Gimein**  
Managing editor

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# Republicans vow retaliation after Trump conviction

## What happened

Republicans circled their wagons this week around Donald Trump and pledged to strike back against what they claimed was Democrats' "weaponization" of the justice system, after a Manhattan jury found Trump guilty of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. After a six-week trial, the jurors deliberated for under 10 hours before delivering a unanimous verdict that Trump had criminally falsified records to cover up a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels in 2016. Trump, the jury found, paid off Daniels out of fear it would hurt his election prospects if Daniels revealed they'd had sex one night in 2006. Trump, who sat stone-faced as the verdict was read, blasted the trial as "rigged" and "a scam," and called Judge Juan Merchan—who will sentence him on July 11, four days before the Republican National Convention—a "devil." Within an hour of the decision, Trump's campaign sent out an email calling him a "political prisoner"; it reported raising nearly \$53 million within 24 hours.

Congressional Republicans rallied to Trump's defense. They hampered the trial as part of a Democratic "lawfare" campaign against the GOP's presumed presidential nominee, who faces dozens of criminal charges in three other cases. The trial "is further evidence that Democrats will stop at nothing to silence dissent and crush their political opponents," said House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), who called on the Supreme Court to intervene and "set this straight." House Judiciary chair Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) demanded Democratic Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg testify about his "unprecedented political prosecution" of Trump, and 11 Republican senators vowed to slow passage of Democratic legislation and block President Biden's judicial and political nominees.

President Biden condemned Trump's "all-out assault" on the justice system. "It's reckless, it's dangerous, it's irresponsible for anyone to say this was rigged just because they don't like the verdict," said Biden, who called Trump a "convicted felon." Trump and his allies repeatedly claimed Biden was behind the prosecution, though it was brought by a Manhattan prosecutor with no federal involvement. "It's a terrible, terrible path they're leading us to," said Trump, "and it's very possible that it's going to have to happen to them."

## What the editorials said

The historic verdict offers "perhaps the starkest" reminder to date of why Trump is "unfit for office," said *The New York Times*. The bright spot in this sordid episode is that it also shows our rule of law "binds everyone, even former presidents." A jury of 12 Americans examined the evidence, found proof that Trump had broken the law for political gain, and found him guilty. The jurors have delivered their verdict; voters will give theirs in November. "If the republic is to survive, all of us—including Trump—should abide by both, regardless of the outcome."



Trump: Verdict was 'rigged' and 'a scam.'

## What the columnists said

Trump lost for a simple reason, said Jonathan V. Last in *The Bulwark*: His guilt in "the Stormy Daniels election interference case" was clear as day. Every Republican howling about a corrupt trial knows that Trump did just as Bragg said: that he had an affair with Daniels while his wife, Melania, was home with their newborn son; got his fixer Michael Cohen to pay Daniels hush money; and then reimbursed Cohen via bogus legal fees. Trump is guilty, and Republicans' anger at the justice system "is an attempt to avoid grappling with this base fact."

Trump is enraged not because this case was rigged, said Adam Serwer in *The Atlantic*, but "because it wasn't." The trials he faces for far more serious federal crimes—including trying to overturn the 2020 election and stealing classified documents—"have been delayed by a sustained attack on the rule of law carried out by right-wing legal activists embedded in the judiciary." Conservative Supreme Court justices and other Trump-appointed judges are punting them "long enough for Trump to potentially win in November" and dodge accountability forever. But in that Manhattan courtroom, Trump "could not count on right-wing legal elites to skew the proceeding in his favor."

"The potential for an arms race of recriminations is now bottomless," said Curt Mills in *Politico*. Bragg's charges had nothing to do with Trump's conduct in office, nor anything to do with his current campaign. They hinged on actions he took nearly a decade ago to conceal a tawdry one-night stand. Trump's conviction broke long-held norms, and "Americans of all political stripes will one day regret ever letting this genie out of the bottle."

As Republican lawmakers assail the justice system, we see "a foundational rule of the Trump era" in action, said David Frum in *The Atlantic*. To back Trump is to eventually "be called to jettison every principle you ever purported to hold"—including supporting law and order. If Trump is re-elected, his top priority will be "smashing up the American legal system to punish it" for daring to hold him to account, and fellow Republicans will simply line up right behind him. The nation "can have a second Trump presidency, or it can retain the rule of law, but not both."

## What next?

Speaker Mike Johnson has announced a "three-pronged approach" to push back against the justice system, said Mychael Schnell in *The Hill*. House Republicans have already initiated elements of the plan, which would involve the government appropriations process, unspecified legislation, and Congress' oversight authority. House Judiciary chair Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) has asked Appropriations chair Tom Cole (R-Okla.) to institute "reforms," including eliminating federal funding for local prosecutors "involved in lawfare." Meanwhile, right-wing social media is aflame with "violent rhetoric" aimed at the trial's jurors, judge, and prosecutors, said Ryan J. Reilly in *NBCNews.com*. Purported home addresses for jurors and Bragg have been published online. "We need to identify each juror. Then make them miserable. Maybe even suicidal," wrote one user on a pro-Trump forum. Trump himself hinted at violence if he were sentenced to prison next month. "I don't know that the public would stand it," he said. "At a certain point, there's a breaking point."

## U.S. launches southern border crackdown

### What happened

President Biden signed an executive order this week that ends most migrants' ability to claim asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border, a move designed to thwart a potential summer migrant surge and a growing voter backlash on immigration. The new rules, which took effect the day after Biden's announcement, allow border officials to immediately expel migrants when average illegal crossings reach 2,500 a day—far fewer than the 3,700 daily attempts seen in recent weeks. The plan has exceptions for unaccompanied children, migrants in severe medical distress, and those who can demonstrate an imminent mortal threat. Biden blamed congressional inaction for making the presidential order necessary; House and Senate Republicans have repeatedly voted down bipartisan legislation that would have tightened border enforcement. “Frankly, I would have preferred to address this issue through bipartisan legislation,” Biden said, “but Republicans left me with no choice.”

The American Civil Liberties Union vowed to sue Biden over the plan, which relies on Mexico or the migrants' home countries to accept those who are rejected. Lawmakers from both parties quickly voiced objections, with progressives like Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.) and Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Calif.) likening the executive order to Donald Trump's asylum ban, while Republicans dismissed it as a cynical attempt to salvage Biden's tanking re-election prospects. “It's window dressing; everybody knows it,” said House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.). “If he was concerned about the border, he would have done this a long time ago.”



‘Republicans left me with no choice.’

### What the columnists said

“Apparently there is a crisis at the border,” said the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* in an editorial, and Biden has discovered he has the authority to act. “Who knew?” Nearly 8 million crossings have taken place since his 2021 rollback of Trump's border measures, but he long claimed to be powerless to stop it. Now he's clearly “desperate to look like he's doing something” about a self-inflicted problem. The president “has proven himself unworthy of Americans' trust on the border—or on anything else.”

Biden may shun his predecessor's “poisoning the blood” rhetoric and family-separation policy, said **Calder McHugh** in *Politico*. But his order demonstrates “Trump's success in reframing the political debate.” Voters consider the border a priority, and neither Biden's executive orders seeking to make the entry process more orderly nor the failed border legislation has improved their view of his record. One recent survey found they trust Trump more on immigration “by a whopping 27 points,” and Biden needs to move the electoral needle.

Even if Biden's order “survives the inevitable fusillade of court challenges,” said **James Gibney** in *Bloomberg*, he can't unilaterally fund its enforcement. And with no new money for deportations or tackling immigration courts' 3 million-case backlog, the immigration system will remain “mired in dysfunction.” Our economy needs immigrant labor, but our failure to build legal pathways leaves many seeking illicit means of entry. “We're long overdue” for a system-wide overhaul—but that's a task “only Congress can achieve.”

## Drugs at center of Hunter Biden gun trial

### What happened

Hunter Biden became this week the first child of a sitting president to go on trial, as he faced federal charges that he lied about his crack-cocaine addiction on an application to purchase a handgun. In the Wilmington, Del., courtroom, prosecutor Derek Hines said he would seek to prove Biden was an addict when he bought the Colt revolver in October 2018. “Addiction may not be a choice,” Hines said, “but lying and buying a gun is a choice.” The prosecution offered a barrage of evidence, including photos and videos of drug use taken from Biden's phone and laptop. Hines even played clips from the audiobook of Biden's memoir, so jurors heard the president's son's own voice saying he had a “superpower of finding crack anywhere, anytime.” Hines said he would call Hallie Biden—Biden's brother Beau's widow, whom Biden later dated—as a witness. It was she who found and disposed of the handgun, an event that led to police involvement.

Biden's defense attorneys said the application form asked about current, not former drug use, insisting that when Biden filled it out, soon after completing a stint in rehab, he considered himself clean. Charged with three felonies, two counts of false statements and one count of illegal gun possession, Biden could get a prison sentence of up to 25 years or a fine of up to \$750,000. The case went to trial after a plea bargain, which would have offered Biden only probation, drew furious Republican opposition and was rejected by Judge Maryellen Noreika, a Trump appointee.

### What the columnists said

So much for the Republican theory that Joe Biden has weaponized the Justice Department, said **Matt Lewis** in *The Daily Beast*. If he's the “evil puppet master” behind Donald Trump's criminal prosecutions, why is his family's dirty laundry being aired in federal court? “Surely a president powerful and corrupt enough to summon the full weight of the judicial system against a former president” could find a way to keep his son out of this mess.

Yet the “power of the Biden family” in Delaware is “undeniable” in the courthouse, said **Miranda Devine** in the *New York Post*. With her Secret Service “praetorian guard” on display, first lady Jill Biden brought the imprimatur of the White House to the gallery, making “a point of turning around and offering her face to the jury pool as they filed in.” And this jury skews sympathetic to the defense: Seven of the 12 said they had a close family member addicted to drugs or alcohol. Biden may well be acquitted.

As he should be, said **Joe Nocera** in *The Free Press*. This is a “nothingburger” of a crime that would never have been prosecuted were the defendant not named Biden. That makes it “the flip side of the Trump trial” last week. Both cases were “based on weak charges” brought by prosecutors who just wanted “to collect scalps.” Prosecutors measure success not by justice delivered, but by convictions obtained. Still, “that's not weaponization.” It's simply, unfortunately, “how the system works.”

## Election 2024: Will Trump's guilty verdict matter to voters?

Could last week's felony conviction cost Donald Trump the election? "Sure it could," said **Jonah Goldberg** in the *Los Angeles Times*. The conventional wisdom is that Trump is such a known commodity, and voters so hardened in their partisan loyalties, that his conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records to hide an affair with a porn star won't have a major impact on the presidential race. But in a contest likely to be decided by "a tiny number of votes in a handful of states," even a minor impact could tip the race to President Biden. "It's early," said **Nathaniel Rakich** in *ABCNews.com*, but polls show Biden has received a "small boost" of about 1 percent since the verdict. That number could go up in coming weeks: In two post-trial polls, about 25 percent of independents and 10 percent of *Republican* voters said they were less likely to vote for Trump because of the guilty verdict. That's more than enough to lose Trump the election if those people vote Biden or stay home in November. Caveats abound, of course. These numbers are based on only a few polls, and "less likely to" doesn't mean "won't." But at least for now, Trump's new status as a convicted felon "does appear to be hurting him."

The verdict is a game changer—but not in the way Democrats want, said **Conn Carroll** in the *Washington Examiner*. More telling than the millimetric fluttering of polls is the fact that Trump's website crashed in the minutes after the blatantly political verdict, as outraged voters "rushed to show their support" with donations. Trump's campaign said it raised a staggering \$52.8 million in the first 24 hours, much of it from small-dollar donors disgusted by this "complete and total witch hunt." Trump already "has a playbook for this moment," said **Jonathan Allen** and **Matt Dixon** in *NBCNews.com*. He chan-



Protesters outside Trump Tower in Manhattan

neled "Republican outrage over his indictments in two federal and two state cases" to capture the party's nomination, and he might be able to ride the conviction "backlash" all the way to the White House.

Not if the backlash is confined to Trump's existing supporters, said **William Kristol** and **Andrew Egger** in *The Bulwark*. A new poll from Data for Progress found that 38 percent of likely voters disapprove of the guilty verdict in his hush money trial—a number that roughly tracks with Trump's usual share of the electorate. But a majority (56 percent) believe the verdict was fair, a figure that rises to 60 percent when you "zoom in the camera on true swing voters" who are genuinely undecided about their choice in November. These numbers suggest the verdict could "be a major obstacle" for the Trump campaign.

It's not just swing voters, said **Michael Tomasky** in *The New Republic*. That 10 percent of Republicans reporting post-conviction qualms about Trump could translate to 5.7 million votes if Biden and the Democrats seize this opening. From this point on, no Democratic officeholder should utter "the name 'Donald Trump' without putting the words 'convicted felon' before it." Simply repeating that phrase won't win Biden a second term, said **David Faris** in *Slate*. Democrats need to help voters understand what the trial revealed: that Trump is an "evil, amoral cretin" who had "unprotected sex with an adult film star" while his wife was at home caring for their newborn son. Does that mean retiring Biden's "above the fray" messaging about democracy and the rule of law? Yes, but he's trailing in the polls with only five months left. The time for restraint "has long since passed."

### Only in America

■ A Chicago man is suing the city after he spent 12 years in jail on the testimony of a legally blind eyewitness. **Darien Harris**, now 31, was sentenced to 76 years in jail for murder in 2011. He was exonerated last year, after investigators discovered that the witness who placed him at the scene had severe glaucoma and could barely see. "Justice is supposed to be blind," said Harris' attorney. "The eyewitness is not supposed to be blind."

■ A Christian lifeguard is suing Los Angeles County for making him work near gay Pride flags. **Jeffrey Little** said supervisors promised to assign him to flag-less lifeguard stations, but that when he showed up at work, he found not one but three rainbow flags proudly displayed on the facilities. Little's lawsuit accuses the county of religious discrimination and requests compensation for the infliction of "severe emotional distress."

### Good week for:

**Duct tape**, after Boeing launched two NASA astronauts to the International Space Station aboard its new Starliner capsule, despite a "small" helium leak in the craft's propulsion system. Fixing the leak, said Boeing's **Mark Nappi**, would have been "quite involved."

**Evolution**, after British scientists found that within a minute of being fitted with an experimental robotic "third thumb," 98 percent of test subjects were able to successfully manipulate objects with it. The extra digit, researchers said, could "advance our motor capabilities beyond current biological limitations."

**Carnivores**, after a specially bred "supercow" sold for \$4 million at auction in Brazil, a record price for any bovine. At 2,400 pounds, **Viatina-19** is twice as heavy as an average adult of her breed.

### Bad week for:

**Expectations**, after a California man sued Madonna for exposing him to "pornography without warning" at her recent concert in Los Angeles. **Justen Lipeles** said he "was forced to watch topless women on stage simulating sex acts" and that, adding insult to injury, "Madonna was lip-syncing" for "most of the performance."

**Recidivism**, after Pope Francis allegedly told a group of young priests in a closed-door meeting that "gossip is a women's thing" and that men bear a special responsibility as "we wear the pants." Just days earlier, Francis had apologized for using a homophobic slur.

**Los Angeles**, after the Postal Service announced that the city was No. 1 in its annual "Dog Bite National Rankings." With 65 postal workers bitten in 2023, L.A. bumped Houston from the top spot.

### In other news

#### Chief justice backs Alito amid flag uproar

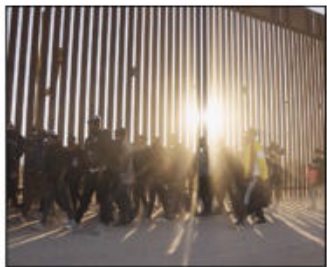
Chief Justice John Roberts rejected last week requests that Justice Samuel Alito recuse himself from Supreme Court cases connected to the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Following revelations that two flags embraced by election deniers had flown outside Alito's homes in Virginia and New Jersey, Democratic lawmakers questioned the ethics of the justice participating in cases related to Jan. 6. But Alito refused to recuse himself, saying his wife was responsible for the flags. In a letter to Democratic senators, Roberts noted that Alito had already addressed the recusal issue. Roberts also declined to meet with Democratic senators to discuss court ethics, arguing it could threaten the separation of powers. Sitting down with leaders of one party with an interest in matters before the court, he wrote, "would be inadvisable."



Troupis, Roman, and Chesebro

## Madison, Wis.

**Fake electors:** Wisconsin this week became the fifth state to prosecute allies of Donald Trump for their efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, following Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and Nevada. Three former Trump advisers were charged with felony forgery in connection with a fake-electors plot. Kenneth Chesebro, who allegedly devised the Trump campaign's scheme to have fake electors vote for Trump in key states that he lost, is one of the defendants. The plan, which Chesebro said in emails would create "a cloud of confusion," was designed to keep the House from certifying Joe Biden's victory. Chesebro also pleaded guilty last year to one election-linked felony in Georgia. Another defendant, former Trump director of Election Day operations Mike Roman, was charged in election interference cases in Georgia and Arizona. James Troupis, a lawyer, is the third defendant.



The Tucson Sector border

## Phoenix

**Border control:** State lawmakers this week approved a ballot measure that will ask voters to make it a crime for migrants to

cross Arizona's border with Mexico outside official entry ports. If approved by voters in November, local and state police could arrest border crossers, and state judges would decide whether to jail convicted migrants or return them to their country of origin. The measure mimics a Texas law passed last year, currently on hold as a federal appeals court decides its constitutionality. Arizona has struggled with a migrant influx; the Border Patrol encountered more migrants in the 262-mile Tucson Sector than in any other stretch of the border for five months in 2023. "The federal government has lost control," said Republican Rep. John Gillette. Democrats claimed the costs of enforcing the law will stress already underfunded law enforcement agencies. Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs said the measure would "bust the state's budget."

AP Twitter/Getty (4)

## Michigan

**Bird flu:** A third dairy worker tested positive for bird flu last week, raising concerns about how far the virus has spread since it was found in dairy cows in March. This was the second farmworker in Michigan known to have contracted the H5N1 virus, following a Texas farmworker diagnosed in April. The latest case was the first to include respiratory symptoms like a sore throat and cough, increasing the risk that the virus could be transmitted to other people. The two previous cases manifested as eye infections. At least 81 dairy herds in nine states are affected by the H5N1 outbreak, but only about 40 people nationwide have been tested. The Agriculture Department last week announced \$824 million in funding to help detect cases in poultry and livestock, while the Centers for Disease Control is preparing 4.8 million vaccine doses. The agency maintains that the risk to the general population is still low.



## Austin

**Ban upheld:** Texas' conservative-dominated Supreme Court last week rejected a challenge to a strict state abortion ban from over 20 women who said they were denied medically necessary abortions. The court ruled unanimously that the state's ban—which forbids abortion in all but life-threatening situations and emergencies posing "a serious risk of substantial impairment of a major bodily function"—could stand as is. The plaintiffs had sought to clarify what qualifies as medically necessary. Plaintiff Amanda Zurawski's water broke when she was just 18 weeks pregnant, putting her health at risk, but doctors refused to perform an abortion because the fetus still had cardiac activity, leading Zurawski to develop sepsis. This was the first lawsuit since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* that was filed by women who argued that their health or fertility was endangered by an abortion ban. Similar suits are pending in other states, including Idaho and Tennessee.

## New York City

### Transnational scam:

The chief financial officer of the right-wing *Epoch Times* was arrested and charged with money laundering this week. The Department of Justice accused Weidong "Bill" Guan of participating in a "transnational scheme" to launder \$67 million in fraudulently obtained funds between 2020 and 2024. Prosecutors said a team called "Make Money Online," managed by Guan, used cryptocurrency to buy debit cards loaded with fraudulently obtained money, including unemployment benefits. The money was then allegedly laundered through bank accounts opened with stolen personal information, before going to Guan and *The Epoch Times*. The paper is affiliated with Falun Gong, a spiritual movement repressed in China. Originally set up to counter Chinese propaganda, it has transformed into a much bigger right-wing news outlet. Guan pleaded not guilty to one count of conspiring to commit money laundering and two counts of bank fraud.



A business beyond news

## Washington, D.C.

**Viral feud:** In a contentious House hearing this week, Anthony Fauci, the immunologist who directed the government's Covid-19 response, sparred with GOP lawmakers and denied that he helped fund lab work that leaked the virus or that he covered up the virus' origin. He told the Republican-led House's Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic that it was "molecularly impossible" that the coronaviruses being researched at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology—work funded partly by grants from the U.S. National Institutes of Health—evolved into Covid-19. "It's just a virological fact." Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) accused Fauci of conducting "repulsive evil science" and recommended he be "tried for mass murder." Fauci said Greene's theory that he tried to cover up a lab leak by bribing scientists was "simply preposterous." He conceded, however, that it was "wrong" and "inappropriate" for his adviser, David Morens, to have suggested ways to skirt public-records laws.



Fauci



Pickton

**Port-Cartier, Quebec**

**Serial killer killed:** Canadian serial killer Robert Pickton died last week after a May 19 attack by a fellow inmate in a Quebec prison. Pickton, 74, was sentenced to life in 2007 for murdering six women, although he is believed to have killed many more. DNA from 33 women, most of them Indigenous, was found on his farm outside Vancouver, and a witness said Pickton claimed he had fed victims' body parts to his pigs. For years, people had alerted police that women, many of them sex workers and drug addicts, were going missing in Vancouver. An investigation concluded Pickton had been able to continue killing partly because of systemic bias against the Indigenous, who make up just 5 percent of Canada's population but 16 percent of its murdered women.

**Mannheim, Germany**

**Knife attack at anti-Islam rally:** A German police officer has died of injuries he sustained in a mass stabbing last week at a Mannheim rally of the anti-Islam group Pax Europa. Five anti-Islam activists were wounded, including the group's leader, and the officer was stabbed while trying to help a victim. The suspect was identified as Sulaiman Ataee, 25, an Afghan refugee who arrived as an unaccompanied minor in 2014; he was shot at the scene and hospitalized in critical condition. The attack has prompted calls, by politicians on both left and right, to change German law so that refugees from Syria or Afghanistan who commit crimes can be deported to their birth countries.



Flowers for slain officer



Honoring the veterans

**Caen, France**

**Remembering D-Day:** Parachutists jumped from three World War II-era C-47 transport planes this week to kick off events commemorating the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the Normandy beach invasion that turned the tide of the war in Europe. Two dozen world leaders,

including President Biden, traveled to France for the ceremonies. Some five dozen American veterans of World War II—average age 100, the youngest 96—also made the trip. Organizers said this might be the last of the major commemorations, held every five years, to be attended by D-Day veterans. “We realize we’re getting to the end of our time,” said Jack Foy, 99.

**Passau, Germany**

**Deadly floods:** More than a dozen cities in southern Germany declared states of emergency this week after a month's worth of rain fell in a single weekend, causing extensive flooding and mass evacuations. Two dams burst, releasing water from the Paar River that swamped entire neighborhoods, while a mudslide derailed a high-speed train. Three people were found dead in flooded basements, another drowned in her car, and a firefighter died trying to save a family trapped in their home.

Authorities sent thousands of emergency workers and 800 soldiers to rescue the stranded and to build emergency dams to keep larger rivers, including the Danube, from overflowing. “This is a warning,” said Chancellor Olaf Scholz, “that we must stop man-made climate change.”



