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If I scripted this moment for Biden . . .

Aaron Sorkin

OPINION

The Paley Center for Media just opened an exhibition celebrating the 25th anniversary of "The West Wing," the NBC series I wrote from 1999 to 2003. Some of the show's story points have become outdated in the last quarter-century (the first five minutes of the first episode depended entirely on the audience being unfamiliar with the acronym POTUS), while others turned out to be — well, not prescient, but sadly coincidental.

Gunmen tried to shoot a character after an event with President Bartlet at the end of Season 1. And at the end of the second season, in an episode called "Two Cathedrals," a serious illness that Bartlet had been concealing from the public had come to light, and the president, hobbled, faced the question of whether to run for re-election. "Yeah," he said in the third

What if President Bartlet had bowed out on "The West Wing"?

season opener. "And I'm going to win." Which is exactly what President Biden has been signaling since the day after his bad night.

Because I needed the "West Wing" audience to find President Bartlet's intransigence heroic, I didn't really dramatize any downward pull that his illness was having on his re-election chances. And much more important, I didn't dramatize any danger posed by Bartlet's opponent winning.

But what if the show had gone another way? What if, as a result of Bartlet revealing his illness, polling showed him losing to his likely opponent? And what if that opponent, rather than being simply unexceptional, had been a dump truck of ignorance and bad intentions? What if Bartlet's opponent had been a dangerous imbecile with an observable psychiatric disorder who related to his supporters on a fourth-grade level and treated the law as something for suckers and poor people? And was a hero to white supremacists?

We'd have had Bartlet drop out of the race and endorse whoever had the best chance of beating the guy. The problem in the real world is that there isn't a Democrat who is polling significantly better than Mr. Biden. And quitting, as heroic as it may be in this case, doesn't really put a lump in our throats. But there's something the Democrats can do that would not just put a lump in people's throats with its appeal

SORKIN, PAGE 11

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.



Squatters playing foosball at an abandoned building set up for informal social activities known as the Bathyscaphe in Seine-Saint-Denis, a suburb of Paris near the Olympic Village.

Evicted for the Olympics

SEINE-SAINT-DENIS DISPATCH
SEINE-SAINT-DENIS, FRANCE

Sprucing up a suburb of Paris for the Games renders many homeless

BY SARAH HURTÉS

The building, once a warehouse, apartments and offices, is a temporary home — with one shower — for 60 adults and children. On the ground floor, rats sprint under plastic chairs and parked baby strollers. The stench of damp clothes and clogged toilets overpowers the strong scents of tomato and spices from the makeshift kitchenettes on upper floors. In the inner courtyard, laughter echoes as children scoop up giggling babies and gently swing them skyward.

This is a so-called squat in Seine-Saint-Denis, a suburban area east of Paris that at one time was an industrial district. Now, it is a place with trendy cafes and high-fashion houses, as well as abandoned factories and spaces like the warehouse, which have become unauthorized housing for homeless people and immigrants.

Mariam Komara, 40, an undocumented immigrant from Ivory Coast, has lived there since last year. The other day,



"It may not be ideal, but it's the best I have," said Mariam Komara, at the so-called Squat Gambetta, the temporary home for her and another 60 adults and children.

she was getting ready to go to court to argue that she had the right to stay.

"It may not be ideal, but it's the best I have, and it's a safe place to sleep," she said one recent evening.

Soon, though, Seine-Saint-Denis will become the thumping heart of the Paris Olympics — with housing for thousands of athletes in the nearby Olympic Vil-

lage — and ground zero for one of France's central dilemmas.

Hundreds of thousands of immigrants have arrived in France in recent years, and many of them have congregated in the gritty suburb nestled in the shadow of the City of Light. Roughly a third of the more than 1.6 million people living in Seine-Saint-Denis are immigrants —



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the highest percentage of any area in the country. The influx has strained the housing stock, and the government.

In Seine-Saint-Denis, thousands live in street encampments, shelters or abandoned buildings like the former warehouse, more than in any other administrative district in France, according to a 2021 report by France's housing authority. To many in the area, the squats are eyesores, standing in the way of a long overdue revitalization.

Building owners often go to court seeking eviction orders, and a new law from last year has made life easier for them by shortening the eviction procedure and imposing substantial fines and prison sentences on squatters.

But solutions for the housing crunch

Trump team plans attack on the likely substitute

Kamala Harris is viewed as probable replacement, should president drop out

BY MAGGIE HABERMAN AND JONATHAN SWAN

Donald J. Trump's campaign is preparing a major effort to attack Vice President Kamala Harris if President Biden steps aside as the Democratic nominee, including a wave of ads focusing on her records in her current office and in California, according to two people briefed on the matter.