Passau, submerged

**Port of Spain, Trinidad**

**Vlogger arrested:** Authorities in Trinidad and Tobago charged a Canadian extreme-travel YouTuber with sedition last week after he interviewed gang members opposed to the government. Christopher Hughes has attracted 326,000 subscribers to his vlog by traveling to what he calls the “most dangerous” places in the world, including neighborhoods in Haiti, Kenya, and the United States, and posting videos to his *Chris Must List* channel. Trinidadian authorities seized his laptop and passport and accused him of posting videos of armed gang members “advocating criminal activities.” If convicted, he could face up to five years in prison. His lawyer said Hughes was “simply exercising his constitutionally protected right to freedom of expression.” This wasn't his first brush with the law: Hughes was kicked out of Cuba for flying a spy drone, and out of Somalia for flinging money at poor people.



Hughes

**Porto Alegre, Brazil**

**Climate refugees:** Authorities said this week they may have to abandon entire towns in Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul state because of last month's flooding. Weeks after the rivers overflowed, killing at least 160 people and driving nearly 600,000 from their homes, many towns remain partly underwater or nearly flattened by mudslides. Thousands of people are expected to leave for good after the state's third major flood in a year—joining the ranks of what the World Bank warns will be more than 200 million climate refugees by 2050. Porto Alegre resident Silvia Tilton decided to relocate after returning to her sodden home to find fish rotting in her yard. “I can't live with this fear of water,” she told *The Washington Post*. The floods over the past year have also fueled an epidemic of mosquito-borne dengue fever that has now reached a record 5.5 million cases.

## Moscow

**Meddling in Paris Olympics:** Russia is trying to disrupt next month's Paris Summer Olympics by sowing disinformation, Microsoft's Threat Analysis Center warned this week. The propaganda campaign includes a fake documentary called *Olympics Has Fallen* that features an AI-generated voice impersonating actor Tom Cruise, as well as fake news reports claiming that terrorism fears have prompted Parisians to buy extra insurance and spectators to return Olympic tickets. Russian saboteurs are also suspected of being behind the placing at the Eiffel Tower of five coffins draped in French flags and inscribed "French soldiers in the Ukraine." One terrorism threat was real, though: French police last week arrested an 18-year-old Chechen man they said was plotting to attack a soccer stadium during the Games. Russia has been barred from this Olympics because of the Ukraine war.



*Fake documentary*

## Tel Aviv

**Renewed calls for Gaza deal:** Pressure was mounting on Israel to accept a Gaza cease-fire this week, after President Biden outlined a three-phase road map for a "durable end to the war" that he said had been proposed by Israel. In the first phase, Israel and Hamas would pause fighting for six weeks, and the militant group would free female, elderly, and wounded hostages in exchange for Israel's release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. The plan also calls for a surge in humanitarian aid to Gaza, where the war has killed some 36,000 Palestinians, displaced over a million, and caused widespread malnutrition. Hamas, whose Oct. 7 terrorist attack on Israel sparked the conflict, said it viewed the proposal "positively." But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Biden left out key details and insisted any permanent cease-fire was a "nonstarter" until Hamas is destroyed. Two far-right ministers threatened to bring down Netanyahu's government if he accepted the plan.

Many Israelis, though, want him to take the deal to free the hostages. Waving signs saying "Bring them home" and "Biden, save them from Netanyahu," more than 120,000 protesters in Tel Aviv called for a cease-fire and early elections. Some of the protesters lit a bonfire and clashed with police; 14 people were injured. A smaller, impromptu rally followed this week after the Israeli military confirmed that four more of the 124 hostages still being held by Hamas had died. The news proves that Israel's military campaign is not the way to bring the captives home alive, said Einav Zangauker, mother of hostage Matan Zangauker, 24. "We get them back dead," she said.



*Protest in Tel Aviv*

## Delhi

**Modi loses ground:** In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has secured a rare third five-year term, but his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to win an outright majority for the first time since he took power 10 years ago. Early results released this week showed the BJP taking about 240 seats out of 543, sharply down from the 303 it won last election and a far cry from its campaign slogan: "This time, 400-plus seats." Analysts said the result was a clear rebuke to Modi personally, who ran a campaign trumpeting Hindu supremacy that featured his face on billboards and ads everywhere. The BJP lost ground even in traditionally Hindu strongholds in the north, where the party's prediction of an easy win may have suppressed turnout. "The country has said to Narendra Modi, 'We don't want you,'" said opposition leader Rahul Gandhi of the Congress party.



*Modi: A modest win*

## Johannesburg

**ANC setback:** The African National Congress lost its parliamentary majority last week for the first time since taking power under Nelson Mandela at the end of apartheid in 1994. The ANC, facing criticism over widespread power outages and a housing crisis, took just 159 out of 400 National Assembly seats, down from 230 seats in the 2019 election. The pro-business, white-led Democratic Alliance came in second, with 87 seats. Its leaders said breaking ANC dominance in government was necessary to "rescue South Africa." The new uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party backed by Jacob Zuma—who turned against the ANC after it forced him to resign as South Africa's president in 2018 over corruption allegations—won 58 seats in an unexpectedly strong third-place showing. The new parliament must now not only form the first-ever coalition government but also decide the fate of President Cyril Ramaphosa, because the president is elected by the legislature.

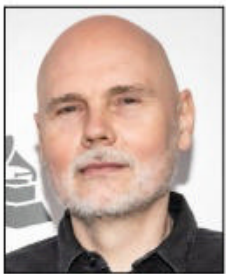


*Ramaphosa*

## Hodeida, Yemen

**U.S. hits back at Houthis:** American and British warplanes and ships hammered 13 Houthi rebel targets in Yemen last week, including by dropping a 5,000-pound U.S. bunker-buster bomb on an underground facility. The attack was aimed at taking out the missile launchers and command centers the Houthis have used in their months-long campaign of missile and drone attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The Houthis said the attacks killed 16 people and injured dozens, making them the deadliest yet, and that they would "meet escalation with escalation." They claimed to have retaliated with a direct hit on the U.S. aircraft carrier *Eisenhower*, but the Pentagon said that claim was false. The Iran-backed rebels have vowed to continue firing at vessels in the region until Israel ends its war in Gaza.

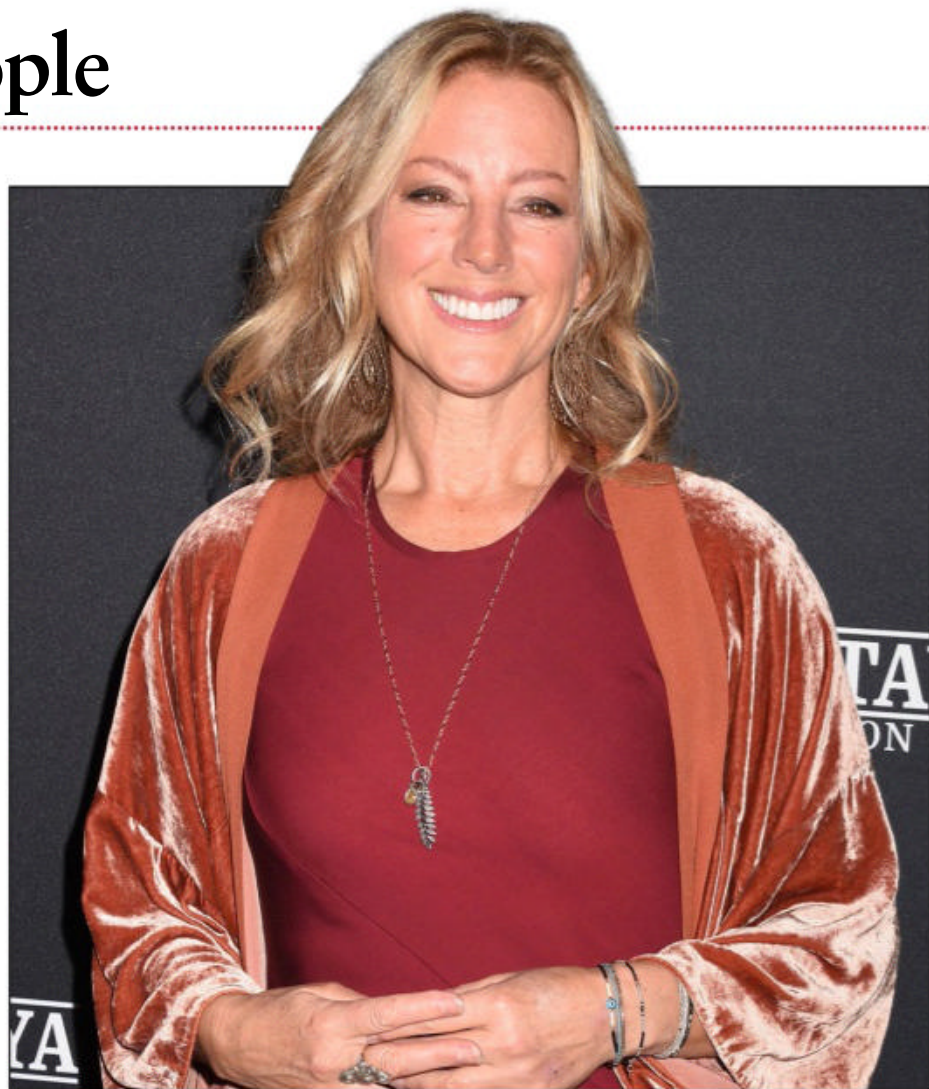
### How Corgan wrestled with depression



In 2017, Billy Corgan was an emotional wreck, said Ed Potton in *The Times* (U.K.). He'd gone from being the frontman of one of the world's biggest rock bands, the Smashing Pumpkins, to seeing his solo album, *Ogilala*, peak at No. 183 on the *Billboard* album chart. The experience had left him battling depression, OCD, and panic attacks. Two things helped him out: becoming a father and taking his therapist's advice. "My therapist used to say to me, 'The worst thing for you is to sit and ruminate; you have to stay busy,'" says Corgan, 57. So he got busy: He reformed most of the Pumpkins' original lineup, opened a tearoom outside Chicago—and bought and revived the cash-strapped National Wrestling Alliance. He'd loved wrestling since he was a boy, finding delight in the "simplicity of it, the morality play: 'You stole my girlfriend and I'm going to beat you up.'" Corgan's bandmates, he admits, are "befuddled" by his desire to hang out with wrestlers like Max the Impaler and Blake "Bulletproof" Troop. But wrestling, he says, provides a perfect counterpoint to the music business. "Wrestling's honesty is in its artifice, and music's dishonesty is in its pretense that it's not artifice. Music is mass psychosis. We pretend: 'Gee, guys, it's so nice to be in Cleveland.' Total malarkey. Everybody in music is a complete assassin."

### The loving insights of *Ghost*'s writer

For more than 50 years, Bruce Joel Rubin kept a secret from nearly everyone but his wife, said Ryan Gilbey in *The Guardian*. At 81, the screenwriter—who won an Oscar for the Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore blockbuster *Ghost* (1990)—has publicly outed himself as gay in a new memoir. "I am fully gay, and I always knew it," says Rubin, who also wrote *Jacob's Ladder* and *Deep Impact*. "I don't like that I was closeted for so long. But it would just have confused people." He met his wife, Blanche, in the late '60s and confessed all to her: that he was attracted to men but had enjoyed sex with women, and that he'd heard Jefferson Airplane singing "You better find somebody to love" and had taken it as a divine order. They married two years later, had two children, and briefly experimented with polyamory. "We had a conjoined relationship with a guy I liked in our ashram. She had a private moment with him, and so did I." He has no regrets about putting his sexuality to the side. "Being 'other' is what led me to be a writer. Finding yourself on the fringe of human experience is a gift rather than a torment. A movie like *Ghost* reached hundreds of millions of people, and it's my little hidden lifestyle that gave me a voice to speak to them."



### McLachlan's retreat from the spotlight

Music was a refuge for a young Sarah McLachlan, said Grayson Haver Currin in *The New York Times*. At school in Nova Scotia, she was teased for being a lesbian after friends found out she'd kissed another girl, even though she was practicing for a boy. "I became poison," says the singer-songwriter, 56. "There was physical abuse, too. I thought, 'I am on my own.'" Things were no better at home, where her mother projected desperate unhappiness onto her three adopted children, of which McLachlan was the youngest. "I didn't have a relationship with my father, because my mother wouldn't allow it. If I showed him any attention, she wouldn't speak to me for a week." A talented guitarist and pianist, she joined a rock band as a teenager and experienced an entirely new sensation at their first gig, playing at a student dance. "I was being seen, and I was being accepted. It was the first time I felt that way." McLachlan went on to achieve immense solo success, selling more than 40 million albums. But the more famous she became, the less she needed the validation of the spotlight, finding it instead in her children, dogs, and nonprofit music schools. McLachlan purposefully began receding from the spotlight and hasn't released an album of original material since 2014. "I'm a middle-aged woman. You kind of became invisible," she says, smiling. "And I really like that."

### In the news

■ At age 93, **Rupert Murdoch** is a newlywed once again. The media magnate married his fifth wife, 67-year-old **Elena Zhukova**, in an intimate ceremony at his Tuscan-style vineyard in the Bel Air neighborhood of Los Angeles last week. A Russian-born retired molecular biologist, Zhukova wore an off-the-shoulder white dress by designer Emilia Wickstead; Murdoch wore a dark suit paired with cushioned Hoka sneakers. Zhukova was previously married to Alexander Zhukov, a Russian oligarch who now lives in the U.K. Murdoch was most recently married to Jerry Hall; *Vanity Fair* reported that he ended the relationship by email, telling



the former supermodel "we have certainly had some good times, but I have much to do."

■ **Brad Pitt** is "aware and upset" that his eldest biological child with **Angelina Jolie** has dropped his last name, the *New York Post* reported this week. On her 18th birthday, Shiloh Jolie-Pitt submitted a petition in Los Angeles County Superior Court to change her name to Shiloh Jolie. She is the first of the former couple's six children to seek a legal name change, but several of her siblings have stopped going by "Pitt" in public. Younger sister Vivienne, 15, was last week listed as "Vivienne Jolie" in a playbill for the Broadway musical *The Outsiders*, which she helped her mother produce. And older sister Zahara, 19, last year introduced herself as "Zahara Marley Jolie" in a video posted by her college sorority. Jolie and Pitt separated in 2016 after an incident on a private jet in which Jolie alleges Pitt slapped one

of their kids, choked another, and poured beer and wine on all of them. Pitt denies the claims.

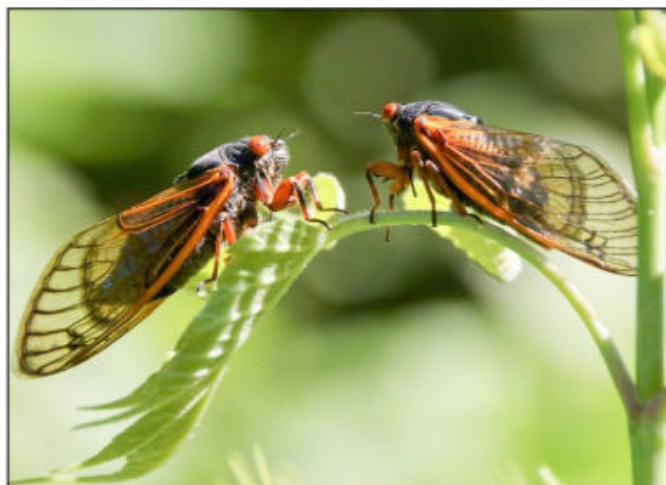
■ The WNBA's No. 1 draft pick, **Caitlin Clark** of the Indiana Fever, was roughed up on the court last week. In the third quarter of a tournament game, the Chicago Sky's Chennedy Carter gave Clark a hard shoulder check before an inbound pass. As Clark fell to the floor, Carter's teammate Angel Reese—Clark's longtime rival—stood and cheered from the sidelines. The WNBA hit Carter with an away-from-the-ball foul, then upgraded it to a flagrant one but didn't suspend or fine the player. After the Fever's 71-70 win, coach Christie Sides complained that the league was tolerating "unacceptable" fouls against her star player. "When will the consistent complaints be heard!?" she wrote on X. Clark shrugged off the foul, saying basketball is "a physical game" and that she wanted her "play do the talking."

# Here come the cicadas

*Trillions of the noisy insects are emerging from the ground this spring and summer in a rare, synchronized event.*

## Why so many bugs?

A vast swathe of the U.S. is now experiencing a natural phenomenon that occurs once every 221 years: the double emergence of two separate broods of periodical cicadas. These are not the usual annual cicadas, the mainstay of balmy summer nights, which live between two and nine years and can be found worldwide. The trillions of red-eyed, cacophonous insects now appearing live only in eastern North America. In the Midwest, there's Brood XIII, which has spent the past 17 years underground, slurping sap from tree roots, and is now crawling above ground to molt, sing, mate, and—after about four weeks—die. And in the South, there's Brood XIX, which has spent 13 years underground. Seventeen states stretching from Wisconsin to Louisiana and from Iowa to Maryland will be blanketed by the two broods, which made their last joint appearance in 1803. While some people may find the insects' chirping annoying, and their mounds of carcasses off-putting, researchers are excited. This emergence "really is one of the seven biological wonders of the world," said University of Connecticut entomologist John Cooley. "It's something that really nobody else in the world gets the privilege of seeing."



*The bugs will die after a month of singing and mating.*

## What is a brood?

It's a massive group of periodical cicadas that have timed their life cycles in unison. There are 15 broods in the U.S., each of which can contain multiple cicada species that all sing different songs. Brood XIII contains three separate species; Brood XIX has four. Scientists believe broods formed as an evolutionary survival strategy. Cicadas are slow and lack poison, a stinger, or any other defense mechanism, so simply turning out en masse means these protein-rich bugs can't be eaten into extinction by predators. "Birds everywhere will feast," said University of Maryland entomologist Mike Raupp, "and once again the cicadas will emerge triumphant." Some researchers speculate that by appearing every 13 or 17 years—both prime numbers—the cicadas stop predators from matching their life cycles and birthing lots of young during years of abundance. But others dismiss this idea, noting that when the bugs do emerge, the world—and cicada eaters—have long forgotten about their existence.

## How do they know when to emerge?

It's all to do with their diet. Cicada nymphs attach to roots and feed off a fluid called xylem. The flow and makeup of xylem changes predictably over the year, becoming richer in amino acids as a tree buds and blossoms. "We know that's what they count," said Georgetown University biologist Martha Weiss. But "where they're putting their little chalk marks on the wall, we don't know." When it's time to emerge, cicada nymphs wait until the temperature 8 inches underground hits 64 degrees Fahrenheit. The nymphs then burrow to the surface, latch on to trees or plants, and shed their exoskeletons. After four to six days as pastel-colored

"teneral" adults, their exteriors darken and harden, and the bugs get busy seeking mates. When that happens, 1 acre of land can host more than 1 million cicadas, about 2,700 pounds worth of bugs.

## Do all those bugs cause damage?

While cicadas are sometimes mistaken for locusts, they don't chew leaves or defoliate crops like their voracious insect cousins. Female cicadas drill slits in trees to lay their eggs—they use a metal-enhanced shaft in their abdomen to make the hole—but this threatens only the health of very young trees and shrubs, which can

be protected with netting. Any significant agricultural damage they inflict is secondary: With predators gorging themselves on cicadas, fewer caterpillars get gobbled. One study found that, during the 2021 emergence of Brood X in parts of the Midwest, the South, and Pennsylvania, caterpillar populations doubled, and oak trees experienced a surge in leaf damage. But for the entire ecosystem, periodical cicadas are a net plus. They aerate the soil when they emerge, and their decomposing bodies infuse it with nutrients. The only real threat they pose to humans is their assault on our eardrums: Some cicadas can make a noise reaching 120 decibels at close range, about as loud as a rock concert or a passing jet.

## Why are they so noisy?

That's how they attract mates. Males have a washboard-like structure on their abdomen called a tymbal, which they strum with their legs to produce anything from the harsh screeching of cassini cicadas, to the tambourine-like shick-shick-shick of the decula. Females respond to these fevered cries with a simple click of their wings. After mating, they lay clutches of up to 600 eggs in branches and die shortly afterward. When the eggs hatch, the infant insects drop to the ground and burrow down, waiting for their time to dig out. But scientists note that this multiyear cycle seems to be shifting, with periodical cicadas now emerging 10 to 14 days earlier than they did on average in 1940, and more "stragglers" surfacing without their brood.

## Sex, drugs, and killer fungus

In addition to hungry birds and mammals, cicadas are menaced by a unique, very gruesome STD. *Massospora cicadina*, a cicada-specific parasitical fungus, enters their bodies and swiftly starts generating spores. Eventually, spores burst out of its rear end, causing the cicada's genitals to fall off to reveal a chalky fungal plug, which contains a form of amphetamine. Despite lacking the equipment to mate, the zombified insect will try to hook up with as many other cicadas as possible. Eventually the plug disintegrates, and the disemboweled cicada rains down spores that infect others. "We call them saltshakers of death," said West Virginia University mycologist Matt Kasson. This fungus doesn't affect other species. Still, experts warn that, while healthy cicadas are fine for humans and pets to eat, it's best to exercise caution. If you find old, sickly-looking, or dead bugs, said Kasson, "you do not want to put those in your mouth."

## What's behind this change?

Researchers suspect global warming is messing with the bugs' time-counting mechanism. An unusually warm winter can cause trees to leaf early, which cicadas count as a year; if a cold spell causes trees to pause this process, then resume when spring arrives for real, the insects will count a second year. Some entomologists suspect warming temperatures could shift 17-year cicadas to a 13-year cycle, and 13-year cicadas to a nine-year. But many worry that climate change is happening so fast that species won't be able to evolve adaptations to keep up with it. Cicadas are "going to be handicapped in a very real sense" by their long life cycles, said John Lill, a biologist at George Washington University. "You can only evolve as fast as you can have new generations."

## Europe's terror of Trump

McKay Coppins  
*The Atlantic*

Throughout Europe, there's "a sense of alarm bordering on panic at the prospect of Donald Trump's re-election," said McKay Coppins. Russia's brutal war on Ukraine, which has entered its third year amid horrific losses of troops and civilians, has deeply unnerved NATO nations, which know that Trump intends to cut off aid and force Kyiv to accept "peace" terms dictated by his pal Vladimir Putin. Trump's disdain for traditional American allies has triggered a wave of "existential" fear—especially in countries that border Russia. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk is urging citizens "to prepare for a conflict" with Russia. Terrified Europeans have "a pathologically intense fixation on the U.S. presidential race," and can describe the swing states' impact on the Electoral College "in granular detail." European officials are struggling to understand how Americans could re-elect a man who incited an attack on the U.S. Capitol, has been indicted four times and already convicted once, and cozies up to Putin and other foreign autocrats. Europeans who grew up admiring America as "the vanquisher of tyrants, keeper of the democratic flame" are bewildered. Many say that if the U.S. puts Trump back in power, "We will never trust you again."

## Protecting the NRA's speech rights

Billy Binion  
*Reason*

"No matter how much you dislike" the National Rifle Association, said Billy Binion, its resounding Supreme Court victory last week is indisputably "good for free speech." In a 9-0 decision, the Supreme Court found a New York state official had infringed on the NRA's free speech rights. In 2018, Maria Vullo, who then led New York state's Department of Financial Services, allegedly warned banks and insurers that she would more stringently enforce regulations on those that did business with the NRA. She and then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo jointly urged companies to sever relations with the gun group. This, all nine justices agreed, clearly "crossed the line from persuasion into coercion." Rightly so: It would be hard to find "a more obvious violation of the Constitution than the weaponization of government power to cripple advocacy disfavored by the state." The NRA's relentless opposition to all gun laws makes it "one of the more polarizing lobbying organizations in the country." But the First Amendment protects the speech of groups or individuals others find repugnant. That's why the American Civil Liberties Union chose to represent the NRA. Even in our polarized age, "some things, like the First Amendment, really aren't partisan."

## A cynical calculation by billionaires

Timothy Noah  
*The New Republic*

"For the billionaire donor class," this election is about one thing, said Timothy Noah: "Keeping rich people's taxes low." Wall Street billionaires like JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, Blackstone Group CEO Stephen Schwarzman, and investor Nelson Peltz condemned Donald Trump after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, while hedge fund manager Kenneth Griffin called the former president a "three-time loser" after the 2022 midterms. Yet "all four sing a different tune today." They claim to support Trump because of inflation (which has dropped to 3.4 percent), the immigration crisis, or rising antisemitism on the Left, "but they're all full of it." These plutocrats are actually "drifting back to Trump" because "they want to keep the tax cuts" he gave them in 2017, which are due to expire in December 2025. President Biden plans to let the cuts for the wealthy and corporations run out, keeping them only for Americans earning under \$400,000. Trump's plan to extend them would increase the budget deficit by \$4 trillion over a decade—which, along with his promised steep tariffs, would be highly inflationary. Nonetheless, they're "holding their noses and rallying around Trump" simply because he'll "make them richer."

### It must be true... I read it in the tabloids

■ More than 8,000 pieces of fossilized feces from dinosaurs and other creatures are now on display at the Poozeum in Williams, Ariz. Museum owner and curator George Frandsen said that "many people react with a 'yuck' face or laughter" when they hear about his displays, "but after witnessing the collection, their reactions often shift to shock at the diverse and intriguing nature of coprolites." The largest poop on display, measuring 26.6 inches by 6.2 inches, likely came from a *Tyrannosaurus rex*.



■ Mexico's federal archaeology agency has accused the city of Guanajuato of mishandling its famed collection of mummified bodies after an arm fell off one of the preserved corpses. The National Institute of Anthropology and History said the arm came off during renovations at a museum where about 100 preserved 19th-century bodies are on permanent display. The institute cited a "lack of knowledge about proper protocols" and said the renovation work "resulted in damages, not only to this body."

■ When the owner of a Russian supermarket chain announced that he'd pay a million rubles (around \$11,255) to anyone who could prove they'd gotten food poisoning from his products, it set off a stampede of people who hoped to be afflicted—with several customers licking eggshells in the store in search of salmonella germs. Ivan Zaichenko made the reward offer to dispute claims by 18 people that they had been poisoned by food from his Zhiznmart stores. Zaichenko called the customers seeking food poisoning "completely idiotic," and said that only the first 18 were eligible for the payment. "Please do not lick the eggs," he added.

### Viewpoint

"Public frustration [over the economy] seems to build on a sense that the system is 'rigged' against the average person. In 2022, the income share of the richest 1 percent topped 20 percent for the first time since the 1940s. There is a deep sense that America is increasingly dominated by a wealthy elite. They set the rules in Washington and own the preponderant share of stocks, bonds, and assets of all kinds. The flaws of capitalism in its current, twisted form are real. Better 'messaging' won't whisper the resulting frustrations away."

Ruchir Sharma in the *Financial Times*



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## Mexico: Will new president be a puppet of AMLO?

Claudia Sheinbaum's election as Mexico's president this week is grounds for "a double, albeit cautious, celebration," said Jorge Volpi in *El País* (Spain). The former Mexico City mayor is many firsts: the first president to be a woman, the first to be Jewish, the first to be a climate scientist. Perhaps more important, though, her victory marks an end to "one of the harshest and most contradictory governments in recent decades"—that of her mentor and fellow Morena party member Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known as AMLO. But will she succeed where he failed? I have only "modest optimism" at best. Mexico under AMLO has become one enormous cemetery—over his six-year term, more than 200,000 people were killed, and the country is littered with mass graves. At the same time, in an effort to combat cartel violence, AMLO presided over a vast expansion of military power that led to wide human rights abuses. That makes Sheinbaum's task formidable. If she can't rein in the military while combating the cartels, she "won't be able to prevent the country from falling apart in her hands."

Yet voters chose her in a landslide specifically to continue AMLO's leftist policies, said Viri Rios in *Milenio* (Mexico). Sheinbaum, 61, took 60 percent of the vote, the highest in our democratic history, and Morena also swept most state governorships and nearly took two-thirds of congressional seats. Clearly, "in the opinion of an overwhelming majority, the country is on a better path now than it was before" López Obrador. The opposition claims



López Obrador with Sheinbaum

that he eroded democracy and used his state power to put a thumb on the electoral scale. Yet they must recognize that "if you want to 'save liberal democracy' you cannot continue" ignoring the will of the impoverished majority. AMLO's motto was "For the good of all, first the poor"—and it's still a winning message. But that leaves Sheinbaum as little more than a figurehead, said Raymundo Riva Palacio in *El Financiero* (Mexico). While AMLO was limited by law to one term, this was essentially his second victory, secured by "delivering massive amounts of money to buy votes" and the loyalty of Morena governors and lawmakers. For the new president, "any hint of patricide would be a political error."

Yet only if she can "break with her predecessor" can Sheinbaum save Mexico—and spare the U.S. the nightmare of a failed state on its doorstep, said *The Economist* (U.K.). She must abandon López Obrador's "permissive stance toward gangs," which allowed the cartels to not only terrorize Mexicans but also smuggle vast quantities of fentanyl and migrants across the U.S. border. On trade, she must stop allowing Chinese companies to move to Mexico specifically to bypass U.S. tariffs. And finally, she must reverse AMLO's "assault on democracy" by restoring the independence of judges and electoral officials. It's a daunting "to-do list," and it's far from clear Sheinbaum is up to it. She has been an AMLO protégée her whole career, and even if she wanted to buck his authority, would the "obsessive, egomaniacal" ex-president let her? "A huge test lies ahead," for Sheinbaum and for Mexico.

### SOUTH AFRICA

## Don't invite the whites into a coalition

Junior Lebesa  
*IOL.co.za*

South Africa is in danger of taking a "bone-chillingly racist" step backward, said Junior Lebesa. The African National Congress Party, the leader in the struggle against apartheid, lost its parliamentary majority this week for the first time since democratic elections began in 1994. Now it is holding "backdoor negotiations" to form a coalition not with other Black parties but with the white-dominated Democratic Alliance (DA). The deal would let the DA, which took just over 20 percent of the vote, effectively "run the national assembly," while the executive branch would be in the ANC's hands. This is a transparent scheme to box out

uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the party of former President Jacob Zuma, which took an unexpectedly strong 14 percent. The white mainstream media is cheerleading for this coalition, saying the presence of Zuma—a Zulu nationalist who left the presidency in 2018 under a cloud of corruption allegations—would scare off foreign investors. But "any self-respecting Black person" should reject that "racist subtext," which implies that "Blacks need white supervision" to govern responsibly. Bringing the DA into government would give the most racist whites "what they have always wanted": a return to minority rule, this time under the guise of democracy.

### PHILIPPINES

## Treat divorce as a human rights issue

Mel Sta Maria  
*Rappler*

When will Filipinos finally legalize divorce? asked Mel Sta Maria. Besides Vatican City, the Philippines is the only country in the world with no legal remedy for those trapped in "loveless marriages." Many assume that divorce is unconstitutional because our 1987 constitution calls marriage an "inviolable social institution," but the drafter of that provision was explicitly asked whether he meant to bar divorce and he says he did not: All it would take is a simple act of Congress. The lower house of Congress passed a bill to legalize divorce last month, but it has little chance in the Senate—which has also killed every other divorce liberalization

effort brought over the past 40 years. Opponents of divorce cling to tradition, saying the "majority of Filipinos, being Catholics, do not believe in divorce." And it's true that the most recent polls show 51 percent against legalization and just 41 percent in favor. But in human rights issues, the majority opinion isn't necessarily the fair or correct one—just look at Jim Crow segregation in the U.S., or "any of the many civil rights struggles around the world." While most Filipino couples are perfectly happy, the few who aren't should not be forced to live like spiteful roommates. It's time for us to join the rest of the world and "let failed marriages die."

## FRANCE

### Forcing people to choose death

**Damien Le Guay**  
*Atlantico*

The debate around the right to die in France has become unhinged, said Damien Le Guay. The administration of President Emmanuel Macron introduced legislation in March that would allow terminally ill patients to end their lives under certain conditions. It was a limited, humane proposal—but now overzealous lawmakers are stretching it beyond recognition. Scrapping strict criteria like “terminal illness” and “end of life,” the new language would extend euthanasia to those with any incurable condition in an advanced stage. Many cancers and neurodegenerative diseases are incurable, as are some mental illnesses. Should we,

as a compassionate society, really be offering assisted suicide to a 19-year-old woman petrified by a cancer diagnosis, when treatment could extend her life by years? Most frightening is a new provision making it a crime to “obstruct assisted dying,” which could send to jail anyone who hinders the death of a qualifying patient. What about informing them of other options? “Is it ‘hindering’ to grab someone who’s about to throw themselves off a bridge?” Assisted death without limits can easily slip into an inhumane disregard for sick people, who may feel pressure to end their lives rather than accept the palliative care they deserve.

## GERMANY

### Blind to our casual xenophobia

**Gilda Sahebi**  
*Die Tageszeitung*

It’s easy to disavow racism when it’s being spewed by people you already despise, said Gilda Sahebi. That’s why all of Germany has loudly professed to be shocked and disgusted by the recent video of rich kids on the party island of Sylt chanting “Germany for Germans, foreigners out” and giving the Nazi salute. Even our most notoriously xenophobic journalist, Julian Reichelt, said they should be ashamed of themselves. It was a repugnant display, to be sure, but those guys are easy to hate—they’re “drunken spoiled brats” flashing “gold jewelry and expensive sunglasses.” The truth is, their bigotry is not as far out of the mainstream as we like to pretend. In a watered-down form, it

has even permeated the major parties. The center-right Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union parliamentary bloc, for example, has proposed that people with dual citizenship should be stripped of their German passports if they commit certain crimes. That would create a “legal distinction between ‘real’ Germans and ‘not real’ Germans.” Isn’t that just another way of saying, “Germany for the Germans, foreigners out”? Yet “nobody calls it disgusting or demands that people speak up” to denounce CDU/CSU leaders. Anti-immigrant sentiment has become so normalized that we hardly notice it—unless, that is, the perpetrators “drive a Porsche.”

## How they see us: Running a felon for president

“It turns out that what lay beyond America’s uncharted waters was some more uncharted waters,” said Marina Hyde in *The Guardian* (U.K.). In a wild ride over the last eight years, Donald Trump has become the country’s first president to come from reality TV, the first to refuse to concede an election, the first to lead an insurrection, and now the first convicted of a crime. “Forgive me: 34 crimes.” In most Western democracies, a felony conviction would be disqualifying in the eyes of voters, if not in the letter of the law. But in the U.S., it might boost Trump’s chances of winning in November—immediately after the verdict, polls showed his odds above 50 percent for the first time. What has become of America? Have Trump’s years of lying, badgering, conniving, and conspiracy theorizing so degraded political debate and public life that half of Americans can actually see him as a “political prisoner” and democracy itself as their enemy? After the Manhattan jury handed down its verdict, Trump’s “ghastly strongman son Donald Jr.” declared that the U.S. had become “a third-world shithole.” To which the rest of the world can only respond: “You said it, mate.”

That the Republicans won’t drop Trump as a candidate speaks to the “moral and ethical degeneration” of the party, said Piotr Smolar in *Le Monde* (France). Since 2015, and even more intensely since the insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, the GOP has become a cult of personality, filled with sycophants who worship at the altar of MAGA. Trump was impeached for inciting the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol, but he wasn’t convicted, be-



*Trump fans: Standing by their man*

cause Senate Republicans stood by him. It was a shocking display of partisanship over patriotism. “Not being able to agree on the seriousness and reality of a coup attempt” is simply “discrediting” for any party. And now, in the wake of Trump’s conviction, it’s become Republican orthodoxy to dismiss the entire U.S. justice system as corrupt and “rigged.” Don’t just blame the Republican Party, said Karl Doemens in *Redaktions Netzwerk Deutschland* (Germany). “Trump should have been behind bars long ago,” and it’s an indictment of all American political institutions—and especially American voters, who continue to support him—that he is still a viable candidate. The guardrails have utterly failed to prevent “the law-breaker and would-be autocrat from taking over.”

The thing is, Trump is not wrong when he whines that he’s “been the target of a conspiracy to deny him office,” said Tim Stanley in *The Telegraph* (U.K.). Democrats, fearing their “zombie” candidate Joe Biden couldn’t win, turned to the courts to try to eliminate Trump, attacking him with four separate indictments. The one resulting in last week’s conviction, the hush-money case, “should never have been brought” at all; falsifying business records isn’t election interference. Now that the verdict is in, the November election has become “a referendum on whether Trump should go to prison or the White House.” If Trump wins, “America gets a president with a rap sheet,” a national humiliation. If he loses, he will claim victory anyway and there will surely be violence. “Whatever the outcome, America will lose.”

## Trump trial: Why he lost and what comes next

Donald Trump will go down in history as the first former president to be convicted of a felony, said trial lawyer **Renato Mariotti** in *The New York Times*. But his New York trial “didn’t have to end this way.” Facing charges that Trump falsified business records to hide a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 election, a smart defense team could have won Trump a hung jury or misdemeanor conviction. To do so, they had to offer jurors a clear and compelling narrative spelling out why they should acquit. The defense could have argued, for example, that Trump couldn’t have played a part in creating the records after the election because he was too busy in his new job as president. Instead, the defense adopted “an ill-advised strategy right out of Trump’s playbook”: fight everyone and deny everything. His attorneys ludicrously denied that Trump had a one-night stand with Daniels in 2006 and aggressively attacked her on the stand, succeeding only in making her more sympathetic to the jury. There was an obvious path to victory, said **Ankush Khadori** in *Politico*: zero in on former Trump fixer Michael Cohen. A serial liar convicted of fraud and perjury, the prosecution’s linchpin witness was “a defense lawyer’s dream.” But the key point that Trump’s team needed to drive home—that Cohen’s claims about Trump overseeing Daniels’ payoff were uncorroborated and untrustworthy—was lost amid the bluster.



Guilty on all 34 counts

a liberal prosecutor in a deep-blue city who boasted while campaigning of having sued Trump repeatedly. His office almost never pursues cases where falsifying business records is the only charge. But to take down his enemy, he concocted “bizarre” charges that “push the outer boundaries of law and due process.” All that’s true, said **Jonah Goldberg** in *The Dispatch*, but I won’t shed any tears for Trump. His whole life has been an exercise in “violating and abusing the rules—some legal, some moral, some normative—for his own benefit.”

The verdict “is wrong,” but the karmic justice is undeniable.

Trump plans to appeal, and some experts “think he has a decent chance of reversal,” said **Erica Orden** and **Ben Feuerherd** in *Politico*. His attorneys could challenge the legal theory Bragg used to transform the misdemeanor counts into felonies. They could argue that Judge Juan Merchan wrongly allowed “prejudicial” testimony from Daniels, who provided a lurid account of their tryst. And his lawyers can question whether Merchan—who donated \$35 to Democrats in 2020—should have recused himself. The appeals process “could take years to unfold,” said **Melissa Quinn** in *CBSNews.com*. If Trump loses the first appeal, he can petition New York’s top appeals court; should he strike out there, Trump could attempt to take his case to the Supreme Court.

Trump’s conviction on all 34 felony counts was a “full-blown victory” for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, said **Sam Levine** in *The Guardian*. Bragg had been criticized “for using a novel legal strategy” to prosecute Trump. Falsifying business records is only a misdemeanor in New York. To boost it to a felony, Bragg had to show Trump “did it with the intent to commit another crime.” That crime, the DA argued, was the violation of an obscure state law that prohibits groups from using “unlawful means” to influence an election. His prosecutors offered “a range of what the ‘unlawful means’ were, including violating campaign finance and tax laws.” It was an ambitious effort, but Bragg and his team “transformed a complex legal case” into one “that was easy for jurors to understand”: that Trump lied to keep a bad story from coming to light and hurting his election chances.

Just because Bragg won doesn’t make his critics wrong, said **Elie Honig** in *New York* magazine. “This case was an ill-conceived, unjustified mess” that never should have been brought. Bragg is

For now, the former president’s fate is in the hands of a judge he’s repeatedly slammed as “corrupt” and “incompetent,” said **Dareh Gregorian** and **Adam Reiss** in *NBCNews.com*. The 34 counts are punishable by probation, a fine of up to \$5,000 each, or up to four years in prison for each. Many experts say prison time is unlikely given Trump’s age, 77, lack of a criminal record, and the nature of the offense. But Merchan can take into account Trump’s attacks on him and repeat violation of gag orders during the trial. And the judge is known for giving white-collar offenders harsh sentences, said veteran defense attorney Ron Kuby, who believes it’s “substantially likely” Trump will draw a prison sentence. Still, any sentence would be on hold pending appeals, and a second presidential term if he wins in November. Merchan “has a devil of a dilemma,” said **Jesse Wegman** in *The New York Times*. I can’t predict what he’ll do, but I can say with confidence that “in a healthy country” we wouldn’t be having this conversation about a front-running presidential candidate. But that’s where American now stands. “That this candidate may yet prevail in November is the biggest predicament of all.”

### Noted

■ Nine people serving as witnesses in criminal cases against Donald Trump have received financial benefits from Trump’s businesses or campaign committees. They include campaign aide Boris Epshteyn, whose average monthly pay doubled to \$53,500 after Trump was charged with conspiring to overturn the 2020 election. Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg, meanwhile, received a \$2 million severance package last year that barred him from voluntarily cooperating with law enforcement. *ProPublica*

■ To protect against attacks by Ukrainian drones, the Russian military has begun deploy-

ing so-called turtle tanks to the battlefield: armored vehicles retrofitted with shell-like casings made of corrugated metal. The extra armor can deflect some drone strikes, but also slows the tank and stops the vehicle from rotating its turret. *The Economist*

■ Excessive heat was listed as a factor on the death certificates of more than 2,300 people last year, the highest number in 45 years of



records. Public-health experts say that figure is a fraction of the real death toll. Last summer was the hottest on record; a third of the deaths occurred in Arizona, which endured 73 days with temperatures above 100 degrees. *Associated Press*

■ The Republican National Committee and other GOP-linked groups have already filed dozens of lawsuits in 25 states related to the November election. Some seek to prevent states from counting mail-in ballots that are missing a date; others challenge the accuracy of states’ voter registration lists. *Axios*

## Baseball: Seeking to rectify its record books

Josh Gibson was the greatest hitter in Negro League history, said **Gene Seymour** in *CNN.com*, and now, 77 years after his death, the slug-ging catcher finally gets a chance to become “a household name.” Gibson became baseball’s all-time batting champion last week, after Major League Baseball sought to correct what it called a “longtime oversight” by incorporating Negro League statistics into its official record books. Dubbed the “Black Babe Ruth,” Gibson compiled a lifetime average of .372 while playing for the Homestead Grays and other teams in the racially segregated 1930s and ’40s, placing him ahead of Ty Cobb’s .367 average. For the past three years, a 17-member panel vetted thousands of Negro League box scores to compile the new data for MLB’s revered record books. Belatedly, baseball is now seeking to give proper recognition to legendary Black players such as Gibson, Satchel Paige, Buck Leonard, and Cool Papa Bell, whose achievements were unfairly excluded. “If there’s an article of faith that the Church of Baseball holds more dearly than any other, it’s fairness.”



Gibson: Highest batting average

Yes, these were great players, said **Michael Sterk** in *Barstool Sports*. But “we can only hypothesize”

what their stats would have been had baseball not been segregated. It’s absurd to create an artificial “new world” in which Black players were not excluded. The “simple truth” is that the two leagues were not equivalent, said **Colin Fleming** in *The Baltimore Sun*. Negro League seasons were much shorter, and the average level of competition was not the same. Gibson had just 838 verified lifetime hits, compared with 4,191 for Cobb, and is now credited for the highest single-season batting average of .466 in just 157 at-bats in 1945. “No one hits .466, except a kid in Little League.”

Negro League statistics don’t need any asterisks, said **Kevin B. Blackstone** in *The Washington Post*, unless you want to put asterisks on all baseball records. “All of them—Babe Ruth’s home runs, Ty Cobb’s hits, Walter Johnson’s strikeouts—took place in their own racial vacuum.” White players who never had to face the pitching of Paige or the slugging of Gibson in their primes should face the same skepticism as Black stars of that era. “The Negro Leagues were never less than major,” and the whites-only major leagues “were not as major as we’ve mythologized them to be.”

## Ukraine: Biden’s costly indecision

In Ukraine, “the cost of delay and indecision is measured in lives,” said **Jim Geraghty** in *National Review*. That’s why it’s inexcusable that President Biden waited until last week to rescind his ban on using U.S. weapons to strike inside Russian territory. Moscow has exploited this rule in its monthlong assault on the Kharkiv region, which has combined a ground incursion with impossible-to-intercept glide bombs launched from inside Russia, at least 24 miles away. Now the Biden administration is ludicrously congratulating itself for its “lightning speed” in acting 17 days after Ukraine again came begging for permission to hit Russian airfields and other targets; while the indecisive Biden fiddled, Russia proceeded to “bomb the bejeezus out of Ukraine’s second-largest city.” Even worse, the policy change applies only to military targets near the Kharkiv front, not oil refineries, and only to shorter-range HIMARS rockets and not longer-range ATACMS missiles.

Biden is stuck in “a bad pattern,” said **Andreas Kluth** in *Bloomberg*. Since the war began, he has repeatedly denied Ukraine’s desperate pleas for the advanced weapons it needs—until conditions forced his hand. Biden is “being driven by events rather than driving them.” Why? He’s been

spooked by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s repeated threats to use nuclear weapons if the West crosses his “red lines.” But Putin is bluffing; he knows the U.S. and NATO would respond to Russia’s use of a battlefield nuke with “overwhelming” conventional forces that would destroy Russia’s army in Ukraine. Still, what’s the end-game? asked **Samuel Charap** and **Jeremy Shapiro** in *The Washington Post*. Continual, reactive escalations of Western military aid “won’t end the war” and could prolong the bloodshed for years. With Ukraine critically short of manpower and armaments, everyone must accept that peace will come only “at the negotiating table.”

True, but not now, said **Rajan Menon** in *Foreign Policy*. Huge new tranches of Western aid “have just started reaching the front,” and we don’t know yet what difference they’ll make. Russia’s recent gains are fragile. Russia has suffered an estimated 450,000 casualties, and Ukraine has also damaged or destroyed a third of Russia’s Black Sea fleet. Eventually, Ukraine may have to accept painful losses of territory in return for an end to the fighting. But “now is not the time to negotiate”—instead, the U.S. must help Ukraine “boost its bargaining power.”

## Wit & Wisdom

“Either the United States will destroy ignorance or ignorance will destroy the United States.”

**W.E.B. Du Bois**, quoted in *The New York Times*

“A liberal is a conservative who has been arrested.”

**Tom Wolfe**, quoted in *Politico*

“No one comes from the earth like grass. We come like trees. We all have roots.”

**Maya Angelou**, quoted in *Good Housekeeping*

“We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.”

**W. B. Yeats**, quoted in *The Dispatch*

“That’s not a chip on my shoulder. That’s your foot on my neck.”

**Malcolm X**, quoted in *The New Arab*

“The quickest way to become a millionaire in the airline business is to start out as a billionaire.”

**Richard Branson**, quoted in *Forbes*

“All of us invent ourselves. Some of us just have more imagination than others.”