The Trump team has already prepared opposition research books on Ms. Harris and has similar dossiers on other Democrats who could become the nominee, if Mr. Biden were to drop out of the race.

But the bulk of the preparations so far have been focused on Ms. Harris, including a recently concluded poll testing her vulnerabilities in a general election contest, according to the two people. The Trump team's attention on Ms. Harris is based on its assumption that Democrats' bypassing the first Black woman to serve as vice president would drive deeper divisions in the party and risk alienating Black voters.

Trump allies have also begun examining the records of Democratic governors who are considered potential running mates for Ms. Harris. Advisers to the former president are paying close attention to Gov. Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania — the state the Trump campaign is most focused on winning to block the Democrats' path to the White House.

A Trump campaign spokesman did not respond to an email seeking comment.

Brian Fallon, a campaign spokesman for Ms. Harris, said in a statement: "After tanking the bipartisan border deal, Donald Trump has resorted to lying about the vice president's record. As a former district attorney and attorney general, she has stood up to fraudsters and felons like Trump her entire career. Trump's lies won't stop her from continuing to prosecute the case against him on the biggest issues in this race."

Since Mr. Biden's disastrous debate performance on June 27, Mr. Trump and his political operation have softened their criticisms of the president, hoping he stays politically viable until the party formally nominates him and it's too late to replace him without major legal hurdles. Mr. Trump's senior team would prefer that Mr. Biden remain in the race, believing his low approval numbers and voters' widespread doubts about his age and cognitive fitness represent the former president's best chance at reclaiming the White House.

After the debate, the Trump team decided to hold back advertising that could further damage Mr. Biden, according to one person briefed on the Trump campaign's internal discussions, who wasn't

She's over 100, living in the Amazon rainforest



Vari Vati Marubo is believed to be one of the oldest people living deep in the Amazon. She remembers a time when seeing a white person could cause her people to flee.

PROFILE
JAVARI VALLEY INDIGENOUS TERRITORY, BRAZIL

Vari Vati Marubo's life highlights the challenges facing Indigenous people

BY JACK NICAS

After more than 100 years in the rainforest, Vari Vati Marubo walks with a stick and, as she always has, barefoot.

So when her Indigenous tribe, the Marubo, gathered for meetings this year in a village that would require a 13-mile hike across streams, fallen logs and dense forest to reach, everyone knew it would be difficult for her to attend.

But, as she has for a century, Vari Vati dealt with the elements. She caught a ride on the only transportation available: her son's back.

"Be careful with me!" she shrieked to her son, Tama Txano Marubo (all Marubo use the same surname), as he

climbed down a muddy embankment with a machete in one hand and his mother on his back. Her weight sat on a blue strip of fabric that stretched tight across his forehead. "Call a truck to come get me!" she shouted to laughing relatives. "This is too much."

She made it just fine. Beyond being the senior elder in the 2,000-member Marubo tribe, Vari Vati is believed to be one of the oldest people still living deep in the Amazon rainforest. Her official government document, based on an estimate from an anthropologist, says she turns 107 in September, though her family believes she is even older. Fellow tribe members describe her as over 120.

Maria Lucimar Pereira Xaxinawá of the nearby Huni Kuin people was 131 when she died in 2022, according to a government document. If that age was accurate, she would have been the oldest person in the world. Researchers have attributed the longevity of some Indigenous people in the Amazon to their active lifestyles and natural diets.

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PAGE TWO

Bouncy ‘wonders’ raise questions in Hong Kong

HONG KONG

Mock-ups of monuments like Stonehenge stir talk about the nature of art

BY TIFFANY MAY

With darkness falling along Hong Kong's waterfront against a backdrop of glimmering skyscrapers, carnival music competed with the whine of ventilation blowers as visitors bounced on an inflatable Stonehenge.

The puffy white model of megaliths was part of an installation this month for SummerFest, a public outdoor festival that is to continue for several weeks. Like its companions, including mock-ups of Egyptian pyramids and the giant faces of Easter Island, it was based on A.I.-generated images dreamed up by Joann, an Armenian designer who has created whimsical, surreal pop-up exhibits for clients like Gucci, Marc Jacobs and Oatly Ice Cream.

The exhibit, “Inflatable Wonders,” has attracted crowds. It has also elicited mockery, as well as stirred discussion about cultural sensitivity and about what gets to be considered art, and what is crass commercialism, pandering to mass tastes. Some people have also been asking why more local artists aren't being used for projects like this one.

White is a color associated with death in East Asia, and the shapes of the Stonehenge have drawn comparisons to tombstones. As space for free expression has shrunk in Hong Kong in recent years efforts to lure tourists or generate civic pride have at times struck notes of desperation or simply oddness.