**Cher**, quoted in *Time*

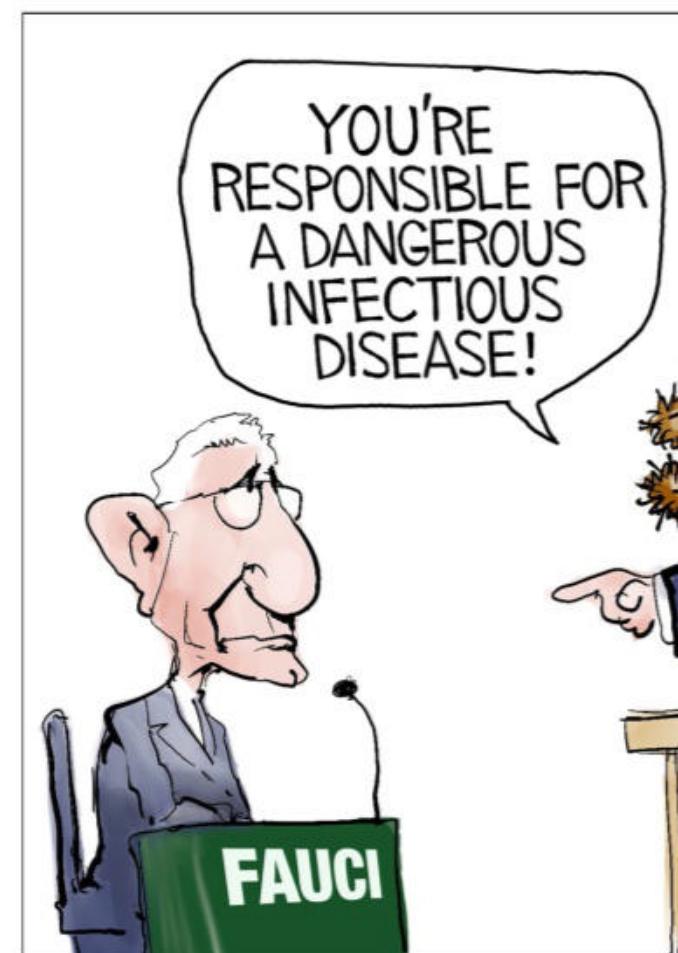
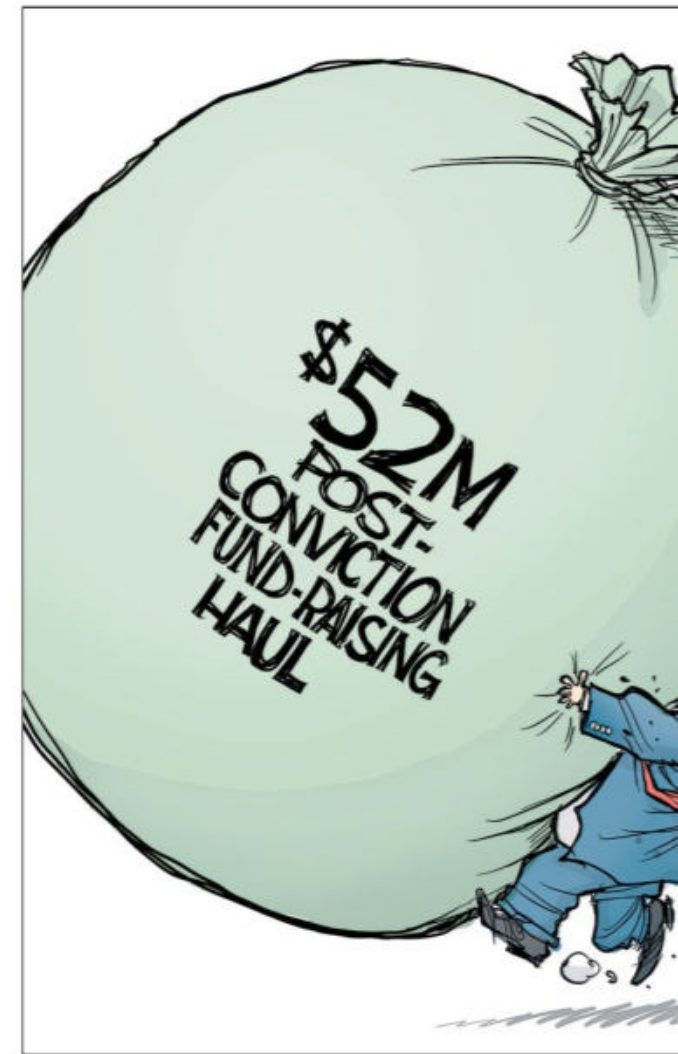
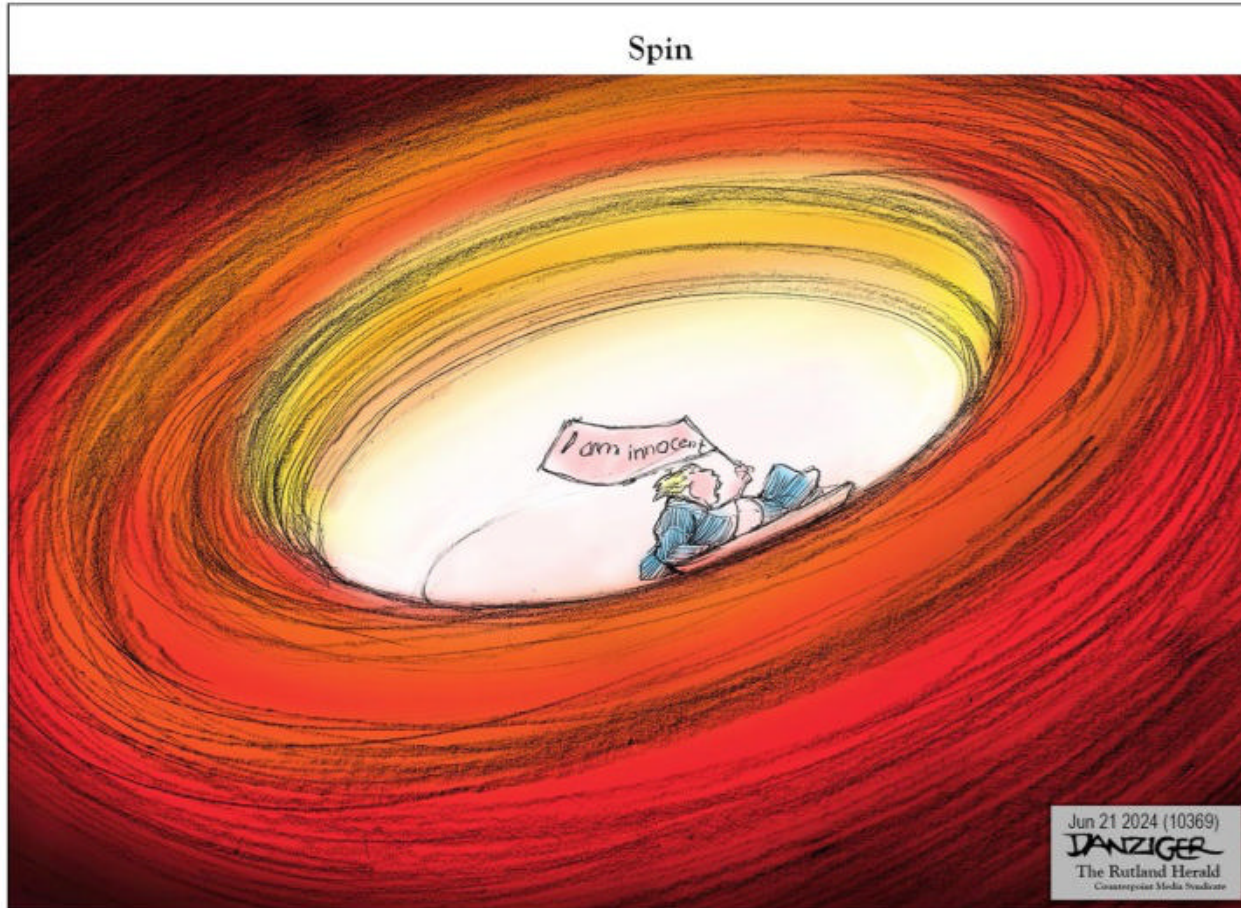
## Poll watch

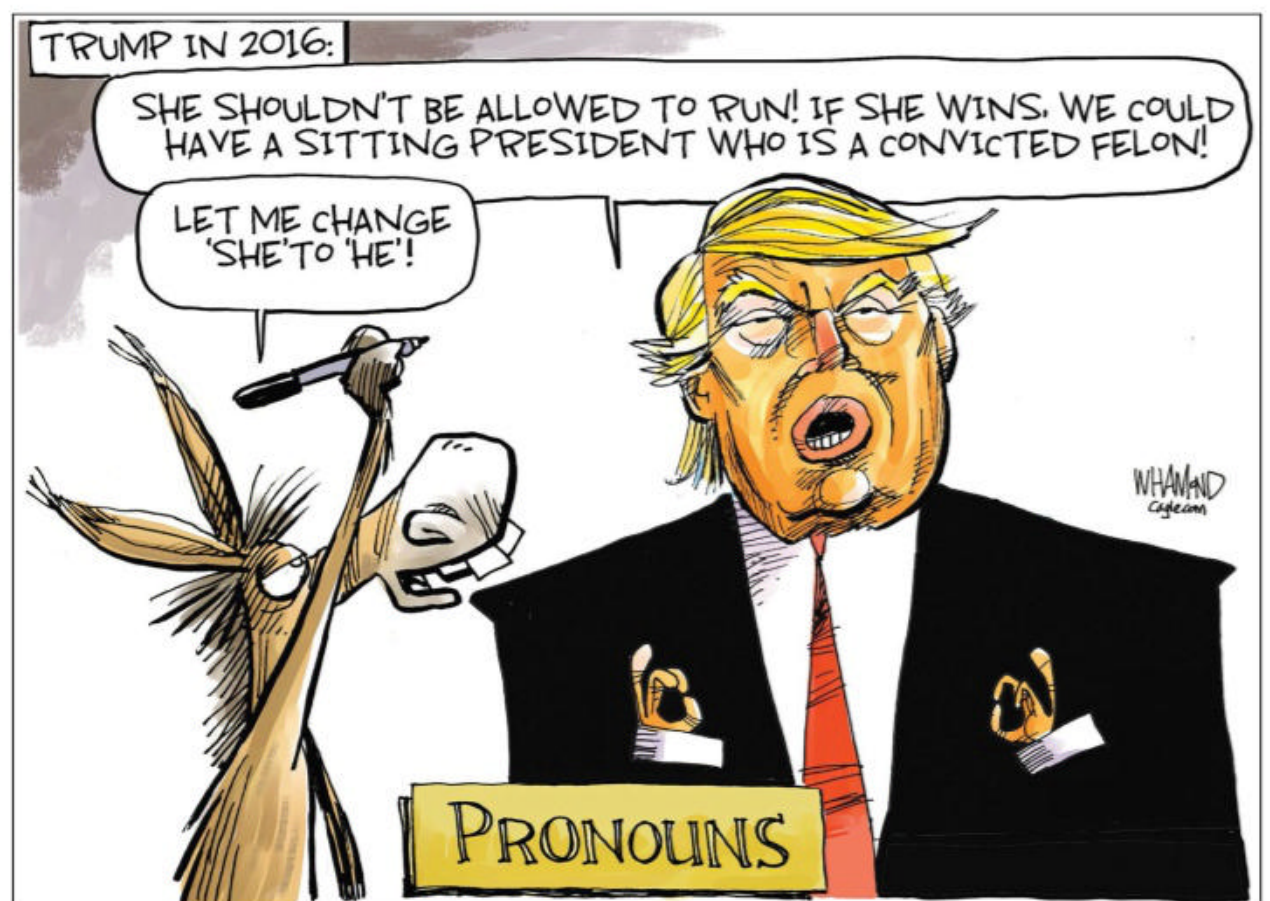
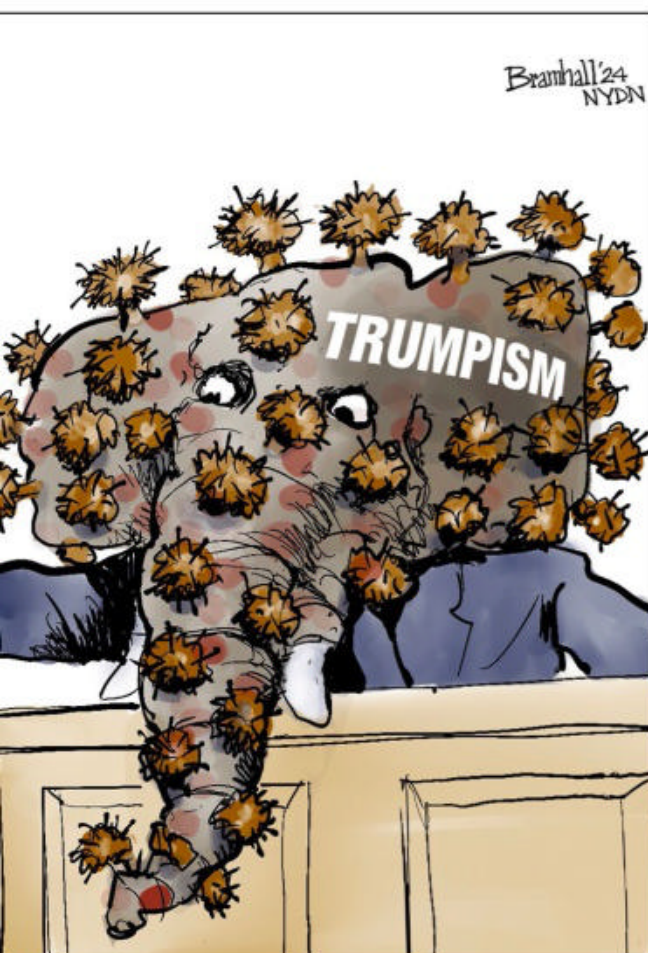
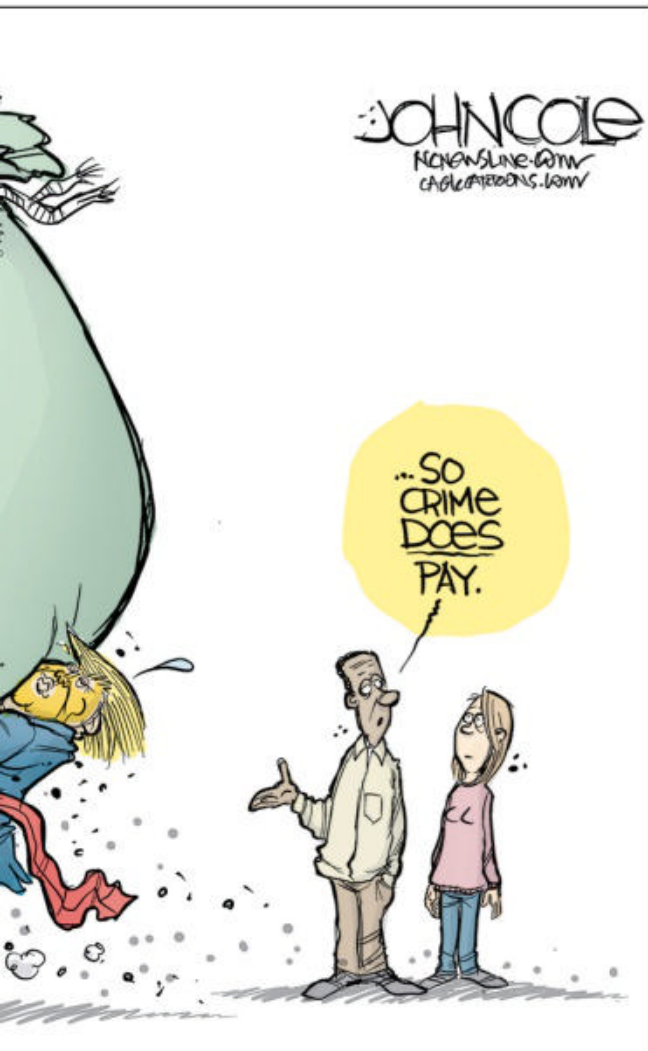
■ Only **24%** of those ages 18 to 29 approve of the job President Biden is doing, and **62%** have an unfavorable view of him. **49%** view Donald Trump positively, the highest among any age group. Young voters unhappy with Biden cite the cost of living, immigration, and his age.

NPR/PBS News Hour/Marist

■ Globally, **17%** of Generation Z (born between 1996 and 2012) identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, or gender-fluid, compared with **11%** of Millennials (1980–1995), **6%** of Generation X (1966–1979), and **5%** of Baby Boomers (1945–1965).

Ipsos





## Right shift: Musk opens tech's door to Trump

A cultural shift in Silicon Valley has Democrats on edge, said Alex Rogers and Hannah Murphy in the *Financial Times*. Influential tech leaders have grown increasingly “critical of President Biden, with some considering switching allegiance” to Donald Trump. This week, two Silicon Valley billionaires, David Sacks and Chamath Palihapitiya, hosted a fundraiser for Trump in San Francisco costing \$50,000 per attendee—or \$300,000 with VIP seating and “a photo with the ex-president.” Jacob Helberg, a senior Palantir executive who donated to Biden in 2020, recently announced a \$1 million donation for Trump, citing his “border policies and pro-Israel stance.” But the most vocal Biden critic has been Elon Musk, who “previously supported Biden, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama” but has since begun to “mirror Trump’s talking points” on social media. Musk hasn’t said he will vote for Trump, but he “held an anti-Biden dinner in Hollywood” in April.

Trump is embracing Musk’s rightward turn, said Emily Glazer in *The Wall Street Journal*, and the two have even “discussed a possible advisory role for the Tesla leader” in the White House. They now “talk on the phone several times a month,” and Musk’s social platform, X, will host a live Trump town hall to garner support for the Republican candidate. Rather than write checks, Musk seems more willing to organize “salon-style gatherings”



Musk says he’s battling a ‘woke mind virus.’

with other powerful businessmen, where they can rage against the “woke mind virus.” Musk’s always been an independent thinker, but his tiptoeing into politics makes him “the most important business player” in November’s elections and beyond, said Zachary Basu in *Axios*. He has his own massive social media platform, unlimited personal wealth, and “the power to sway or repel” legions of voters. And right now, he has “Trump’s open and willing ear.”

What’s not clear is whether Musk is motivated by ideology or business interests, said Ryan Mac in *The New York Times*. In the 2010s, “he built an alliance with President Obama as Tesla and SpaceX welcomed federal assistance.” More recently, he’s “fostered relationships with a constellation of right-wing heads of state,” such as India’s Narendra Modi, that have also helped him “win corporate advantages.” Many tech leaders also “tacitly embraced Trump’s politics” the first time around, said Max Chafkin in *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Why are they so much more vocal now? “Part of it is undoubtedly a sort of influence play” to get likes on social media. But Trump is also “much friendlier to their interests than Biden,” who has steered an aggressive antitrust agenda, staunchly supports unions, and has intensified the tech “cold war” with China even more than his predecessor. All of these policies “are anathema to the typical venture capitalist,” and they’re opening their wallets.

### Innovation of the week



A simple attachment turns any bike into an e-bike, said Eric Bangeman in *Ars Technica*. The Clip, from a startup in Brooklyn of the same name, “is a friction drive unit that attaches to the front fork of any bicycle” to give you some extra oomph on the road. A detachable controller mounts on the handlebar to let you operate the friction drive with the push of a button, and the battery on the \$499 Clip itself boasts a range of about 12 miles before your legs will have to start working again. “It’s a fantastic way to give new life to an old bike,” and while there are other e-bike conversion kits, it’s hard to imagine “something easier to install and use.”

### Bytes: What’s new in tech

#### The dream of cryopreservation

A longevity startup is pushing ahead the controversial science of reversible cryogenics, said Ashlee Vance in *Bloomberg Businessweek*. The idea of placing humans “into a frozen state and then reviving them at some stage in the future” has been around for many years; a facility in Arizona even “has a couple hundred bodies and heads stored” in freezers. The big caveat: So far, no cryonics venture has “shown it can revive anyone.” That’s where Cradle Healthcare comes in. The startup was founded by a “prodigy in biotech,” Laura Deming, who has raised \$48 million around her technology, including “a new type of cooling and rewarming machine.” The machine is “about the size of a mini fridge” and is currently experimenting with slices of rodent brains. The ultimate hope is to freeze people with deadly ailments and revive them “when cures have arrived.”

#### An AI mogul’s web of investments

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman’s investment empire is filled with conflicted interests, said Berber Jin in *The Wall Street Journal*. Outside OpenAI, Altman has amassed an individual portfolio that rivals “the value and size of some full-blown venture firms.” His holdings include stakes in big firms like Reddit—whose

stock surged recently after it announced a partnership with OpenAI on content sharing—and dozens of startups, raising questions about conflicts of interest. Helion, a nuclear energy startup that is chaired by Altman, for instance, is now in talks with OpenAI about an energy deal for data centers. “Public-company boards typically bar executives from taking large stakes in outside ventures,” but OpenAI is a private nonprofit. Altman has also used his own personal debt line through JPMorgan Chase to add to his stakes, “a risky gamble.”

#### Security flaws in Windows’ new Recall

Cybersecurity experts say Microsoft’s new AI-powered Recall feature is an easy target for hackers, said Tom Warren in *The Verge*. “Recall is part of the new Copilot Plus PCs that are debuting” later this month. The default feature automatically “screenshots everything you do on your PC” every few seconds and “gives you the ability to search and retrieve anything in seconds.” While Microsoft says the data is secure and encrypted, a former Microsoft cybersecurity expert, Kevin Beaumont, found otherwise. Recall automatically scans saved pages for text, then saves the text, unencrypted, in a folder on the computer’s hard drive that’s accessible to knowledgeable users.

## Giving babies peanuts cuts allergy risk

Children who are given peanut butter as infants are much less likely to develop a peanut allergy in later childhood than those who don't get early exposure, reports *The Washington Post*. Researchers tracked more than 500 children from infancy into early adolescence, much longer than previous studies on the issue. They found that by age 12, just 4.4 percent of children who had eaten peanuts before age 5 had an allergy, compared with 15.4 percent of those who had avoided them early on—a decline of more than 70 percent. (Those rates were higher than would be expected for the general population because

all the participants had an elevated risk of food allergies.) The finding adds to a growing body of research suggesting that early exposure to peanuts helps build immunity, which has led to a complete reversal in medical advice for parents. Between 2000 and 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics was recommending that children shouldn't be given peanuts until age 3; by 2017, it was advising parents to introduce them as early as four to six months. Yet researchers say many people remain unaware that exposing infants to peanuts can stave off a potentially deadly allergy. "We'd love to spread the word



*Fun to eat and good for baby*

to more families," says co-author Michelle F. Huffaker, from the University of California, San Francisco, "and reach people who may not know about this."



*All the way up to four*

### Crows count out loud

Crows are known to be clever birds, able to recognize human faces and use rudimentary tools. Now scientists have found that they can count up to four out loud, echoing the way toddlers learn numbers. Researchers at Germany's University of Tübingen trained three carrion crows over more than 160 sessions to recognize visual and auditory cues for the numbers 1 to 4—a visual cue might be the numeral in question, an audio cue the sound of a drumroll. The crows learned to respond to these cues by providing the corresponding number of caws: three caws for the cues for the numeral three, for example. The more cues they heard, the longer the crows took to react to each one, as if they were thinking over the answer. And the first caw in each sequence had a distinct timing or pitch depending on how many subsequent caws were coming, so the caw for "one" sounded different when a crow was counting "one, two" than when it was counting up to four. Biologist Heather Williams, who wasn't involved in the study, tells *CNN.com* that this shows the crows understand "abstract numbers, and then plan ahead as they match their behavior to match that number."