BILLY H.C. KWOK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



PHILIPPE LOPEZ/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

The exhibit has also raised questions about whether inflatables, a growing presence in the art world, deserve to be taken seriously. On a recent evening, some who lounged on the Stonehenge were fans. “I think this is fun and nice to look at,” said Cai Zhijian, a 45-year-old freelance photographer visiting from Fuzhou, a city in mainland China's Fujian Province, carrying a selfie stick. “You can relax here.”

Fion Ho, a 51-year-old insurance broker visiting with her father, was less impressed. “You call that a tower? The Leaning Tower of Pisa? Doesn't it look like a toy? This is more suited for the water park.”

Hong Kong has a history of welcom-

The giant stone faces of Easter Island, top, and Stonehenge, right, are models for inflatable structures at a summertime outdoor festival in Hong Kong. The city has a history of welcoming inflatable art: Above, a gigantic rubber duck that visited its harbor in 2013.

ing inflatable art. In 2013, a gigantic rubber duck, created by the Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman and sponsored by a local shopping mall, greeted Victoria Harbor. Thousands flocked to view it, many carrying small versions of the duck in homage. Earlier that year, several inflatables were installed by M+ when that museum was still under con-



BILLY H.C. KWOK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

struction. Their subjects included a giant cockroach, a suckling pig and a pile of excrement.

Such works expanded the definition of contemporary art, said Vivienne Chow, Artnet News's London correspondent and co-author of The Asia Pivot newsletter, who covered art and culture in Hong Kong for two decades. In-

flatables are also fun and inviting to the public, she added.

But as event planners tried to replicate that successful blend of consumerism, tourism and public art, giant inflatables risked becoming a tired trope.

Bringing A.I.-generated visuals out of the realm of fantasy is another challenge. Joann, whose images inspired

“Inflatable Wonders,” initially expressed dismay at how they were rendered. “I don't like my name on this ugly exhibition,” she said in an interview with Yahoo News. “But the concept is mine. So I would love it to be stopped.” She added in the interview that she felt that the structures looked poorly proportioned, according to pictures she had

seen of the exhibit (she has not seen it in person).

Grace Au Shui-lin, SummerFest's curator, said in a radio interview on Monday that she hoped that visitors would see the exhibit for themselves, rather than basing their opinions on photographs she characterized as misleading. Central Venue Management, the event's organizer, said that 12,000 people had visited the installations over the first three days of the festival, which is to run until Aug. 11.

When reached for comment, Joann and Central Venue Management released a joint statement walking back Joann's earlier comments. She had made them, it explained, after seeing “low quality and nonprofessional” photos of the exhibit that made it “difficult to accurately assess the installations' appearance.”

The exhibit also illustrated the limitations of inflatables in the real world, even as A.I. becomes more prevalent in art and design.

“While A.I. allows for limitless and surreal creativity, translating these designs into physical installations involves significant challenges. Therefore, variations from the original A.I. concepts are to be expected,” the statement read. It added that Joann had not received compensation for the free public event and that the organizers were “not required to replicate” her designs “exactly.”

Inflatable artwork has encountered other challenges. In February of this year, strong winds twice postponed the introduction of “Chubby Hearts,” an installation of red balloons conceived by the British artist Anya Hindmarch and intended to float above landmarks across the cityscape. Online commenters and lawmakers expressed doubt about whether the project should have received nearly \$1 million (7.8 million Hong Kong dollars) in government funding.

Manfred Yuen, a prominent Hong Kong architect known for designing play spaces, said that the negative feedback reflected other sources of discontent, such as the shrinking economy, falling tourism and the shuttering of small businesses, more than a reaction to the artworks themselves, about which opinion is necessarily subjective.

He also mentioned the commissioning of overseas artists. “My question to the government is: Why can't you use local talent?” he added. “You need to give artists the opportunity to grow. You start importing, then you keep on importing.”

Since 2018, Mr. Yuen has created “Soft Spaces,” a series of indoor and outdoor inflatable installations whose special lighting effects, music and animations are designed specifically for interactive play.

He said it was a delicate, if not impossible, task to reconcile works meant to inspire and raise questions with carnivalesque fun designed for mass consumption. But to “Inflatable Wonders” visitors, that question was not top of mind.

On a recent afternoon, Wendy Liu, a 23-year-old research student from Shenzhen, wandered into the Stonehenge after taking a turn on a nearby Ferris wheel.

“What is this exhibit meant to represent?” she asked.

She had spent the previous half-hour enjoying the view of Hong Kong's skyline from the open space by the harbor.

“This is spacious and pretty,” she said. “I think it fits the theme.”

She's over 100, still living in the Amazon rainforest

AMAZON, FROM PAGE 1

Vari Vati is part of a seasoned group of Indigenous elders who have helped preserve their people's culture and customs in the face of tremendous change and challenges inside and outside their forest home.

The arc of her life has tracked a century of transformation for the Amazon's Indigenous people, when many have confronted new contact with outsiders and their technology, as well as vast destruction of the jungle.

And yet her day-to-day routine shows how some Indigenous groups have been able to preserve a way of life that still resembles that of their ancestors.

Vari Vati has spent all her life in one of the most isolated stretches of the planet, surrounded by miles of forest in every direction. She has slept in a hammock in the Marubo, a tall communal hut where the Marubo cook, eat and sleep together.

She has crafted jewelry and clothes out of material from the forest, including cotton, seeds and animal teeth. And she has cooked traditional dishes over a fire, including banana porridge, roast lizard and fish roe wrapped in banana leaves.

Vari Vati also remembers a time as a child when seeing a white person could send her people running to hide. But now, an increasing number of Marubo live outside the forest. They speak and study in Portuguese, and some have become lawyers and engineers, activists and academics.

The latest Marubo generation — connected in their remote villages via Elon Musk's Starlink internet service — are on TikTok.

“Since our birth, we've kept the traditions alive. But now I see everything changing,” Vari Vati said in her native language, spoken by just a few thousand people. “Many young people have forgotten the wisdom of our elders.”



Vari Vati Marubo's son, Tama Txano Marubo, carried his mother 13 miles using a strip of fabric stretched across his forehead.

VICTOR MORIYAMA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

She said she understands the search for new knowledge but also worries that migration to the city could erase the culture bred in her tribe's forest villages. “I like being in the forest, being at peace and in harmony,” she said. “Waking up to the dawn breeze, catching the tasty fish. All of this makes me feel alive.”

Vari Vati is a calm presence. She moves slowly, and listens intently. She

wore floral dresses and layers of Marubo jewelry, made from coconut and snail shells, including some that loop around her ears and hook to a piercing in her nasal septum. Her hair is thick and only partially gray.

Her exact age is unclear. For generations, Indigenous groups in this region did not track years, so estimating ages often requires clues. One of Vari Vati's

clearest memories from her childhood is visiting the nearest white settlement, Cruzeiro do Sul.

“There weren't many houses,” she said. “There were many trees.”

Cruzeiro do Sul, today a city of 92,000, was founded in 1904 and photos from that period appear to match her descriptions, her family said.

The Marubo first made contact with

outsiders near the end of the 19th century when rubber tappers pushed into their section of the Brazilian Amazon, near the border with Peru.

“When we saw white people we were very afraid,” Vari Vati said. “Our medicines only cured our diseases, not unknown diseases from the outside.”

Many Marubo died — from disease and violence. Vari Vati probably was in her 20s during World War II, but when asked, she had never heard of it. “The only war I witnessed was that of the Peruvians against the Indigenous people,” she said.

Vari Vati has spent all her life in one of the most isolated stretches of the planet, surrounded by miles of forest in every direction.

Vari Vati, a daughter of the Marubo's past chief, married three times and had nine children, the oldest of whom is now believed to be nearly 90. Her first husband left her. Her second was murdered, her family said. And her third later married her niece and now lives in a different village. (In Marubo culture, men are allowed to marry multiple women; women may be married to only one man at a time.)

The Marubo live collectively, with everyone in a village pitching in with different responsibilities, from farming, hunting, cooking and cleaning, and everyone eating the same food from the same bowls.

There are also clear gender roles — and privileges. The men hunt and the women cook. The men eat with forks and spoons at one end of the maloca, sitting on logs. The women eat with their hands at the other, sitting on mats woven from palm fronds. The men take

ayahuasca, a psychedelic brew made from an Amazonian plant, to connect with spirits; the women may not.

Several Marubo lamented the inequality. Vari Vati suggested that it was how life was. Still, the tribe recently elected its first woman as part of the leadership and is now starting its first women's association.

At the meetings this year, part of periodic tribal gatherings to resolve problems and discuss new plans, Vari Vati rose to speak. Nearly everyone stopped to listen.

“Let us not focus on conflicts or hate, but on a collective good, on what is best for our people, on living in peace and harmony,” she said, holding her son for support. “We are Indigenous. We can't live like the non-Indigenous people.”

She added that she was happy she had the chance to address the tribe. “I won't always be here,” she said. “And I'm fearful you will be lost in the future.”

Vari Vati has some of the tribe's deepest knowledge on cooking, medicinal plants, weaving cotton and painting body art, said her daughter-in-law, Raimunda.