### Pregnancy's energy drain

Scientists have calculated just how much energy it takes to grow a baby in the womb,

reports *The New York Times*. And in a finding that will be of little surprise to many moms, the answer is "a huge amount." Over the course of pregnancy, the researchers found, an expectant mother requires 50,000 additional calories, the equivalent of roughly 50 pints of Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia ice cream. That's considerably more than previously thought, because scientists had assumed that all the energy required for reproduction ended up in the fetus. In fact, that energy accounts for just 4 percent of the total expended during pregnancy—the other 96 percent is required by the woman's own body. "The baby itself becomes a rounding error," says study author Dustin Marshall, from Monash University in Australia. Marshall and his team calculated the reproductive energy requirements for not just humans but 81 species, from bugs to white-tailed deer, by analyzing energy in fetal tissue and metabolic rates of mothers. Mammals use more energy than other animals because they must build a placenta to transfer nutrients, and humans use more than most other mammals because they are pregnant longer.

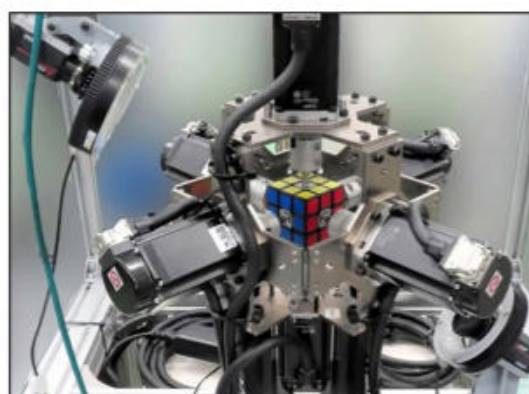
### HPV vaccine good for men

The HPV vaccine doesn't merely prevent nearly all cases of cervical cancer in women. Now a new study shows that the vaccine is also linked to a huge reduction in head and neck cancers in men. Researchers examined the health records of nearly 3.5 million people in the U.S., ages 9 to 39. They found that the men who had been inoculated against HPV had a 54 percent lower risk of developing cancers linked to the virus than those who hadn't, a drop driven largely by a fall in head and neck cancers. Those cancers occur mostly in the mouth and throat and affect men about twice as much as women. The vast majority of cases appear in men over 50, who were too old to be inoculated when the HPV vaccine was rolled out in the mid-2000s. Co-author Jefferson DeKloe, from Thomas Jefferson University, says the new findings are just "the early results of a larger phenomenon we are going to watch play out over the next 20 or 30 years." The vaccine is recommended for all children at age 11 or 12, but so far just 49 percent of girls receive it and 36 percent of boys.

### Robot speedster

Engineers have built a robot that can solve a Rubik's Cube in less than a third of a second, reports *Smithsonian* magazine. Mitsubishi's TOKUI Fast Accurate Synchronized Motion Testing Robot shattered the record set in 2018 by MIT students by completing the puzzle in .305 seconds—about the speed of an eye-blink. The robot deploys cameras with color recognition and AI to determine which rotations must be made to get all squares

of the same color on each side of the cube. Then it uses its robotic arms to turn the cube with lightning speed. The first time the engineers tested it, the arms were moving so fast that the cube jammed, and they had to fine-tune the speed to move just fast enough



*It took only a split second.*

to work within the limitations of the Rubik's own construction. The record reflects the incredible advances in robotics in recent years. In 2009, a robot took 1 minute and 4 seconds to solve a Rubik's Cube. For human solvers, the world record is 3.13 seconds, set last year by 21-year-old Max Park.

# Review of reviews: Books

## Summer reading: Twisty stories of love and murder



### Lies and Weddings

by Kevin Kwan (Doubleday, \$29)

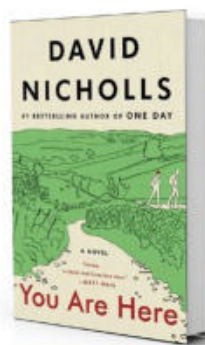
*Crazy Rich Asians* author Kevin Kwan consistently delivers “a breezy brand of jet-set escapism,” said Adam Morgan in *Esquire*. His latest romantic comedy begins with a shocking death-by-chandelier before settling into a pleasantly familiar groove when Rufus Leung Gresham, the unmarried scion of a noble but secretly bankrupt family, attends a Hawaiian wedding and contemplates whether he should court a wealthy woman or his poorer childhood sweetheart. “Spilled secrets, romantic fireworks, and volcanic eruptions ensue, making *Lies and Weddings* the most fun I’ve had reading a novel in years.” Kwan “makes a point of noting what wealth can wreak—poverty, racism, exploitation, environmental degradation—but he’s too canny a showman to let any of these critiques linger,” said Louis Bayard in *The Washington Post*. Here, “laugh lines arrive punctually” and conflicts are resolved “quickly and sunnily.”



### The Winner

by Teddy Wayne (Harper, \$30)

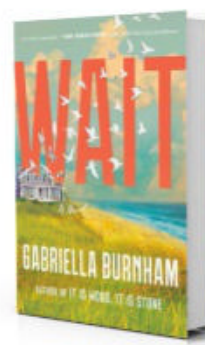
In Teddy Wayne’s “well-constructed” new thriller, “lust and love make for a combustible brew,” said Dale Singer in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. When scrappy law student Conor gets a summer job teaching tennis in a fictional, money-soaked gated community near Cape Cod, he becomes involved with two women and soon struggles to keep the affairs discreet. Though our protagonist seems shocked by the consequences that inevitably arrive, “readers will be able to spot well in advance that Conor is headed for trouble.” For anyone who reads this “terrific” noir, “comparisons to *The Graduate* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* are inevitable,” said Joanne Kaufman in *The Wall Street Journal*. “But *The Winner*, which has some very canny things to say about class and privilege, owes its biggest debt to Theodore Dreiser. This is *An American Tragedy* diabolically turned on its head.”



### You Are Here

by David Nicholls (Harper, \$30)

“This is a novel that will make you feel terrific,” said Erica Wagner in the *Financial Times* (U.K.). And “don’t we all need that more than ever?” In his latest literary love story, *One Day* author David Nicholls chronicles a slow-burning romance between a middle-aged man and woman—both recently split from longtime partners—who meet during a 190-mile hike from one coast of England to the other. “*You Are Here* is a great comic novel that also asks the reader to think about the place of humor in fiction: There’s a dangerous proximity throughout the novel between laughter and tears,” said Alex Preston in *The Guardian*. The reader will be so invested in this second-chance romance that it “makes the whole world shimmer with a kind of secret possibility, as if such narratives are everywhere, just out of sight.”



### Wait

by Gabriella Burnham (One World, \$27)

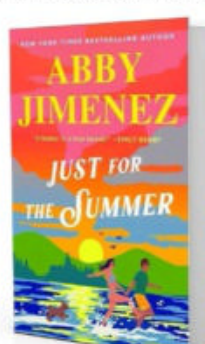
*Wait* is “not the breezy beach read you might expect from its Nantucket setting and the classic shingle-style shorefront house on its cover,” said Heller McAlpin in *NPR.org*. “Instead of a summer frolic, what we have here is a coming-of-age story,” as recent college graduate Elise returns to her Nantucket home and learns that her mother—Gilda, a Brazilian immigrant working grueling hours as a cook—has been deported. Elise and her 18-year-old sister, Sophie, must now support themselves over a “uniquely stressful” summer. Despite their misfortunes, Burnham “doesn’t allow us to pity her characters,” said Imbolo Mbue in *The New York Times*. “These are resilient women who are determined to rescue themselves.” There is no easy way out for Gilda and her daughters, “but this tender novel allows us to rejoice when tiny windows of opportunities begin to open.”



### Missing White Woman

by Kellye Garrett (Mulholland, \$29)

“Sharply honed twists, realistic dialogue, and a solid setting elevate *Missing White Woman*,” said Oline H. Cogdill in the *Sun Sentinel*. In Kellye Garrett’s “insightful” thriller, Bree, a Black woman, wakes up in an upscale Airbnb booked by her boyfriend, Ty, and discovers two unpleasant surprises: Ty’s inexplicable absence and the corpse of a blonde, white woman. “With that nightmare scenario, Garrett launches two intertwined narratives,” said Carole V. Bell in *The Boston Globe*. “One explores what happens to a Black woman caught in the fury of missing-white-woman syndrome in the time of social media; the second involves the shadow investigation Bree launches when the world focuses its suspicion on her and Ty.” Even when these “tasty” ingredients prove hard to balance, “Garrett’s mastery of character and wry social observation shine bright in the eye of this storm.”



### Just for the Summer

by Abby Jiménez (Forever, \$18)

Abby Jiménez is “a master romance storyteller,” said Cindy Alexander in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. In *Just for the Summer*, heroes Emma and Justin bond over the same problem: Whomever they date meets their soulmate immediately after they break up. If Emma and Justin date for the summer, they figure, their curses will cancel out and they’ll find their respective soulmates at last. That may sound schematic, but Jiménez ensures that readers “will find themselves rooting not only for the romance but also the characters themselves, who deal with very real emotions and traumas.” It’s true: “You can never get enough of Jiménez’s characters,” said Victoria Giardina in the *New York Post*. And while this one doesn’t quite reach the heights of the author’s previous literary rom-coms, it remains “a delight in and of itself. And a great beach read.”

## Best books...chosen by Ivy Pochoda

Thriller writer Ivy Pochoda is the award-winning author of *Wonder Valley* and *These Women*. *Sing Her Down*, her latest, follows two female ex-cons who carve a bloody trail from Arizona to Los Angeles, and is now available in paperback.



**Blood Meridian** by Cormac McCarthy (1985). McCarthy's polarizing masterpiece is the seminal text if you want to dig into the poetry of violence, or if you're tired of the whitewashed heroics of traditional Westerns. Sure, it's overdone (and perhaps overripe) in places—but that's what it took to transform bloodlust into indelible art.

**Dirty Weekend** by Helen Zahavi (1991). Buckle up, because Helen Zahavi is about to take you on a wild ride. Bella, who's had enough of being victimized by men, kills 'em all over the course of one weekend. More provocative and meaningful than Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, Zahavi's mannered work of emotional terror will shock you with its daring but also inspire you with its power.

**Angels** by Denis Johnson (1983). Johnson's terrifying first (and perhaps best) novel follows two desperate outsiders who become lovers before they are devoured by their worst nightmares. Johnson conveys the savagery of mental hospitals and death row in brutally poetic language, demonstrating over and over again that within the darkness, there remains a spark.

**Mecca** by Susan Straight (2022). No one writes about the underserved, unheard, and unexamined like Susan Straight. If you think you know the people of California, I suggest *Mecca*, which maps cultures and communities hovering just outside conventional SoCal fiction. I was shocked at my own ignorance about the place I call home and the people who inhabit it.

**Butcher's Crossing** by John Williams (1960). Williams' anti-Western takes American triumphalism to task. In a frigid mountain pass during a buffalo massacre gone wrong, four men descend into a self-created hell. It's a battle between one man's Emersonian ideals and the bloodthirsty hunter he chooses to help realize them. If you're hoping for heroes, you're in the wrong place.

**The Mars Room** by Rachel Kushner (2018). The opening scene, set on a transport bus to a women's prison, stopped me dead. How did Kushner capture the nuance, variety, and voices of so many prisoners in one place? How did she conjure so many competing desperations within one shared desperation? How did she do this while also allowing for moments of comic clarity?

## Author of the week

Mary Claire Haver

"If you are a woman born in the '70s who has Googled 'menopause' on an iPhone, you probably know who Mary Claire Haver is," said **Lauren Mechling** in *The Guardian*. At age 55, the Texas-based ob-gyn,



author of the best-seller *The New Menopause*, has become a social media phenomenon by candidly discussing

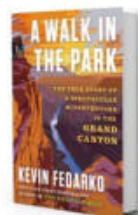
menopause from every conceivable angle. It took Haver some time to find the right format. After experimenting with jokey TikTok dance videos, "I realized people want to hear me talk, not dance," she says. Having come to see that, she adds, "I got really good at doing 30-second little blips on important information about menopause." Haver's health-care advice for women has since racked up more than 4 million social media followers.

In *The New Menopause*, Haver offers more grounded advice than she can squeeze into a TikTok, said **Meghan Rabbitt** in *Maria Shriver's Sunday Paper*. In her medical opinion, other physicians have overemphasized the risks and undersold the potential benefits of hormone therapy. Thanks to its effectiveness, she says, "I think menopause should be optional." For many women, hormone therapy can strengthen bones, lower rates of urinary tract infections and cardiovascular disease, and even reduce mortality. The important thing, Haver says, is that women advocate for themselves and work to dispel a medical climate too frequently dismissive of their concerns. "Sadly, we are a decade or two away from you being able to confidently walk into your primary-care doctor's office and have an informed conversation about your menopause journey," she says. "The onus is on us to educate ourselves."

## Also of interest...in the great outdoors

### A Walk in the Park

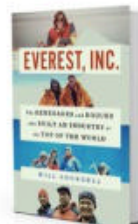
by Kevin Fedarko (Scribner, \$32.50)



Don't be fooled by the title: Hiking the Grand Canyon is no walk in the park, said Blair Braverman in *The New York Times*. In this "triumph" of adventure writing, Kevin Fedarko chronicles his "uniquely awful" journey to walk all 750 miles of the most dangerous national park. Though Fedarko and his companion encounter radioactive mines, pools of dead tarantulas, and "various other incarnations of hell on earth," the riveting writing will tempt readers to visit the canyon "to keep the book's spell alive."

### Everest, Inc.

by Will Cockrell (Gallery, \$30)



"*Everest, Inc.* is an apt title, because the story it tells is ultimately a business one," said Carl Hoffman in *The Washington Post*. Will Cockrell's book details how summiting Mount Everest has evolved, over decades, from "a singular test of alpine skill and endurance" to an achievable goal for the wealthy, supported by a cottage industry of guides and new technologies. Though Cockrell spins these changes as positive, it's hard not to feel that "something fundamental to exploration and adventure" has been lost.

### Amphibious Soul

by Craig Foster (HarperOne, \$30)



Craig Foster is "as much (maybe more) at home in the ocean as he is on land," said Barbara J. King in *NPR.org*. In the literary follow-up to his Oscar-winning documentary *My Octopus Teacher*, the South African diver expands his scope to the entire Great African Sea Forest. By documenting his "incredible engagement" with creatures such as mollusks and clingfish over months of diving, Foster invites us to share in the joys of nature, and "a spirit of generosity suffuses the book."

### We Loved It All

by Lydia Millet (Norton, \$28)



"The natural world has never been far from Lydia Millet's mind," said Michael Schaub in *The Boston Globe*. In "a fascinating book that proves that Millet's narrative brilliance isn't just confined to fiction" such as her novel *A Children's Bible*, the Pulitzer finalist conjures "the religious-like wonder that nature inspires" through tender appreciations of flora and fauna. The result is "a beautiful book, at once a love letter to life on Earth and an impassioned plea to save what we have left of it."

**Exhibit of the week****Christina Ramberg:  
A Retrospective***Art Institute, Chicago, through Aug. 11**'Waiting Lady,' 1972*

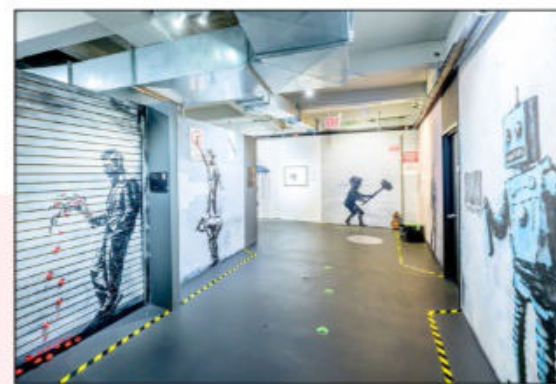
"No artist, to my knowledge, was making stranger, sexier, more vexing work in the 1970s than Christina Ramberg," said **Sebastian Smee** in *The Washington Post*.

Closely associated with the Chicago Imagist movement, Ramberg is best remembered for her paintings of elaborate female hairdos, bound hands, and corseted torsos, which "straddle a divide between erotic heat and deadpan displacement." Gathering roughly 100 works, this Art Institute of Chicago retrospective "showcases not just the art but the person behind it," said **Charlotte Goddu** in *Chicago* magazine. This "long overdue" show also includes diaries, postcards, quilts, slides, and a doll collection to give visitors a fuller picture of the artist's tragi-

cally curtailed life and career, which ended prematurely when she died of early-onset dementia at age 49 in 1995.

Ramberg's paintings "always invoked big-picture questions about women's desire, representation, and agency," said **Vittoria Benzine** in *Artsy.net*. "Her bodies harbor a tension that's alluring, jarring—and achingly relevant today." Consider 1970's *Corset/Urns*, a sequence of eight panels in which each silhouette resembles both. "The shapes' similarities emphasize their contrast: One holds life, the other death. But these vessels also conjure confinement—a sense of the female form being held in, fated for shackles that can be cultural, political, even pleasurable."

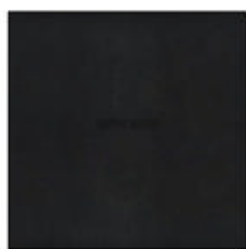
"Stylistically, her work changed very little," said **Charles Venkatesh Young** in *Newcity Art*. It was only in the mid-to-late 1980s that she broke from figurative painting for her so-called satellite paintings. These radical departures were "monochromatic and rigidly diagrammatic," and it's hard not to view them as tragic, as they coincided with the onset of Ramberg's debilitating dementia. "While we can't help but mourn" her early death, this retrospective also reveals "what a miracle her existence was in the first place. Let us celebrate this brilliant mind."

*A gallery full of fake Banksys?***The Banksy Museum***New York City*

"The new Banksy Museum in New York City tries to re-create the experience of stumbling upon Banksy graffiti in the wild," said **Isabella Gomez Sarmiento** in *NPR.org*. But there's a big catch: The murals and paintings on display "are not real Banksys, and Banksy never agreed to have his work reproduced." Instead, said **Max Lakin** in *The New York Times*, you'll get to see 167 "decent-enough reproductions" of noted Banksy works while listening to a piped-in soundtrack of police sirens. With adult tickets priced at \$30 per entry, this unauthorized tribute, "an act of both admiration and exploitation," is also "an interesting thought experiment: Can you have a museum with only reproductions?" If Banksy doesn't like it, Banksy Museum founder Hazis Vardar suggested, he can sue.

**Vince Staples***Dark Times*

★★★★★



Vince Staples has come a long way, said **Sheldon Pearce** in *NPR.org*. "A cult figure of limited reach but outsize admiration," the 30-year-old rapper from Long Beach, Calif., doesn't get much radio play. But

"those listening closely will tell you he has put together one of the most compelling and ambitious rap catalogs of the 21st century." Since 2015, the former Crip has been stripping the glamour from gang culture by rapping about the PTSD and survivor's guilt he's shouldered since his rough teenage years. His "deeply considered" sixth album yields "some of his most bittersweet music" to date. "*Dark Times* is a lucid snapshot of melancholy," said **Peter A. Berry** in *Variety*. Staples is thinking hard about the ways fame distances people from friends and family, as well as his responsibility to the hood he escaped. On standout songs such as "Shame on the Devil" and "Government Cheese," the West Coast rapper "lowers his shield," offering world-weariness in place of his trademark sardonic humor. Sometimes, the album's midtempo beats "can feel a bit monotonous," but Staples' nuanced songwriting results in "the most vulnerable LP of his career."

**Arooj Aftab***Night Reign*

★★★★★

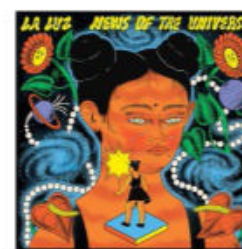


Arooj Aftab is coming into focus, said **Sam Sodomsky** in *The New York Times*. Many listeners first encountered the vocalist, composer, and producer's "hypnotic and immersive style" via her

2021 breakthrough, *Vulture Prince*—a minimalist blend of jazz, folk, and South Asian classical music that served as a grief-stricken lament for her late brother. *Night Reign*, Aftab's first solo release for a major label, "offers a more comprehensive self-portrait" of the Pakistan-raised, Brooklyn-based musician, "with vivid songs veering as close to pop music as she has ever come." When describing her music, "you have to start with her voice," said **Mark Richardson** in *The Wall Street Journal*. "It's a rich instrument that conveys a wide range of feeling, often with subtle shifts in emphasis." Sometimes singing in Urdu, sometimes in English, "she can sound commanding one moment and disarmingly vulnerable the next." Whatever genre labels apply to *Night Reign*'s "dizzying blend of styles," what's most astonishing is "how accessible it all is." Once you start listening to the opening track, "it's very difficult to turn off."

**La Luz***News of the Universe*

★★★★★



"Being indie rock's greatest surf band is a distinction to be proud of, but La Luz clearly wanted more," said **Mark Deming** in *AllMusic*. Inspired by 1960s acts like Dick Dale, the Ventures, and Link

Wray, the all-female Seattle quartet began to experiment with psychedelia on 2018's *Floating Features*, and the group's "immediately engaging" fifth album ventures deeper into "dream-like" soundscapes. As usual, the record's "playful and mysterious" songs reverberate with lovely vocal harmonies and various textures of vintage keyboards. La Luz "sounds more contemplative than ever before," though, probably because singer-guitarist Shana Cleveland became a mother and was diagnosed with breast cancer while writing the album. On "melody-rich" stunners such as "Dandelions" and "Always in Love," Cleveland's lyrics "approach a literary poise that will make you misty-eyed," said **Evan Hagg** in *Spin*. La Luz's sonic range "widens with grace," too: "Bits and pieces of prog, synth-pop, new wave, and '70s pop-rock thread the psych flawlessly." Listen closely, because "this is not groovy indie finery; there's a rock-as-high-art vision at work here."

## Young Woman and the Sea

Directed by  
Joachim Rønning  
(PG)



A rousing underdog  
sports drama

The story of Trudy Ederle “was made for the screen,” said Michael Phillips in the *Chicago Tribune*. Born in 1905 and raised in New York City by a family of German immigrants, the Olympic champion swimmer brightened the future of women’s sports in 1926, when she became the first woman to swim across the English Channel—and shattered the men’s record. The new biopic starring Daisy Ridley has its share of “shamelessly effective melodrama.” But Ridley, 32, creates a heroine “both storybook vibrant and human-scaled,” and the movie makes for “a really good piece of irresistibly rousing history.” It’s almost comical how per-



Ridley’s vibrant Trudy Ederle

functorily the plot unfolds, said Thomas Floyd in *The Washington Post*. Whether Trudy’s dealing with childhood illness or sexist naysayers, “every setback is offset by a cathartic victory.” Still, Disney’s “safely satisfying” sports drama succeeds in its mission of inspiration. “It’s a reminder of how we are compelled by narratives of human striving and triumph,” said Katie Walsh in the *Los Angeles Times*. The whole world was watching when Ederle braved the choppy waters between England and France. A century later, it’s nice to celebrate her determination with “a triumphant, emotional sports movie akin to *Remember the Titans* and *Glory Road*.”