“These village elders are the library of the forest,” Raimunda said. “When they die, some of their knowledge goes, too, because it's not easy to pass it on.”

On the way back from the meetings, Vari Vati and her family stopped to rest. She sat on a log, crouched over, her head in her hand. She swatted at flies circling a cut in her foot.

Her son, Sebastião, who lives part time in the city, said he tries to encourage his mother to take better care of herself, including by wearing flip flops and taking more Western medicine. But she resists.

“She's always saying, ‘Who cares for us is the forest,’” he said. “‘The spirits of the forest. We don't need to worry.’”

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World



The Rev. Benedict Nivakoff during a feast this month. He is the abbot of a monastery in Italy that was rebuilt, funded partly from sales of the monks' craft beer, Nursia.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALESSANDRO PENSO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A tale of faith and ale in Italy

NORCIA, ITALY

Monks rebuild monastery in a region still struggling, years after terrible quakes

BY ELISABETTA POVOLEDO

They may have chosen a contemplative life of prayer, detached from world affairs, but last month a small community of Benedictine monks threw a very big bash for the opening of their new monastery on a hill overlooking the central Italian town of Norcia, where St. Benedict was born.

After a Mass and a seated dinner for 1,000 — about half of them Norcia residents — the monks officially settled in, eight years after a devastating earthquake upended a sizable part of Norcia and destroyed their previous space.

At the festivities, they served Nursia, their craft beer, whose sales had supported the restoration of the 16th-century Capuchin monastery that the community had bought after returning to Norcia 25 years ago, following a two-century hiatus. The celebration was also a moment of hope for an area struggling to revive itself after the earthquake compounded years of depopulation.

"They could have left after the earthquake," Alberto Naticchioni, a former mayor of Norcia, said of the 20 monks. "Instead they rolled up their sleeves and started rebuilding. It gave an important signal."

Norcia was among the 138 central Apennine towns and villages devastated by earthquakes in 2016. Two months after a tremor in the region killed nearly 300 people that August, Norcia was shaken by a magnitude-6.5 earthquake — the strongest in Italy since 1980.

No deaths were reported in the October quake, because many people had evacuated. But many houses and historic buildings collapsed, including the Basilica of St. Benedict and the monks' previous monastery. (St. Benedict, who



Part of the new Norcia monastery; the original structure was destroyed in an earthquake in 2016. Since then, many towns in the region have found it hard to rebuild.

was born in Norcia around 480, founded several monastic communities, and his philosophy formed the precept for thousands of monasteries in Europe.)

Since the quakes, many towns have struggled to rebuild, hobbled by bureaucracy, pandemic-related delays, and a dearth of construction companies and a steep rise in the cost of materials.

"A lot of people in the area are giving up. There aren't many opportunities for young people."

For the monks, however, fund-raising was helped by beer sales, "which remained pretty stable" throughout, "despite Covid and the war in Ukraine," said the Rev. Augustine Wilmet, the head brewer at the monastery, which last month was elevated to abbey status, signaling it had taken root there.

The Rev. Benedict Nivakoff, the abbot, said beer sales covered about 15 to 20 percent of reconstruction, with donations funding the rest.

In his homily at a Mass celebrating St. Benedict's July 11 feast day, Father Nivakoff spoke of the "virtue of patience." But he said in an interview that for the monks, and residents of the earthquake-struck region — some 575,000 people, according to government estimates — "it's been hard."

The area's depopulation had begun well before the earthquake, with younger people migrating to cities.

"A lot of people in the area are giving up," Giulia Bitrai, 27, a schoolteacher who shares a prefabricated home with her mother and grandmother, said on a sweltering afternoon while hanging laundry along a fence. "There aren't many opportunities for young people, and the elderly wonder whether they will ever see their homes again."

So rebuilding has also meant envisioning more-viable communities.

Guido Castelli, a top official for Italy's post-earthquake reconstruction, said substantial investments were being made in digital connectivity, renewable energy and new railway hubs. In addition, a 7 percent flat tax introduced in

2019 to entice people to live in southern Italy's dwindling villages was extended to the earthquake-struck areas.

But there is still a question of where people might live. About 11,000 families affected by the 2016 earthquakes remain in subsidized temporary housing, according to government figures. Nowadays, Norcia's outskirts are pocketed with such makeshift neighborhoods.

After eight years, some front stoops are riotous with flowers while other residents have added barbecues and lawn furniture. One resident, Maria Severini, 71, lamented that her house in San Pellegrino, a town just south of Norcia, was unlikely to be rebuilt anytime soon. The town, practically razed to the ground in the August quake, remains abandoned.

Her concerns may have some merit: In some parts of Italy, people have been living in post-earthquake temporary homes for over a century.

"At least here I don't have stairs to climb as I grow old," Ms. Severini said. It was unclear whether she was being ironic.

Several locals, asked why they stayed, replied that it was home.

"We created this — where are we going to go?" said Giuseppe Ansuini, 77, sitting at his Norcineria, the equivalent of a deli, that he inherited from his father and has passed down to his son. Above him, a sign declared Norcia among "the most beautiful towns in Italy."

Tourism, a major economic driver, remains far below its pre-2016 levels, though. Then, the city could accommodate about 3,600 overnight guests, the mayor said. Now, it's down to 1,000.

The monks' presence has helped attract visitors, Mayor Giuliano Boccamera said. They have also drawn Roman Catholic families who moved to the area to participate in their traditional religious practices.

And the monks themselves are transplants: Only two are Italian, the rest coming from around the world, including several from the United States.

"We made vows here, vows which were for life," Father Nivakoff said. "Our hope was to stick to that."

Venice assesses fees it levied on tourists

Results are inconclusive for stressed Italian city's test to limit day-trippers

BY ELISABETTA POVOLEDO

When Venice introduced a five euro entrance fee in April, officials said the aim was to dissuade day-trippers from visiting at peak times, in a bid to ease the pressure on beleaguered residents forced to share the fragile city's limited space and public resources.

So did the fee work? "We are convinced that we limited some peaks," said Luigi Brugnaro, Venice's mayor, who called the experiment a "great success."

But at a news conference on Friday, city officials conceded that a more thorough analysis of the data was necessary before it could definitively be said that the objective had been realized in this test phase.

City officials had singled out 29 peak dates from April through the middle of this month — mostly national holidays and weekends — when single-day travelers arriving in Venice between 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. were required to pay the €5 fee (about \$5.50).

Over the course of the period, the entrance fee was paid 485,000 times, making the city €2.43 million richer, according to statistics presented.

"Much more than we expected," Mr. Brugnaro said, adding that it had been estimated that the city would collect about €700,000.

But critics promptly called the pilot project a failure.

"They brag that they raised a lot of money with this contribution, but that shows the opposite," said Giovanni Andrea Martini, an opposition City Council member, referring to day-tripper traffic. "If you made that much, it means you can't control it."

"It's evidence of a failure," he said.

City officials said on Friday that comparisons of visitor numbers with previous years was difficult, because there was no comparable data. They said a more complete report would be made public in the fall.

Mr. Martini said that city officials had access to comparable cellphone data of people arriving in the city in prior years, and that the available data showed that more people had come to Venice this year on peak days, regardless of the fee. "They have all the numbers, all of them — they can't hide," he said.

Another critic, Franco Migliorini, an architect who researches overtourism, said €5 was too little to "stop anyone." "Just about everything in Venice costs more than €5, practically even a coffee," Mr. Migliorini said.

Venice is one of dozens of cities in Eu-

rope, and around the world, grappling with a glut of tourists, and with growing frustrations among locals, that this year led some residents of Barcelona to take to the streets and squirt tourists eating al fresco with water guns.

The wear and tear of mass tourism has been felt especially in Venice, a collection of islands crisscrossed with canals, which is also threatened by climate change and rising seas. Last year, UNESCO, the United Nations' culture agency, recommended that the city be put on the list of its endangered World Heritage Sites, citing mass tourism as a principal concern, though Venice stayed off the "in danger" list after the access fee was approved.

On the 29 days the fee was levied, visitors had to register online to receive a QR code. Overnight visitors already pay a tourist tax and were exempt, as were other categories including students, workers and residents of the region.

Officials had warned that transgressors faced steep fines, but a city spokesman said on Friday that none had been issued. Critics said that fines could have been challenged in court, so the city tread lightly.

On Friday, Simone Venturini, the city's top tourism official, said that Venice had spearheaded a "cultural revolution" when it came to dealing with mass tourism.

The fee program provided precise visitor numbers that allowed officials to plan ahead, and also allowed city officials to interact with visitors before they came, he said.

So will the program continue? Only after the data has been further examined will city officials decide whether to increase the number of days in which the fee would be levied next year, or to raise the cost, which could double on some days, Mayor Brugnaro said.

Looking at one graph, Mr. Brugnaro said that compared with the first weeks, there had been a clear decrease in the number of people who paid an entrance fee on peak days during the final days it was in effect. "That means something is there," he said.

Mr. Martini disagreed. "All it means is that there were fewer people paying the fee, because they knew no one was being fined," he said.

While the mayor judged the test a success and thanked city officials for working hard to ensure that the experimental phase went smoothly, he said, "Right now I don't feel much like celebrating."