## In a Violent Nature

Directed by Chris Nash  
(Not rated)



A different sort of  
slasher movie

With his debut feature film, Chris Nash pulls off “an ambitious blend of art house and slaughterhouse,” said Jeannette Catsoulis in *The New York Times*. The Canadian writer-director takes such a “bloodcurdlingly cool-headed” approach to the slasher subgenre of horror that “his unusual shocker is impossible to dismiss.” Unlike most slasher flicks, *In a Violent Nature* fixates on the killer’s perspective, and though it employs familiar tropes—a masked murderer, a cabin in the woods, hapless teenage victims—the “deeply unsettling” movie maintains “a mood of stunning serenity,” even amid scenes of “nauseatingly explicit” violence. The



A killer steps out from the dark.

bloodletting culminates with “one of the goriest kills ever preserved in film,” said Anna McKibbin in *The A.V. Club*. Yet instead of jump scares, the spectacle unfolds in “painstakingly composed” long takes, to a soundtrack of creaking boughs, snapping twigs, and birdsong. “It’s like the woods themselves are possessed.” As the movie’s slow-moving killer, “Ry Barrett is an excellent weapon,” said Jacob Oller in *Paste*. “It’s not as easy as it looks to hulk menacingly with every step.” And though the pacing is sometimes so methodical that “the movie can stall out,” its “vibrant realism” offers a reminder that “slashers speak to something primal inside of us.”

## New and notable podcasts

### Afghan Star

iHeartPodcasts



“We don’t usually think of reality shows as a civilizing force,” said Alessandra Stanley in *Air Mail*. But a new podcast hosted by John Legend chronicles how *Afghan Star*, an *American Idol*-like sing-

ing competition, became a “joyous, liberating oasis” for Afghanistan when it premiered in 2005, not long after the Taliban were chased out during the War on Terror. The “funny and exhilarating” podcast captures this “daring and improbable” program through the eyes of Saad Mohseni, a media bigwig who championed *Afghan Star* and insisted that women be included and allowed to perform without burkas. “Still, amid these tales of resistance and creativity, a sadness hangs over this series,” said Fiona Sturges in the *Financial Times* (U.K.). When Western troops left Afghanistan in 2021, the resurgent Taliban stripped women of their rights and banned entertainment. The story of a TV talent show “highlights the liberating and unifying power of music”—as well as “what happens when it is lost.”

### Fur & Loathing

Brazen



“You may be surprised to learn that a 2014 chemical attack in the suburbs of Chicago, which targeted hundreds of people, remains unsolved to this day,” said Eliana Dockterman in *Time*.

“The reason you haven’t heard of this terrifying incident?” The target was an easily ridiculed convention of “furries,” people who enjoy dressing up in large, fuzzy animal costumes. A decade later, investigative reporter Nicky Woolf has teamed up with Patch, a furry blogger who has spent years probing the incident, to try to uncover who released chlorine gas at the 2014 FurFest Convention, resulting in 19 hospitalizations but—fortunately—no fatalities. “There definitely is an innate silliness to the case,” said Miranda Sawyer in *The Guardian*. But this is also “a proper in-depth investigation” into the biggest chemical weapons attack on U.S. soil in 50 years, and into how the initial federal investigation bungled the case. The result is “a strangely gripping show that uncovers more than you might imagine.”

### Sixteenth Minute (of Fame)

Cool Zone Media / iHeartPodcasts



In both concept and execution, *Sixteenth Minute* “seems too good to be true,” said Lauren Passell in *Podcast: The Newsletter*. In this new weekly series, prolific podcaster Jamie Loftus turns her attention to

people who became internet-famous, “whether they wanted to or not,” to learn what happened once everyone moved on. The first episode features a “long, empathetic” conversation with Antoine Dodson, who became a viral-video star after a news clip of him warning people to “hide your kids, hide your wife” from a home intruder was remixed into a catchy tune. The story is messy, fascinating, and “full of exploitation,” and the podcast’s two-part premiere looks into “what’s human about it all.” Loftus is “responsible for some of the truly great limited audio series of the past few years,” said Nicholas Quah in *NYMag.com*, and this new project plays to her strengths. *Sixteenth Minute* is “a reminder that beneath any cultural moment, produced on the internet or otherwise,” there are “oodles of details worth parsing over.”

**Streaming tips****Tales of immigrant strivers****Aisha**

Letitia Wright is best known as T'Challa's fierce and fiery sister in the *Black Panther* franchise. She channels similar energy in this heartfelt, minimalist drama, as a Nigerian woman struggling through bureaucratic roadblocks and other indignities as she seeks asylum in Ireland. *\$7 on demand*

**Drift**

Cynthia Erivo gives an entrancing performance as a traumatized Liberian refugee staving off a breakdown and eking out survival performing menial tasks for tourists on a Greek island. Alia Shawkat proves a nice complement as an American tour guide who becomes a friend. *\$6 on demand*

**Minari**

The Yi family are Reagan-era South Korean immigrants who settle in rural Arkansas and struggle to establish a successful farm. They are wonderful company in this understated, beautiful, Oscar-nominated drama. *\$4 on demand*

**The Visitor**

A curmudgeonly economics professor checks into his rarely used Manhattan pied-à-terre to find it occupied by a Senegalese and Syrian immigrant couple, who have been swindled into renting it by a con man. Rather than kick them out, he allows them to stay, and an unlikely bond forms between them. Richard Jenkins stars in an Oscar-nominated performance. *Prime*

**Brooklyn**

Saoirse Ronan shines in this warm and wonderful period drama, playing an Irishwoman determined to make a new life for herself in 1950s New York. A return visit to Ireland has her torn between cultures, and romances. *Max*

**El Norte**

This Oscar-nominated classic from 1983 follows the arduous journey of two indigenous Mayan teens who flee for the United States after the Guatemalan army massacres their village. *Prime*

**The Week's guide to what's worth watching****30 for 30: False Positive**

ESPN's sports documentary series continues with the story of Butch Reynolds, the former world-record holder in the 400-meter dash. Reynolds was at the height of his track-and-field career in 1990 when a faulty drug test led to his suspension from competition and forever tarnished his reputation. A retrospective of Reynolds' career is capped by the story of his enduring effort to clear his name. *Tuesday, June 11, at 7 p.m., ESPN*

**The Boys**

Time is running out to stop the supes. In the fourth season of the hit superhero satire, supe-in-disguise Victoria Neuman is on the verge of the presidency, running as a veritable Manchurian Candidate to further the plans of corrupt superhero clan the Seven to put the world under its control. Meanwhile, vigilante Billy the Butcher, head of the anti-supe group the Boys, has lost his crew's confidence at the moment he's most needed. *Thursday, June 13, Prime*

**BRATS**

The Brat Pack is back. Director and Pack alum Andrew McCarthy helms a documentary about the crew of young actors who took Hollywood by storm in the 1980s, becoming the decade's defining icons of teenage cool in movies like *St. Elmo's Fire*, *Sixteen Candles*, and *The Breakfast Club*. Rob Lowe, Ally Sheedy, Demi Moore, Emilio Estevez, and other Brat Pack members regroup to tell behind-the-scenes stories and reminisce. *Thursday, June 13, Hulu*

**Hotel Cocaine**

It's not a place to get much sleep. The retro-feel series takes us to late-1970s Miami, where Cuban immigrant Roman Compte manages the glam Mutiny Hotel, a hot spot for cocaine dealers and enthusiasts. With the hotel a raging success, Compte's choices become delicate and dangerous when both the DEA and a powerful drug lord start demanding his loyalty. Danny Pino and Michael Chiklis lead the cast. *Sunday, June 16, at 9 p.m., MGM+*

**House of the Dragon**

War is coming to Westeros, and with it an abun-



Danny Pino as drug trade impresario Roman Compte

dance of Targaryen-on-Targaryen violence. Season 2 of the *Game of Thrones* spin-off continues with the platinum-haired rulers of House Targaryen divided. A shocking development in last season's finale has left Queen Rhaenyra of the Black Council, once amenable to peace, now committed to war against King Aegon and the Greens. With dragons at the ready, mass destruction seems assured. *Sunday, June 16, at 9 p.m., HBO/Max*

**Other highlights****Tour de France: Unchained**

With this year's race just ahead, this *Drive to Survive*-like docuseries digs into the high drama of the 2023 race, highlighting the heated rivalry between top racers Tadej Pogacar and Jonas Vingegaard. *Tuesday, June 11, Netflix*

**Mysteries of the Terracotta Warriors**

The fascinating and complex tale of the 8,000 sculpted clay warriors unearthed at the first Chinese emperor's tomb a half-century ago is explored in this detailed documentary. *Wednesday, June 12, Netflix*

**77th Annual Tony Awards**

Broadway's biggest night figures to be a triumph for Alicia Keys' musical *Hell's Kitchen* and the play *Stereophonic*, each with 13 nominations. Ariana DeBose hosts the ceremony. *Sunday, June 16, at 8 p.m., CBS/Paramount+*



Gyllenhaal tries to keep up his family-guy image.

**Show of the week**  
**Presumed Innocent**

Television wizard David E. Kelley works his dramatic magic on this adaptation of Scott Turow's best-selling 1987 novel. The stakes are high for Rusty Sabich, a Chicago prosecutor who becomes a suspect in the murder of another lawyer, Carolyn Polhemus. Jake Gyllenhaal delivers a terrific performance as Sabich, who despite his image as a good guy and family man is revealed to have had an affair and a not-so-healthy obsession with his dead colleague. The onus is on him to clear his name and prove his innocence. Ruth Negga, Peter Sarsgaard, and Bill Camp co-star. *Wednesday, June 12, Apple TV+*

### Critics' choice: New and classic seafood standouts

#### Penny New York City

The East Village's most exciting new seafood spot "has a polished, understated swagger that somehow seems to make oysters taste even better," said Helen Rosner in *The New Yorker*. The upstairs sister to hit French restaurant Claud is chillier, but the mood in the 30-some seats set around the "seemingly infinite raw bar" is warm and lively. Behind it, a battalion of shuckers and slicers prep abundant seafood treasures. "The best way to take in the bounty is by way of the \$98 Ice Box Plus," a "gloriously over-the-top" seafood platter heaped on my visit with smoked mussels, burly oysters, tiny periwinkle snails, bright-pink shrimp cocktail, Jonah crab, and scallop crudo. "Most thrilling" were accompanying shot glass-size servings of vichyssoise dolloped with "voluptuous portions of caviar." It's all "money well spent," and the Ice Box is easily a meal for two. If you need something cooked, Penny does that well, too, from thick Dover sole dressed in marrow and Bordelaise sauce to poached lobster in brown-butter vinaigrette served around an "aromatic bundle of sage and rosemary." For dessert, the chocolate mousse is "a plate of pure, relaxed luxury." 90 E. 10th St.

#### Scoma's San Francisco

Scoma's is the old-school, legacy restaurant that "proves it's possible to maintain



Scoma's upgrades Fisherman's Wharf standards.

high standards over the decades," said MacKenzie Chung Fegan in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. At 60, the "decidedly uncontemporary" Fisherman's Wharf restaurant could be phoning it in with staid cioppino, filet o' flounder sandwiches, and frozen vegetable sides. Instead, you get "real cooking with thoughtful sourcing." Meals kick off with white-jacketed servers reciting lengthy lists of fresh catch. Petrale sole will almost certainly be in the mix, and Scoma's pan-fried preparation, "described to me as a fish dish for people who hate fish," almost resembles a chicken cutlet. Whether or not you love fish, it's "light and delicate," served with seasonal vegetables and a warm barley, black rice and orzo salad, and is a must-order. Those seasonal sides aren't an afterthought. Halibut could come with pea

risotto cakes and fresh pea shoots, gold-spotted sand bass atop a wild mushroom spaetzle. "It may not be the most groundbreaking food in town," but it's more than solid, especially with ice-cold martinis and attentive service. 1965 Al Scoma Way

#### Gift Horse Providence, R.I.

The critics aren't looking this Gift Horse in the mouth, said Gail Ciampa in *The Providence Journal*. The new raw bar and restaurant stunner from chef-owner Benjamin Sukle has been making best-restaurants lists left and right, and chef Sky Haneul Kim is in the spotlight, too, as a James Beard Award nominee for Best Emerging Chef. Local catch is the focus at the modern space featuring a horseshoe-shaped bar. "The lineup of oysters on the half shell reads like a map of Rhode Island's coasts and waterways: Watch Hill, Sakonnet River and West Passage in Narragansett Bay," and Kim pairs them with inventive sauces like kimchi mignonette and fermented green-chili hot sauce. Large plates like crispy whole fish with *banchun*, rice, and spicy peanut *ssamjang* are highlights, but ordering a battalion of small plates is equally satisfying. The smoked-fish dip with puffed seaweed chips is "not to be missed," nor is the caviar and doughboys, which pairs white sturgeon Piper roe with the state's beloved fried treat. 272 Westminster St.

#### Recipe of the week

Because flank steak is a relatively thin cut, we suggest a modified sugar steak approach, said Garth Clingingsmith in *Cook's Illustrated*. Dividing the steak gives you more control when grilling and minimizes the meat's tendency to shrink and buckle. The sugar-salt rub, meanwhile, encourages faster, deeper browning.

##### Grilled flank steak

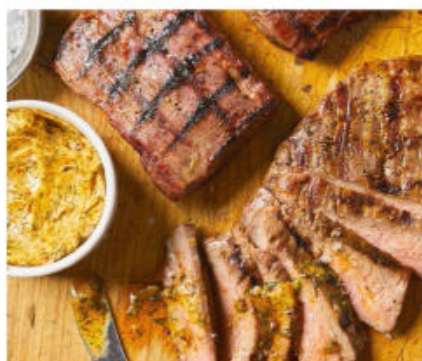
1 (1½- to 1¾-lb) flank steak, trimmed • 2½ tsp Diamond Crystal kosher salt  
• 2½ tsp sugar • 1 tsp ground black pepper

• Pat steak dry with paper towels. Cut in half lengthwise, then cut each half crosswise to create four steaks, and place them in a 13-by-9-inch baking dish. Combine salt and sugar in a small bowl. Sprinkle 2 tsp of this mixture evenly over steaks and press in gently. Flip steaks and repeat with another 2 tsp mixture. Cover dish and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour.  
• Set a wire rack in a rimmed baking sheet.  
• If using a gas grill, turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Clean and oil the cooking grate. Sprinkle both

sides of steaks with pepper and remaining 1 tsp salt mixture. (Steaks will be moist; do not pat dry.)

• Lay steaks on grill and cook (covered for gas grill, open over charcoal), flipping every 2 minutes and moving as needed for even cooking, until meat thermometer registers 125 to 130, 6 to 12 minutes. Transfer steaks to prepared rack and let rest 10 minutes.

• Transfer steaks to cutting board. With a sharp knife, slice meat as thin as possible on a bias against grain. Arrange slices on a platter. Serves 4 to 6.



#### Canned wine: Summer's best

Canned wine has recently benefited from a "miraculous" influx of "offbeat, ambitious" offerings, said Zachary Sussman in *Punch*. Heat damage is still a worry, so buy canned wines when they're fresh. We sampled nearly 40 cans and found several high-quality options. These wines hit "that sweet spot between complexity and crushability," and deserve space in your cooler this summer. Prices are for four-packs.

**No Fine Print Lil Fizz** (\$20). This bubbly, "beyond the ordinary" California blend of sauvignon blanc and chardonnay has "a yeasty, lees-y quality" plus "succulent flavors of citrus peel and white peach."

**Prisma Pinot Noir** (\$17). Credit Chile with this standout among canned reds. It's "bursting with crunchy sour cherry fruit and juicy acidity."

**Weingut Leitz Leitz Out** (\$28). A great value, this entry-level German Riesling is perfect with hot dogs. Faintly off-dry, it offers "bracing" acidity and "a pop of wet slate minerality on the finish."



## The 2025 Subaru Forester: What the critics say

### Edmunds

The new Subaru Forester is a lot like the old one, and that's OK. The "roomy and versatile" compact SUV remains "easy to recommend," thanks to its safety features, 8.7 inches of ground clearance, and standard all-wheel drive. And though "this is still one of the slower small crossover SUVs on the market," it's "more stylish, more enjoyable to drive, and better equipped."

### Car and Driver

"We wish the changes had gone a little further." Until a hybrid version arrives next year, the same 2.5-liter four-cylinder produces 180 hp—

the least of any compact SUV. To be fair, peak torque now arrives sooner, and the 2025 Forester uses a dual-pinion power steering rack similar to the system in the WRX sports sedan. The Forester still isn't fun to drive, though, and its new exterior somehow manages to look "more generic and more forgettable." We love the small SUV's 360-degree visibility, but overall, "this refurbishment feels half-hearted."

### Road & Track

Yes, Subaru's "amazingly slow" crossover comes across as "a relic of the '90s," and yet "you can tell it's different from the moment



An incremental improvement, from \$29,695

you set foot in it." Its "quieter and calmer" road manners are on par with the Toyota RAV4's, and that newfound refinement impresses in a car that can handle deep mud and snow. "If you want a boxy family vehicle that can go off-road, the Forester is still your car."

## The best of...e-bikes for commuters



### Aventon Soltera.2

"An everyday e-bike that's great for commuting," the latest Soltera offers a host of modern features, including integrated turn signals, a "sleek, detailed" LCD display screen, and a mobile app to track your rides.

\$999, [aventon.com](https://www.aventon.com)  
Source: CNET.com



### Marin Fairfax 1

With "hill-friendly" gears, "zippy" acceleration, and a lightweight yet durable aluminum frame that's forgiving on potholed city streets, this e-bike is a "top pick" for budget-conscious commuters.

\$499, [marinbikes.com](https://www.marinbikes.com)  
Source: Wirecutter



### Cannondale Adventure Neo Allroad

For bikers commuting during the week and trail-riding on the weekend, this rugged Cannondale—boasting a 250-watt Bafang motor and tires with high-traction treads—is "versatile and nimble on roads, trails, and gravel."

\$1,675, [cannondale.com](https://www.cannondale.com)  
Source: Wired



### Lectric XP 3.0

Lectric's foldable e-bike is the "low-cost answer" for commuters searching for transport that fits onto a train or bus. It has multiple mounts for racks, and while heavy for lugging upstairs, it's "a treat to ride."

\$999, [lectricebikes.com](https://www.lectricebikes.com)  
Source: Tom's Guide



### Bakcou Mule

"This beast effortlessly glides at speeds topping 35 miles per hour," making it the ultimate commuter for those who tend to run late. It's durable, too, with a 300-pound weight capacity, making it both "a beast of burden" and "a racehorse."

\$4,799, [bakcou.com](https://www.bakcou.com)  
Source: Time

## Tip of the week...

### How to consume fewer pesticides

■ **Shop organic.** To avoid harmful pesticide residues, "look for the USDA Organic label." Organic produce is grown only with non-synthetic pesticides, if any at all. Don't put much stock in "pesticide-free" labels, though, because use of that term isn't regulated.

■ **Eat fewer high-risk foods.** According to USDA data, strawberries, potatoes, bell peppers, blueberries, and green beans—especially those imported from Mexico—pose the greatest risk. Watermelon and kale are relatively high-risk, too. Safer fruits include oranges, grapefruit, cantaloupe, cranberries, and plums.

■ **Scrub, scrub, scrub.** "Washing is crucial," even though it doesn't remove all residues. Rinse produce under cold water for 15 to 20 seconds, using a vegetable scrubber on harder fruits and vegetables. "Peeling likely removes some residues, but not all," so if you enjoy eating nutrient-rich skins, "don't get rid of them just to avoid pesticides."

Source: Consumer Reports

## And for those who have everything...

"Automatic litter boxes have come a long way." Most of today's smart, self-cleaning cat toilets do their job remarkably well. The **Neakasa M1** is no exception, and though the app needs work, the unusual open-top design of this high-tech litter sifter should appeal to pets who refuse to use covered boxes. The headroom allows large cats to turn around and dig without feeling cramped. A unique waste drawer contains odors by letting you tighten drawstring bags before opening the drawer. Plus, the M1's space-age design makes it look as though your cats "could take off at any moment and return to their home planet."

\$500, [neakasa.com](https://www.neakasa.com)  
Source: Wired



## Best apps...

### For sending faxes

■ **Dropbox Fax** lets you send faxes of up to 25 pages for free and charges a fee that generally comes to \$1 to \$2 to send longer documents, with no monthly subscription—or fax machine—required. The app is perfect for those who need to send faxes once in a blue moon, to request medical records, for example, or to sign a lease or loan agreement. "It's reliable and easy to use, and it offers convenient features like fax signing and faxing files from Dropbox or Google Drive."

■ **mFax** meets high-security legal requirements, including HIPAA compliance, making it ideal for health-care providers and other businesses that fax sensitive documents on a regular basis. The service isn't free: Professional plans start at \$25 a month, and business plans—the most popular option—cost \$150 a month. "But it still provides excellent value for a home office or small business that requires HIPAA compliance, whether you send and receive 25 pages a month or 2,500."