In the past week, Mr. Brugnaro was placed under investigation, and Renato Boraso, a Venice city councilor, was arrested on charges relating to a real estate deal. Mr. Brugnaro said his "conscience was clean, squeaky clean," and expressed confidence that prosecutors would clear his name.



Inspectors checking tourists in Venice to verify that they had paid a five euro (about \$5.50) entrance fee aimed at easing the pressure on the city's beleaguered residents.

Canada will struggle to fulfill its military spending pledge

NEWS ANALYSIS

It highlights the challenges for NATO in upgrading the capabilities of its members

BY MATINA STEVIS-GRIDNEFF

Long seen as punching below its weight, Canada, the world's second-largest country by area and one of its seven wealthiest economies, said it would meet its NATO pledge to significantly bolster its military spending by 2032.

But everything about the commitment, which NATO is pushing all alliance members to make, is fraught.

Some have criticized the timeline as too protracted, though it is actually compressed if considered through the lens of the slow pace of global military hardware production.

Canadians, much like many citizens across the developed world, are concerned about housing and public services. Convincing them that it is necessary to dedicate billions of dollars to mil-

itary equipment will not be easy.

And Canada is expected to hold elections some time before October 2025, meaning that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's defense pledge will not be binding if he loses to his conservative opponent, Pierre Poilievre, who is considered a serious challenger.

"I make promises that I can keep and right now we are, our country, is broke," Mr. Poilievre said this month, declining to abide by the spending target.

NATO members have pledged to spend at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product on their militaries.

Canada is far from the only NATO spending laggard. About a third of NATO's 32 members exceed the 2 percent target, but most of them have security concerns at their borders that motivate them to expand their militaries.

Another third say they will reach that target by the end of this year.

But Canada, much like France, Germany and Italy — which are all members of the Group of 7 industrialized nations — have been slow to catch up and spend below the target.

"We are rich enough that we should be able to do more, and have typically



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada, center, pledged to increase military spending at the NATO summit meeting.

done just enough to keep our allies' frustrations with us in check," said Adam Chapnick, a professor of defense studies at the Royal Military College of Canada, although he also stressed that Canada is the seventh-biggest spender in the alliance in absolute dollar terms.

On the sidelines of a NATO summit meeting in Washington this month, Mr.

Trudeau and his defense minister, Bill Blair, announced a plan to spend 2 percent of the country's economic output on defense by 2032.

Canada currently spends roughly 1.4 percent of its economic output on defense and has plans to increase that to 1.7 percent by the end of the decade.

"We wanted to be able to provide a credible and verifiable response to our allies about what Canada will do to reach the 2 percent and the time frame," Mr. Blair said in an interview with The New York Times last week.

But the country could not spend faster than its military industry can produce, he said. "We were limited in part by how quickly it takes to actually acquire these big things that we had to procure."

The possibility of a second Trump presidency adds urgency to the matter. As president, Donald J. Trump browbeat NATO allies for overly relying on American military largess to guarantee post-Cold War peace and demanded that they spend more. The Biden administration has consistently, if more politely, delivered the same message.

But the war in Ukraine has depleted

NATO allies' stocks, and the military industry requires vast investments to ramp up production.

As he seeks to reclaim the White House, Mr. Trump has said that he will not continue to support Ukraine's war efforts and will instead push for peace. This would most likely leave other NATO members having to either support Mr. Trump, or break with the United States, the heart of the alliance, and back Ukraine without Washington as a partner.

Mr. Blair did not comment on the possible link between the increased spending announcement and the prospect of a second Trump presidency. Instead, he said Canada's military needs were "urgent," especially in modernizing and ramping up its presence in the Arctic, which has become a source of tension among major powers.

The importance of reaching the spending target, Mr. Blair added, was to "get the capabilities that we require."

Still, experts said, declaring a sense of urgency does not necessarily expedite military procurement.

"Military procurements are multi-year projects and therefore threats that

are a decade away must be treated as urgent so that the procurement process is finished by the time the need moves from hypothetical to real," Mr. Chapnick said.

Canada also said it would buy 12 conventionally powered (meaning not nuclear) submarines, a key part of its strategy to expand its military presence in the Arctic, which it sees as an important theater of competition with Russia and China.

Mr. Blair said he expected to have the first submarine delivered by 2030.

On Thursday, the newly appointed chief of the Canadian Armed Forces, Gen. Jennie Carignan, said Canada needed to bolster its defense.

"We are much more open now to both conventional threats and unconventional threats, all at the same time," she told the news media after officially taking on her position. "So I think that Canadians need to understand that if we are not ready, we might not be able to react appropriately in defense of them."