Source: Wirecutter

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| D. Hinwick Hare  | <del>\$79*</del> | \$59 +S&P | <b>Save \$20</b> |
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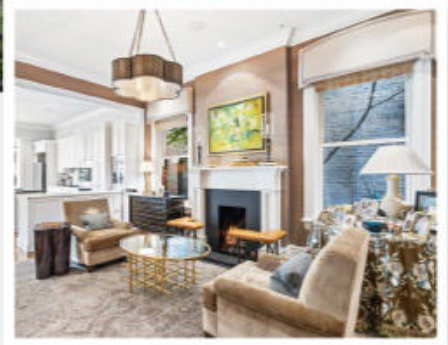
**This week: Homes built of brick**

Nick Cann Photography

**1 ▲ Charleston, S.C.**

Built in the early 1700s, this two-bedroom brick home was the kitchen house of a gated property in the historic South of Broad neighborhood. The exterior is set off with gas lanterns, black shutters, and blooming

camellias; the updated interiors feature wide-plank heart-pine floors, exposed beams, a brick fireplace, and French doors to a patio and walled garden. The lushly landscaped lot is a block from White Point Garden and the Battery. \$2,100,000. Leslie Turner, Maison Real Estate, (843) 367-3722

**2 ▲ Chicago**

This 1894 red-brick townhouse incorporates neoclassical details. The renovated, restored five-bedroom home has original hardwood floors, custom woodwork, hand-painted murals, a kitchen with eat-in island and walk-in pantry, a living room with marble fireplace, a top-level rec room, and a basement with guest suite. The oversize East Lakeview lot includes a garden patio, trees, and a three-car garage, and Lincoln Park is walking distance. \$2,950,000. Timothy Salm, Jameson Sotheby's International Realty, (312) 545-6753



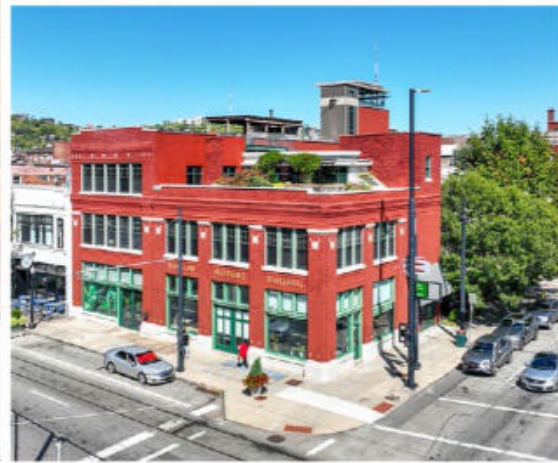
Chris Saldivar, Tea Tree Productions



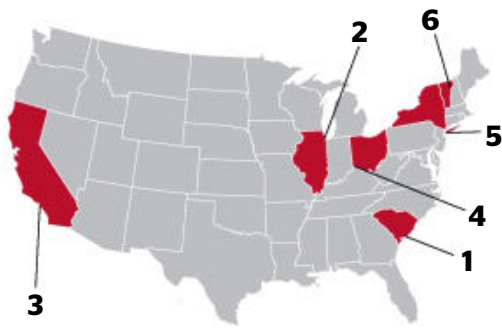
**3 ▲ Manhattan Beach, Calif.** Built in 1950, this three-bedroom bungalow is white-painted brick inside and out. The house features exposed beams, a new, all-white chef's kitchen, a window-wrapped great room with fireplace, and multiple French doors to the outside. The lot in the residential Tree Section includes a fenced turf yard, firepit, and patio; Manhattan Village's shops are walking distance and the beaches are a five-minute drive. \$2,499,000. Jennifer Caskey and Stacia Janus, Caskey Real Estate Group at Compass, (310) 200-5900



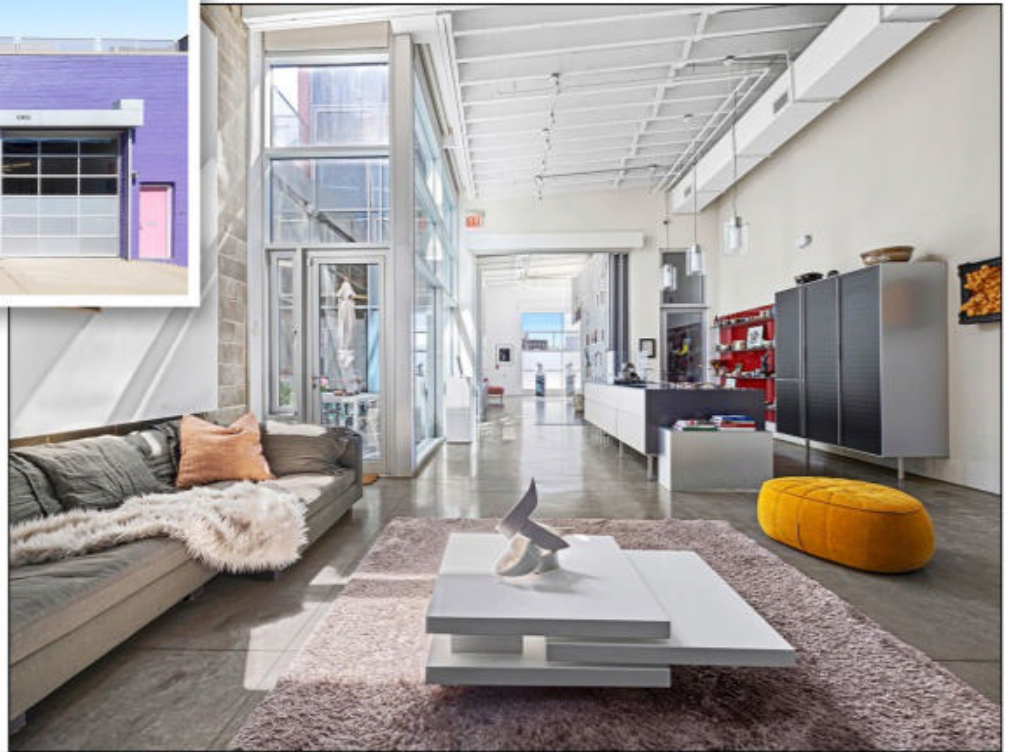
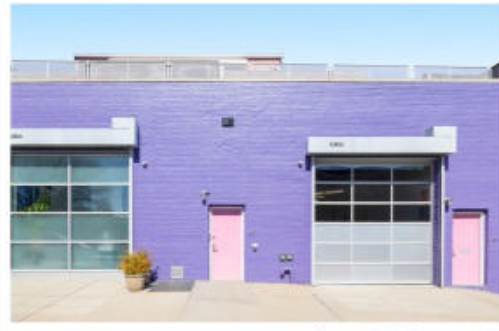
**4 ▼ Cincinnati** This three-story 1915 building was originally designed by architect Harry Hake for a car company. Its two-bedroom penthouse is now a condo loft with wood floors, exposed ducts, brick walls, concrete ceilings, oversized skylight, and wraparound wood-crafted built-ins; outside is a large roof deck with chef's kitchen and hot tub.



Centrally located in Over-the-Rhine, a historic arts district, the home is also a short walk from Washington Park and neighborhood amenities. \$1,500,000. Drew Homan, Coldwell Banker Realty, (513) 240-1043



**5 ► Brooklyn** Architect Jonathan Marvel and Maum Design merged two warehouses to create this 50-foot-wide, two-story, two-bedroom house of purple brick. The home features a ground floor with 17-foot ceilings, a 30-foot-high atrium with garden, a penthouse suite with oak floors and spa bath, an oversize living-entertaining space, an artist's studio and skylit gallery, a roof deck, and private parking. The lot, between Carroll Gardens and Gowanus, is steps away from dining and shopping. \$6,995,000. Ravi Kantha, Serhant, (914) 224-2191



## Steal of the week



**6 ◀ Barnet, Vt.** This former parsonage in northeastern Vermont dates to 1820. The three-bedroom house has hardwood floors, a woodstove, a

wainscoted country kitchen with a checkered floor, a three-season porch, and an attached two-story barn providing bonus space and storage. The 0.83-acre property has new landscaping, a firepit, a yard, and mountain views; the local library is next door and St. Johnsbury's dining and shops are a 12-minute drive. \$445,000. Anita Lamotte, Choice Real Estate & Property Management, (802) 472-3338

## The news at a glance

## The bottom line

■ The global airline industry is set to generate \$30.5 billion in net income this year, according to the International Air Transport Association, up from \$27.4 billion in profits last year. Airlines are earning \$6.14 per passenger, up from \$5.80 in 2019, amid record travel demand.

*Bloomberg*

■ The median pay package for CEOs in the S&P 500 rose to \$16.3 million, up 12.6 percent from last year, compared with a 4.1 percent rise in wages for private-sector employees.

*Associated Press*

■ Forty-nine companies have made the Fortune 500 list every year since its first edition, in 1955, including Pfizer, Boeing,

General Motors, and IBM. Exxon Mobil is the only Class of 1955 member still in the top 10 today.

*Fortune*

■ A \$13 billion stock sale by Saudi Aramco sold out within hours. The Saudi government, which owns 98 percent of the company, plans to use the proceeds to help pay for a massive economic transformation plan.

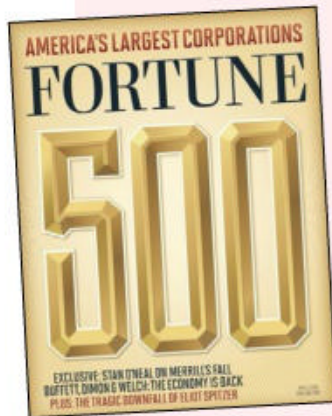
*Reuters*

■ Dr Pepper is now tied with Pepsi as the second most popular soda brand in the U.S., with each company claiming about 8.3 percent of the \$97 billion market for carbonated soft drinks. Pepsi has held the No. 2 spot almost every year since 1985 behind Coke, which owns 19 percent of the market.

*The Wall Street Journal*

■ About 10 percent of Starbucks customers said they waited more than 15 minutes for their orders in the last quarter, compared with virtually no one waiting that long during the same period in 2019. At Dunkin', 94 percent of customers said their wait was 15 minutes or less.

*Bloomberg*



## Trading: Clamping down on meme stocks

E\*Trade wants to put a leash on Roaring Kitty, said AnnaMaria Andriotis in *The Wall Street Journal*. Keith Gill—better known for his YouTube persona, Roaring Kitty—this week “posted screenshots of an E\*Trade account showing he owns GameStop shares now valued at \$140 million.” The stock of



*E\*Trade: Not happy with stock hype*

GameStop surged again after his post; it has risen 60 percent since Gill returned to social media following a three-year absence in May. Gill is credited with helping ignite the rally for “meme stocks” like GameStop in 2021, but his popularity has “created concerns he can pump up a stock for his own benefit.” The Morgan Stanley-owned

brokerage is considering banning Gill from its platform for stock manipulation.

E\*Trade’s going to need a really good justification to act, said Matt Levine in *Bloomberg*. Gill isn’t “just one retail trader; he’s the voice of a movement,” and shutting him down risks incurring the wrath of a “meme army.” Gill does seem to be buying a lot of GameStop stock and call options, posting things online to inspire others to buy, and profiting—all things “you would do if you were manipulating GameStop stock.” But a key part of illegal manipulation is dumping the stock as you promote it to others. Instead, Gill “keeps plowing his profits back into it.”

## xAI: Musk shifts Tesla AI chips from Tesla to new firm

Elon Musk may have diverted AI chips reserved for Tesla to his social media company, X, said Lora Kolodny in *CNBC.com*. Emails from Nvidia staffers seen this week indicate that Musk ordered the chip-maker “to let X jump the line” for its high-powered processors ahead of Tesla, which had announced ambitious plans for a network of AI-powered robotaxis. X is tightly entwined with Musk’s AI startup, xAI. Musk has threatened to shift his attention from Tesla to his other companies if Tesla shareholders turn down his proposed pay package.

## Sports: NBA close to \$76 billion rights deal

The National Basketball Association was closing in this week on an 11-year TV deal worth \$76 billion, said Joe Flint in *The Wall Street Journal*. The negotiation, which includes NBC, ESPN, and Amazon, “has turned into a defining moment for the TV industry,” as media companies with “uncertain financial futures” compete for the few truly reliable blockbuster franchises. “Entertainment is a swamp,” one top sports media executive said, “and sports is the only firm ground.” The deals would include WNBA rights, which have grown in value “with the rise of rookie sensation Caitlin Clark.”

## Affirmative action: Fearless Fund shuts down grants

A federal appeals court this week suspended a venture capital firm’s grant program for Black women business owners, said Alexandra Olson in the *Associated Press*. The Atlanta-based Fearless Fund, established to address the “racial disparity in funding for businesses owned by women of color,” was sued last year over its \$20,000 Strivers Grants by conservative Edward Blum. He was also behind the Supreme Court case that dismantled college affirmative action programs. The appeals court ruled 2-1 that the grant program is likely discriminatory, though a dissenting judge said the plaintiffs never had any real intention of applying for a grant.

## Media: Redstone considers long-sought Paramount deal

Paramount’s management agreed to a deal with Skydance Media last week, said Anna Nicolaou and James Fontanella-Khan in the *Financial Times*. But it’s not clear if Shari Redstone, Paramount’s most powerful shareholder, will give her sign-off. Redstone has been wavering for weeks about whether to “offload her family’s media empire,” which is “emotional for her.” The deal would pay investors in Paramount, the owner of the CBS network and the Paramount+ streaming service, \$15 a share, about a 20 percent premium over its current price.

## The shady business of coaching coaches

You don’t need a life coach to tell you not to become a life coach, said Katie Bishop in *The New York Times*. “With roots in the late-20th-century pull toward self-improvement,” life coaching is a \$4.6 billion industry, with the number of coaches up 54 percent between 2019 and 2022. Then again, “one of the dangers of life coaching is that anyone can claim the title of life coach.” That doesn’t stop people from peddling phony certifications. Billiejo Mullett says she was duped by a podcast that encouraged listeners to pay for \$2,000 courses at a “life coach school” that would give her “everything I needed to make my first \$100,000.” Mullett said she quickly felt pressured to “spend substantial sums on coaching classes and business mentoring,” the hallmarks of a pyramid scheme. With more purveyors of wisdom today than there are wisdom-hungry clients, coaches must expand their business through other methods—like selling coaching certifications to their followers.

## Office life: An epidemic of loneliness

The office used to be a social place, said **Te-Ping Chen** in *The Wall Street Journal*. Today, even when workers are physically in the office, they dash from meeting to meeting, leaving “less time for casual interactions” that “foster happiness at work.” The facelessness of work feeds a deeper problem of profound isolation. Some 58 percent of U.S. adults now say they are lonely, and more than 40 percent of those who work remotely say they “go days without leaving the house.” Hybrid schedules and increased flexibility have curtailed how much people get to know their colleagues; there are “only so many jokes and memes you can send over Slack,” one tech investor said. Americans have also “tripled the time spent in meetings since 2020,” most of them conducted virtually. The new way of working is causing widespread disillusionment. One estimate, from the insurance company Cigna, put the cost of loneliness-driven absenteeism at \$154 billion a year.

“Work friendships matter,” said **Christine Carter** in *Fast Company*. “When employees have work friends, your business does better.” Employees with relatively few friends at work have a 71 percent stronger likelihood to ditch their job for another company. And the more chumminess, the better: “Every friend a person reports having at work can be equated to a 5 percent lower quit rate.” Workloads shouldn’t be “so overwhelming that office mates feel like they can’t talk to their colleagues,” and even remote compa-



Making friends at work has become harder.

nies should schedule “in-person time for workers to laugh, ideate, and care about each other.”

Don’t overdo this, said **Trey Williams** in *Fortune*. Not everybody needs an “office bestie.” Organizations like to pitch their culture as a “family,” perhaps because of the popularity of “boundaryless TV relationships featured in workplace dramas and sitcoms.” Unlike on TV, though, boundaries in a professional setting are “vital.” Office friendships can get “cliquey,” and damage the “overarching team culture companies chase.” Americans do need more friendships. But the workplace may not be the place to find them.

For an example of how workplace camaraderie works, look to sports, said **Tania Ganguli** in *The New York Times*. The New York Knicks outperformed expectations this year in large part because of the chemistry of Jalen Brunson, Josh Hart, and Donte DiVincenzo, three players who were on the same Villanova University championship team. Reunited in the NBA, “playing together added a boost” to their performance. Playing with close friends can “mean instinctively knowing what a teammate might do on a fast break.” Many bosses believe that “work friends could be distracting.” But research shows that in fact teams that are personally friendly communicate better—whether it’s on the basketball court or in an office.

## What the experts say

### Money and the happiness plateau

Researchers say money does buy happiness, after all, said **Joe Pinsker** in *The Wall Street Journal*, but there’s no magic number at which happiness peaks. The oft-cited salary figure is \$75,000, which comes from a 2010 study by two Nobel laureates (it would be \$110,000 in today’s dollars). That number “stuck,” perhaps because it “seemed within reach for many people”—and therefore could be marketed by employers. But even the original study contained nuances. The \$75,000 number “applied solely to day-to-day mood,” for instance; people’s overall happiness “was higher at household incomes above \$120,000 than just below it.” Other studies have found that “each dollar makes less of a difference,” so “beyond a certain level of pay, happiness effectively plateaus.” But where’s that plateau? We don’t know, probably because it’s really high.

### Tax savings from your teenager’s job

Hiring your kid can be a tax-savvy move, said **Kate Dore** in *CNBC.com*. “For 2024, the federal standard deduction for single filers is \$14,660.” If you’re self-employed, and you have a child working for you whose income falls within that range, you may be able to deduct their wages as a business expense. “Plus,

payments to children may avoid Medicare and Social Security taxes, depending on the child’s age and your legal business structure.” The caveat: Your kid must be doing “real work for the business,” and compensation has to match their tasks. Keep detailed records, and know that several states prohibit the hiring of any children under age 14.

### How the 2020s are like the 1950s

Is the stock market too concentrated? History says it isn’t, said **John Rekenthaler** in *Morningstar*. Today’s “Magnificent Seven” stocks—Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and Tesla—account for an ever-growing share of the market. Those seven companies alone now make up 25 percent of the value of all U.S. stocks, and 29 percent of the S&P 500. But decades ago, things were worse. In the late 1950s, just three stocks accounted for almost 30 percent of the S&P 500’s value. We can likely recall the adage that “what was good for General Motors—and before that, U.S. Steel—was good for the country.” Back then, “DuPont employed more chemists than did all American universities. Ma Bell managed every telephone line.” That may not have been great for innovation, but it didn’t make the stock market riskier.

## Charity of the week

As injured U.S. troops started returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003, a group of veterans in Virginia launched a grassroots project to send care packages to



veterans’ hospital bedsides. Their organization, **Wounded Warriors Project (woundedwarriorproject.org)**, has since grown to provide nearly 200,000 injured veterans each year with physical and mental rehabilitation services. Veterans can participate in the WWP wellness program, in which they receive 90 days of one-on-one wellness coaching to help them adopt healthy nutrition, sleep, and exercise routines. WWP also cares for invisible illnesses, such as PTSD and traumatic brain injuries, with free clinical mental health treatment, peer support groups, and 12-week mental health workshops. When veterans are ready to start the next phase of their lives, WWP provides job interview preparation, résumé reviews, and job placement counseling.

Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from *Charity Navigator*, which rates not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their governance practices, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group’s highest rating.

## Health care: Wall Street's bad prescription

A Boston-area hospital chain has given us “one of the biggest hospital bankruptcies in decades,” said **Bloomberg** in an editorial, and you can lay the blame at the feet of Wall Street. Private investment in health care “has surged to almost \$1 trillion over the past decade, funding new technologies, clinical trials, and more.” Midsize physicians’ practices have welcomed the money; so have struggling hospitals. But private equity, an engine of efficiency, has foundered on the “messy reality” of American medicine. Take Steward Health Care System.

With the help of private equity giant Cerberus Capital Management, CEO Ralph de la Torre “turned six Boston-area facilities into one of the nation’s largest for-profit hospital chains.” At first, conditions improved, “but Steward also borrowed heavily to fund its expansion,” and things quickly went south. Last year, a patient died after giving birth “because a device that would’ve stopped her bleeding had been repossessed.” Steward filed for bankruptcy protection in May.

Steward’s financial struggles were exacerbated by a \$484 million dividend paid to investors while the hospital was allegedly \$1.4 billion underwater, said **Maureen Tkacik** in *The American Prospect*. De la Torre “used the dividend to buy himself a \$40 million mega-yacht.” Meanwhile, the hospital chain has been “sued by dozens of vendors and service providers for failing to pay bills.” The intensive-care unit at one hospital in Florida reeked of guano from an infestation of 3,000 bats because Steward had stiffed the exterminators. Private equity funds owned 17 of the 80 hospitals that declared bankruptcy in the U.S. last year, said **Maia Anderson**



A rally to save Steward's Morton Hospital

in *Fortune*. Their business model “relies on high debt levels” and has been punished by an increase in interest rates. “Health-care companies have also faced rising labor costs and staffing shortages,” compounding the financial challenges.

The private equity health-care “hijacking” is overstated, said **Nathalie Voit** in the *Washington Examiner*. “The truth of the matter is that hospital chains affiliated with churches and universities employ far more doctors,” and nonprofit hospitals “engage in the same profit-maximizing

techniques, such as systematic staff downsizing and sharp budget cuts.” Wall Street is an easy scapegoat. We don’t know if Steward is the norm or an exception, because we actually don’t know the extent of private equity’s tentacles in health care, said **Lisa Jarvis** in *Bloomberg*. Acquisitions are hard to track “because the price usually falls below antitrust reporting thresholds.” And private investors typically only hold on to a health-care asset for three to eight years, adding to the disruptive “churn” of the industry.

Private equity firms claim their acquisitions make health care more affordable, said **David Wainer** in *The Wall Street Journal*, but the evidence shows otherwise. Since the buying binge began a decade ago, “Americans’ medical bills have gone nowhere but up”—sometimes dramatically. One firm bought more than a dozen anesthesiology practices in the Houston area alone and kept hiking rates with each acquisition that eliminated a competitor. Consolidation makes the industry “less competitive by design,” with “few mechanisms to limit profiteering.”

## Brands find the value of neutrality

**Michael Serazio**  
*Vox*

Activism doesn’t sell like it used to, said Michael Serazio. During Donald Trump’s presidency, “advertising evolved a bit like journalism,” with brands positioning themselves as “vessels for progress” on cultural matters like race, sex, and immigration. Neutrality—once the golden rule for brands wanting to sell to everyone—came to be seen as “craven delusion,” as more and more consumers began to vote with their wallets. And marketers responded. Levi’s and Delta demanded gun control, Nike supported Black Lives Matter, even Axe body spray condemned the Jan. 6 rioters. “Brand-land was arguably taking its cues from market demand: A 2018 *Adweek* poll found

nearly three-quarters of consumers wanted retail companies to stand up for their political beliefs.” Today, “virtue-signal shopping is a luxury less affordable during inflationary times.” And brands seem happy to backpedal from anything remotely controversial. The billion-dollar sales slide of Bud Light, after an ad with a trans influencer sparked a boycott, is now a cautionary tale. Some advertisers have gotten so paranoid about their influencer relationships, they are “deploying AI tools to track down ‘every political word,’” and dropping spokespeople if there’s even a hint of an opinion on Israel-Gaza. The election is looming, but Madison Avenue is sitting this one out.

## Elon Musk’s space-launch monopoly

**Eric Lipton**  
*The New York Times*

Elon Musk has gone from David to Goliath in the space industry, said Eric Lipton. It took Musk’s SpaceX well over a decade to convince the U.S. government that his engineering genius and entrepreneurial drive were superior to those of the “big, slow-moving contractors that had long dominated the industry.” Now it is Musk who is dominant. SpaceX made 96 successful orbital launches last year—89 more than all of its competitors. It earned more federal contract money than its top nine competitors combined in 2023. SpaceX once sued the Air Force over its cozy relationship with Lockheed-Boeing, but upstart launch firms say SpaceX is now able to

undercut competitors by using its own government business to subsidize commercial launches. As it has grown, “SpaceX has increasingly adopted business tactics that Musk once condemned.” The company has boosted its spending on lobbyists by 30 percent since 2020. It also hired several “top Pentagon and NASA executives after they played key roles in awarding contracts to SpaceX.” SpaceX’s defenders say the space business is growing more crowded, with Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin as well as Boeing, Rocket Lab, and Relativity Space all nearing commercial launches. “For now, though, the ability of the United States to reach orbit remains largely dependent” on one man.

## The basketball giant who beat pain and a stutter

**Bill Walton**

1952–2024

Bill Walton was one of the greatest centers in basketball history, leading UCLA to two national titles before landing NBA championships for the Portland Trail Blazers and the Boston Celtics. But he didn't stop there. After retiring from the court, he overcame a stutter to launch a second career as an eccentric and often hilarious broadcast commentator, holding forth on the game's intricacies with leaps into history, politics, and the glories of his beloved Grateful Dead. "I was incredibly shy and never said a word," he once said. "Then, when I was 28, I learned how to speak. It's become my greatest accomplishment of my life—and everybody else's biggest nightmare."

William Theodore Walton III was born in La Mesa, Calif., said *The New York Times*, to a social worker father and a librarian mother. One day, the family next door "dismantled its backboard and basket, and he and his father reassembled it at their home." Walton had found his passion. After a stellar high school career, he landed at UCLA, where he won his first NCAA title in 1972—the same year that he was arrested at a protest against the Vietnam War. His most famous game came in the next year's final, said



*ESPN.com*, "in which he shot an incredible 21-for-22 from the field" and led the Bruins to another national championship. The 6-foot-11-inch Walton quickly became a dominant force in the NBA, driving the Trail Blazers in 1977 to their only NBA championship. His 14-year career was "disrupted by chronic foot injuries" and dozens of painful surgeries, and he played just 468 out of 1,148 regular-season games. In 1988, when his injuries had progressed to the point where he could no longer run, he retired and took up broadcasting, calling games for NBC, ESPN, and CBS with goofy glee.

Walton brought "a sense of joy, wonder, and wackiness" to his on-air coverage, said *CNN.com*. He showed off his tie-dyes, showered colleagues with gifts, and once gobbled a cupcake, lit candle and all. But constantly cramming his huge frame into airplane seats took a toll, and his spine collapsed in 2007. Spinal fusion surgery finally took away his chronic pain and restored his ability to walk. "My life has been defined by meteoric rises and climbs to the top, and then these catastrophic health challenges that would just take me down," he said in 2016. "I never thought that I'd be free of pain.... I am the luckiest guy on earth."

## The producer who made *The Godfather*

**Albert S. Ruddy**

1930–2024

A born storyteller with a flair for four-letter words, Albert Ruddy could talk his way out of anything. While producing *The Godfather* (1972) he was inundated with threats from Italian-Americans convinced the film would stereotype them—at one point, his car windows were shot out. So Ruddy went straight to a Mafia boss to work out a deal, agreeing to strike the words "Mafia" and "Cosa Nostra" from the script and to cast members of the Italian-American Civil Rights League as extras. Once news broke that he'd made concessions to mobsters, the studio wanted to boot him from the film, but director Francis Ford Coppola insisted it couldn't be made without him. *The Godfather* went on to win three Oscars, including Best Picture. "I am probably the only person who was stupid enough and street-smart enough to enable us to keep going the way we did," he said in 1997.

Born in Montreal to a uniform manufacturer and a clothing designer, Ruddy was raised in New York City from age 7, following his parents' divorce. After studying architecture at the University of Southern California, he took various jobs as a computer programmer, a con-



struction supervisor, and a shoe salesman "while slowly making inroads into the studios," said *The Telegraph* (U.K.). In 1965, he co-created *Hogan's Heroes*, a sitcom about Allied prisoners in a Nazi POW camp. The premise "seemed tasteless to American viewers 20 years post-World War II," said *The New York Times*. But when Ruddy acted out the pilot for CBS chairman William Paley, the network head laughed so much he bought the show, and it ran for six seasons. Ruddy also began producing films, showing a talent for finishing under budget.

For more than half a century, Ruddy presided as "part peacemaker, part ringmaster" on the sets of popular movies and TV shows, said *The Washington Post*. He produced the 1974 football film *The Longest Yard* as well as 1981's comedy *Cannonball Run*, and created and produced *Walker, Texas Ranger*, which ran on CBS from 1993 to 2001. Three years later, he won his second Oscar, for 2004's Clint Eastwood and Hilary Swank boxing tearjerker *Million Dollar Baby*. But *The Godfather* was his defining achievement—and he maintained it wasn't a Mafia flick. "It may be," he said in 2009, "the greatest family movie ever made."

## The former teacher who revolutionized American parenting

Adele Faber changed the way we speak to our children. As the co-author of the hit parenting guide *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So*

**Adele Faber**

1928–2024

*Kids Will Talk*, Faber helped popularize the teachings

of psychologist Haim Ginott, particularly the then radical idea that children should be treated as equals, with dignity, not punished or lectured. Faber, a mother of three, translated Ginott's scientific ideas to everyday scenarios to help parents offer choices rather than threats. "Love is not enough. You need skills, and these skills just aren't in our culture," she said in 1987. "They've got to be taught."

Born Adele Meyrowitz to Jewish immigrants in the Bronx, she grew up speaking Yiddish at home, said *The Washington Post*. After studying education at New York University, Faber taught high school English until her three kids came along. But even with her teaching background, she said, she "felt there was more to know about relating to children" and started attending Ginott's parenting lectures. She convinced a neighbor, Elaine Mazlish, to join her, and the two decided to write their own parenting book—"not from the perspective of an expert psychologist, but from the standpoint of two mothers." *Liberated Parents, Liberated Children* (1974) was a success, but the *How to Talk* series really took off, spawning five more guides, including *Siblings Without Rivalry* (1987).

These "child-rearing blockbusters became bibles for generations of parents," said *The New York Times*, and were published in nearly 40 countries. For decades, Faber continued evangelizing Ginott's techniques by leading workshops, teaching courses, and appearing on TV. "People welcome the new methods," she said in 1995. "They don't want to repeat the same hurtful patterns they grew up with."

# A too-perfect stone

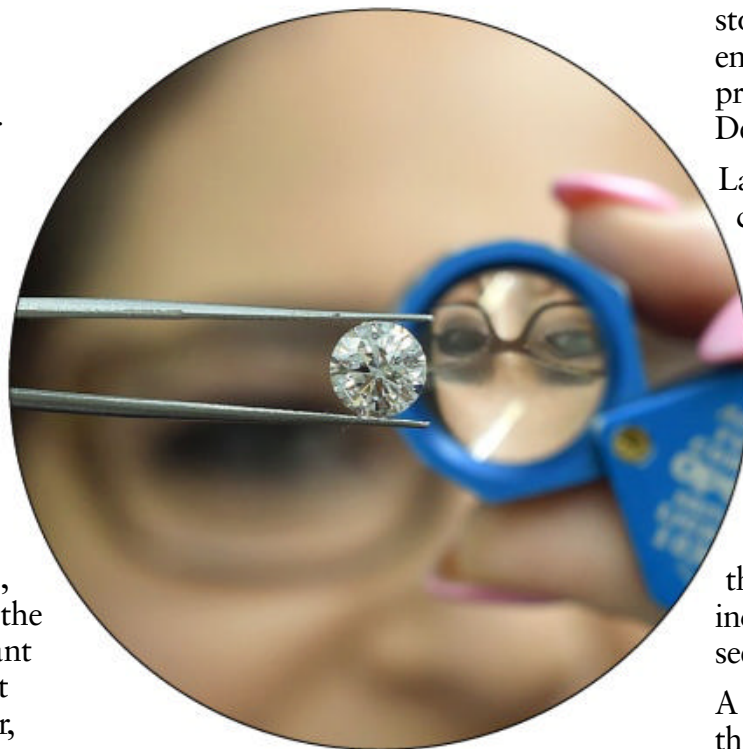
*Lab-grown diamonds are indistinguishable from mined ones, and much cheaper, said Amanda Mull in The Atlantic. For many brides-to-be, that's a problem.*

LAST YEAR, A funny thing happened at Ring Concierge's Manhattan showroom. A bride-to-be brought her engagement ring back to the popular jewelry store after wearing it for a few weeks and wanted to trade out her diamond for a worse one. The woman was worried that the original rock was too clear, too bright, too perfect for its large size, Ring Concierge's CEO, Nicole Wegman, told me. She wanted to replace it with a lower-quality stone of a similar size—something a little less bright white.

Brides sometimes bring in new rings for tweaks; maybe they want the fit adjusted, or they're having second thoughts about the setting. Occasionally, they decide they want to pay the extra money to go bigger. That the central diamond is too good, however, is just not a complaint that jewelers get, except in cases of totally blown budgets. But this particular bride wasn't worried that she'd spent too much money, Wegman said. In a sense, the bride was worried that she hadn't spent enough. She and her fiancé had selected a lab-grown diamond—a gem that's chemically identical to a mined diamond at a fraction of the cost—in order to get the kind of size and clarity that would push a natural stone far beyond their means. Now she was concerned that everyone they knew would take one look at the big, perfect stone on her finger and immediately see the trade-off.

In recent years, lab-grown diamonds have flooded into the market, causing something of an existential crisis in the natural-diamond industry, which has spent decades making the diamond engagement ring into a singular goliath of American luxury shopping. This new wave of stones offers a tempting bargain: You can have the ring of your dreams (or something much closer to it), even if your budget is significantly smaller than the average ring cost of somewhere around \$5,500. A real stone—and its symbolic value in life and romance—no longer requires all that expense, or all of the baggage of mined stones' bloody imperial history. Diamonds, it would seem, are now a solved problem.

Except, of course, a diamond's appeal has never had that much to do with the chemical specifications or atomic structure of the stone itself. Even as lab-diamond sales have taken off, Wegman told me, most buyers



*A diamond that's too big can betray its origin.*

have the same approach as that regretful bride. They want to stick to a stone that would still seem plausible for their income and status were it mined, and they don't plan to tell their family and friends that it's not. The rationality of lab-grown diamonds is butting up against an even greater force: the cultural power of their mined counterparts, built on a generations-long influence campaign to change the way Americans think about marking personal milestones. In the end, it's a fight that lab-diamond purveyors might not want to win.

**D**IAMONDS, AS YOU have probably heard before—perhaps from someone trying to get out of buying one—are just chunks of carbon. More precisely, they are chunks of carbon that form more than 100 kilometers belowground, some of which are eventually carried by volcanic activity back toward the surface, where they can be reached by miners. Natural diamonds are generally pit-mined—a difficult, dangerous process in which they are hauled by humans out of great human-made craters in the earth—and they can develop in only a handful of rock varieties.

For generations, De Beers—a British-South African mining corporation that the journalist Edward Jay Epstein described in a now-legendary 1982 *Atlantic* exposé on the industry as “the most successful cartel arrangement in the annals of modern commerce”—controlled enough of the trade to meter the supply of jewelry-quality

stones released to the consumer market, ensuring a sense of scarcity and high, stable prices. Over the past few decades, however, De Beers' influence has waned.

Lab diamonds promise beautiful stones created with industrial predictability and control. The first lab diamonds were produced in the 1950s, but decades of additional research were needed to refine a commercially viable process that can consistently produce customizable, gem-quality diamonds. Now what takes nature perhaps a billion years and a great deal of happenstance can be accomplished in a factory in a few weeks with the right machinery, the right materials—including a sliver of diamond that acts as a seed—and enough skilled technicians.

A 1-carat round mined diamond—the kind that anchors a huge proportion of American engagement rings—currently costs anywhere from \$50 to \$1,000 to produce in its rough form, depending on where it's mined, according to Edahn Golan, a diamond-industry analyst and a managing partner at the jewelry-analytics firm Tenoris. In a lab setting, that same diamond now costs \$15 to \$20 to manufacture. At retail, a lab-grown diamond will generally sell to a consumer for less (and sometimes much less) than half of what a mined stone with near-identical characteristics sells for. Even the Gemological Institute of America, or GIA—a highly influential industry organization that provides, among other things, widely accepted standards of diamond grading that help determine a stone's worth—has stopped referring to lab-grown diamonds as synthetic. They're real. No caveats.

**Y**OU DON'T HAVE to be especially skilled at math to discern the grave disruption that this confluence of circumstances could cause for the traditional diamond industry. Russell Shor, a veteran of the diamond industry who spent almost two decades as the senior market analyst for GIA, told me that according to some of the estimates he's seen, lab diamonds accounted for 30 to 40 percent of the engagement-ring stones sold in the United States last year. Overall, the numbers are impressive: In 2016, about \$1 billion worth of lab diamonds was sold worldwide. By 2022, the total was \$12 billion, or about 17 percent of the global diamond market, according to Golan.

Diamond growers aren't just competing against purveyors of mined gems; they're competing against one another for dominance of a market that is not yet mature. This competition is rapidly driving down prices as the sales numbers shoot up. New players can buy a few machines, lease some factory space in a country with cheap labor, and start churning out low-quality lab-grown gemstones in short order. (Like natural diamonds, lab-grown stones can have occlusions or wonky colors, and those grown too quickly develop what can only be described as stretch marks.) What has happened is exactly what you'd expect when supply far, far exceeds demand: According to Golan's data, at the end of 2018, the average wholesale price for a 1-carat round lab diamond was \$1,786. At the end of 2023, it was \$163. "It's a race to the bottom," Shor said. Retail prices have not collapsed quite as quickly, but they, too, are trending down in rather dramatic fashion.

On one level, that's great. Diamonds have endured as a part of engagement jewelry for lots of reasons that have little to do with practicality, but the stones' characteristics—chiefly their incredible durability and neutral color—do make them a reasonable choice, in purely physical terms, for jewelry you intend to wear on your hand every day for decades. If big, flawless diamonds are no longer even plausibly rare or difficult to source, then people who want a diamond of any sort can simply choose the size and shape that suits them best and not worry about their budget—or about what their diamond says about their position within old-fashioned ideas of status and hierarchy.

Except, well, what if all of that is still sort of the point? Lots of people want to give or receive big diamonds because of their implications, not in spite of them. Wegman, Ring Concierge's CEO, was skeptical of the idea that price had become incidental to the appeal of a diamond engagement ring. "Lab-diamond prices will have to bottom out at some point, but if they go too low, then is it not going to be enough for an engagement ring?" she asked.

THE IDEA THAT receiving a big, beautiful diamond engagement ring might be less exciting if that ring doesn't strain your beloved's budget is, of course, a boon to those in the business of selling jewelry, no matter what kinds of diamonds are in their inventory. A decades-long media campaign funded by the De Beers cartel didn't just ensconce diamond rings as the

default symbol of American betrothal; in order to goose sales of larger diamonds, it also painted the stone's size as a shorthand for a couple's personal and professional success. The expense itself has always been what makes the ring meaningful.

Why anyone would long to spend extra money when far more affordable, identically useful options abound can be a maddening question—but only when asked about products you're not personally interested in. You may not feel that way about diamonds, but maybe sports cars or designer handbags or rare whiskeys do it for you. These are all known as "Veblen goods," so named after the American economist Thorstein Veblen, who first described the phenomenon in 1899. Veblen goods are products for which demand increases as their price goes up. People come up with all kinds of arguments for why any particular Veblen good is totally worth the money in rational terms—fine craftsmanship, superior materials, that sort of thing. Sometimes, those assertions are true enough, but they're not complete. A Veblen good's primary utility is for social signaling; it derives value from its price, instead of the other way around. It's desirable because people with less money can't have it.



A 1-carat stone now costs just \$15 to \$20 to produce.

All of this puts lab-diamond purveyors in an awkward position. If lab diamonds become too cheap, they can ruin the demand for diamonds altogether. Lab-diamond makers tend to argue that their product is also more ethical and sustainable—attributes constantly said to be of incredible importance to the young people who make up most of the engagement-ring market. And to be fair, diamond mining historically has earned its reputation for cruelty and excess, even if the modern industry has made efforts to clean up the worst offenses of generations past. But public proof of lab-growers' sustainability claims can be thin on the ground. And no clear evidence exists

that many diamond shoppers are excited enough about an environmentally friendly sales pitch to switch their preference if price isn't already a concern. No matter how anyone ignores or sanitizes it, part of the appeal of luxury goods is the difficulty or danger involved in service of the buyer's pleasure.

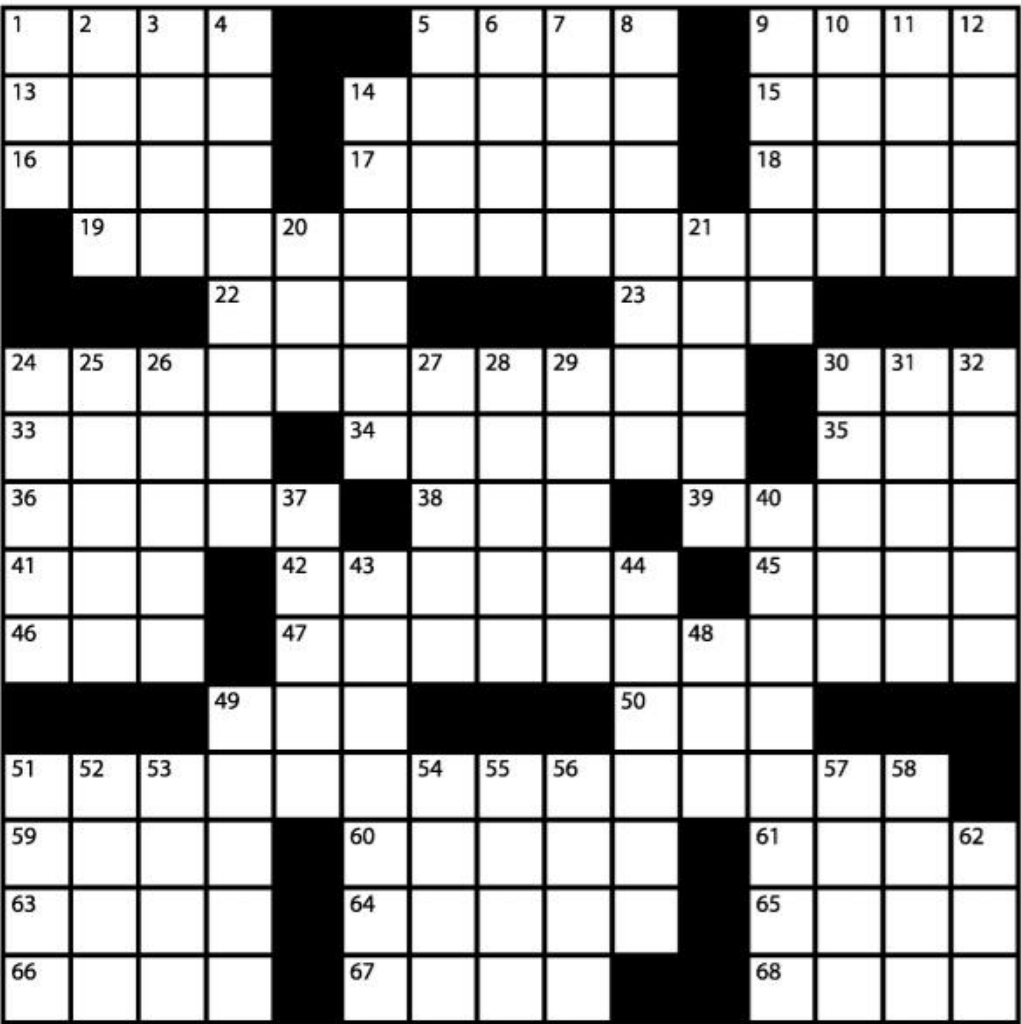
Lab diamonds are just as sparkly and beautiful as their mined counterparts, but they aren't a product that has much clear value if people aren't still being driven mad by desire for the mined diamonds they currently seek to undercut. Counterintuitive though it may seem, that's great news for the traditional diamond trade—lab stones' explosive popularity might actually strengthen demand for at least some types of mined diamonds, rather than subvert it.

You can already see that beginning to happen in the numbers, if you look carefully: The size of the average American natural-diamond engagement ring, Golan said, has begun to creep up in the past few years. It used to be about a carat, and now it's up to 1.2 or 1.3—a phenomenon that he attributed to the proliferation of big lab-grown stones, which make smaller natural diamonds look extra small in comparison, thereby encouraging those buyers to expand their budget to keep up. Buyers could also enter the market for fine jewelry at a younger age and lower price point with lab diamonds, and then "upgrade" to natural stones as they get older, get engaged, and make more money—something Shor said he also expected to see as the owners of lab engagement rings grow older. Upgrading your diamond and expanding your collection along with your socioeconomic status, after all, has long been a part of the diamond invention.

At Ring Concierge, Wegman has so far been reluctant to expand lab diamonds outside of the engagement-ring business. But as time goes on, she said, customers have begun to ask for lab options in other styles—even those who want a mined diamond for their engagement ring. The two types of products are beginning to look more complementary than competitive. This past Black Friday, Ring Concierge dipped its toe into those waters for the first time, offering a pair of lab-diamond stud earrings—a style that Wegman said is a financial stretch for almost everyone when using mined diamonds, because it requires two big stones. The earrings were a hit.

*A version of this story originally appeared in The Atlantic. Used with permission.*

Crossword No. 748: Comprehensive Crossword by Matt Gaffney



- ACROSS**

1 Beef Emmy winner Ali

5 Like “der” words in German (abbr.)

9 Cotton \_\_ (Q-tip)

13 Seller of beds and bookcases

14 Event most celebrate yearly

15 Dark-green veggie

16 1982 sci-fi movie

17 Play part

18 It’s pumped in gyms

19 Baseball fans (and players) breathed a sigh of relief last week when this umpire, often reviled as the league’s worst, announced his retirement

22 Shareholder’s possession (abbr.)

23 Pick-six results (abbr.)

24 Song from the 1975 musical *Chicago*

30 Baseball great Ripken Jr.

33 Fish that’s also part of a shoe

34 Trippy shirt

35 Palindromic Oklahoma city

36 Oscar or Tony, say

38 Impress, and then some

39 Alternative to legal tender

41 Skirt feature

42 Give an angry earful to \_\_ Day vitamins

45 \_\_ Day vitamins

46 One of the Gershwins

47 1975 U.S.-USSR space mission whose second word is Russian for “union”
- 49 “There’s an \_\_ for that”

50 Brynner in *The King and I*

51 Photographer with 1.2 million Instagram followers

59 Home to some alpacas and zebras

60 Item of value

61 Active person

63 Show Katy Perry is leaving after this season, briefly

64 New York city

65 French bread?

66 Part of DMZ or ZIP code

67 Newspaper department

68 Comprehensive...or, what this puzzle’s four theme entries go from
- 25 \_\_ East Side (part of Manhattan)

26 Woolly creature

27 Former San Antonio Spurs center Splitter

28 Amethyst or zircon, say

29 *Let’s Make \_\_*

30 One manning the balloon darts stand, e.g.

31 Dramatic goodbye

32 South American capital

37 Curtain

40 Brainstorming session compliment

43 Put your hands together

44 Highlander creator

48 The Highlander is one

49 Supermarket section

51 Ansari of *Master of None*

52 “\_\_ you?” (question after answering another question)

53 Lunchtime, often

54 Direction 90 degrees from norte

55 Ancient Egyptian goddess

56 \_\_ and call

57 Sell aggressively

58 Not even one

62 Cartoonist Chast

The Week Contest

**This week’s question:** An entirely underwater 10,000-square-foot lot in the San Francisco Bay Area, bought sight unseen by its current owner, is on the market for \$400,000. In seven or fewer words, come up with a real estate listing that will tempt buyers into bidding on this lagoon-bottom property.

**Last week’s contest:** A luxury airline catering to dogs has taken its inaugural flight, with owners paying \$6,000 each to have their pooches ferried from New York to Los Angeles by BARK Air. In seven or fewer words, come up with a job listing for a flight attendant at this high-class canine carrier.

THE WINNER: Wanted: Emotional support human, vest provided  
*Kenneth Jensen, Richland, Wash.*

SECOND PLACE: Forget first class, be best in show  
*Jeff Morris, Alexandria, Va.*

THIRD PLACE: Wanted: Bite attendant/chewardess  
*Ann Schroeder, Dummerston, Vt.*

For runners-up and complete contest rules, please go to [theweek.com/contest](http://theweek.com/contest).

**How to enter:** Submissions should be emailed to [contest@theweek.com](mailto:contest@theweek.com). Please include your name, address, and daytime

telephone number for verification; this week, type “Lagoon lot” in the subject line. Entries are due by noon, Eastern Time, June 11. Winners will appear on the Puzzle Page next issue and at [theweek.com/puzzles](http://theweek.com/puzzles) on Friday, June 14. In the case of identical or similar entries, the first one received gets credit.



◀ The winner gets a one-year subscription to *The Week*.

Sudoku

Fill in all the boxes so that each row, column, and outlined square includes all the numbers from 1 through 9.

Difficulty: medium

				1			7
		2	5			8	6
		7	2			4	1
		5	4		3		2
				2			
2			8		6	7	
	8	6			2	3	
	1	3			5	6	
4			3				

Find the solutions to all *The Week*’s puzzles online: [www.theweek.com/puzzle](http://www.theweek.com/puzzle).

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**The Week** (ISSN 1533-8304) is published weekly, except January 5, January 12, July 12, and September 13. **The Week** is published by **Future US LLC**, 130 West 42nd Street, 7th floor, New York, NY 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to **The Week**, PO Box 37252, Boone, IA 50037-0252. One-year subscription rates: U.S. \$199; Canada \$229; all other countries \$269 in prepaid U.S. funds. Publications mail agreement No. 40031590, Registration No. 140467846. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 503, RPO West Beaver Creek, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 4R6.  
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