"I say we have about five years to get us close enough to be ready to counter those long-range type of threats," she added.

Needing urgent treatment, but trapped in Gaza

JERUSALEM

Border crossing closed by Israel prevents the very ill from reaching Egypt

BY AARON BOXERMAN

After months of waiting, Fida Ghanem was granted a permit by Israel and Egypt to leave Gaza for urgent lymphoma treatment in the spring. But the next morning, Israeli forces seized the only border crossing from Gaza to Egypt, in Rafah, as part of a military offensive against Hamas.

Ms. Ghanem, 42, died one month later in early June. The border was still shut. "She should have been allowed to leave as soon as they found the cancer," said her husband, Maher Ghanem. "But it was delay after delay."

For nearly all Gazans, the southern Rafah crossing has been the only way out since the war began nine months ago. But since Israel captured it in early May, it has been closed to all civilians, and Israeli, Egyptian and Palestinian officials have been unable to agree on the terms to reopen it.

Aid workers and doctors have warned that the prolonged closure is endangering some of Gaza's most defenseless, including children with severe burns, cancer patients and people needing heart surgery. More than 10,000 people need immediate medical treatment outside the enclave, according to the World Health Organization.

"The most vulnerable residents of Gaza — its children, sick and elderly — are paying the highest price," said Tania Hary, who directs Gisha, an Israeli human rights group that advocates freedom of movement for the more than two million Palestinians in Gaza.

The closure also severed a vital route for humanitarian aid into Gaza, and at least for a time, significantly reduced the quantities going in to a population already struggling with widespread hunger.

Adding to the volatility, on Saturday, Israeli fighter jets bombed a port in Yemen controlled by the Iran-backed Houthi militia in retaliation for the group's deadly drone attack in Tel Aviv a day earlier. It was the first time Israel has publicly struck the group during months of escalating Houthi attacks.

The Gaza side of the Rafah crossing had been administered by Hamas since the group took full control of the territory in 2007 and until Israel captured it in May. Egypt, which closely coordinates with Israel on security, often used the crossing to exert pressure on Hamas, including by enforcing a joint blockade of Gaza with Israel for 17 years.

To address the aid disruption after the crossing was shut down, Egypt agreed to divert some trucks ferrying food and medicine into the enclave via a different route, through Kerem Shalom, an Israeli-controlled gateway.

Ordinary Gazans are often forced to pay thousands of dollars to go-betweeners to obtain permission to cross the border. Dual nationals, whose exit is arranged by their embassies in Cairo, and the critically ill, who leave in coordination with the Egyptian authorities, generally do not have to pay.

Israel controls all other routes out of Gaza.

The Kerem Shalom crossing connects Gaza only to Israel, but there is a separate border point with Egypt about 25 miles south, outside the Israeli village of Nitzana. Last month, Israel and Egypt allowed about 20 sick and wounded children from Gaza to leave through Kerem



Clockwise from above: Lama Abu Holi, 8, in Al-Aqsa Hospital in Gaza, where more than 10,000 people are said to need immediate medical treatment; Fida Ghanem, a lymphoma patient who died last month while waiting to leave Gaza for treatment, with her husband, Maher; Israeli military vehicles at the Rafah border crossing from Gaza to Egypt.



Shalom and enter Egypt at Nitzana to test the feasibility of that route.

But thousands more who desperately need treatment are still stuck in Gaza.

Muna Abu Holi, a college professor from central Gaza, said she survived explosions that killed one of her daughters and left two others with deep shrapnel wounds. The surviving daughters, Lama and Malak, need surgery and obtained permits to leave through Rafah on May 7. But they are still waiting to get out.

"We're grasping for any possible hope," Ms. Abu Holi said. "Every piece of news we hear, we cling to."

The United States has pressed Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the West Bank and administered Gaza before the Hamas takeover in 2007, to reopen the Rafah crossing.



But Israeli, Egyptian and Palestinian officials cannot agree on how to do that.

Egypt demands a full Israeli withdrawal, according to Egyptian state media. Israel says it will not allow Hamas to control the crossing again, charging that it used Rafah to smuggle arms into Gaza.

In private, Israeli officials have sought to persuade the Palestinian Authority to send employees to informally run the crossing under Israeli security control, according to Palestinian officials and diplomats who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

The Palestinian Authority rejected the idea, refusing to take over the border unless it was part of a broader push for full Palestinian sovereignty over Gaza — which Israel opposes. Israel similarly

approached a mission of European Union border observers who were present at the crossing until 2007, but they refused to work there without the Palestinian Authority, diplomats said.

By late June, photos revealed that much of the Rafah crossing had been destroyed, another obstacle to any speedy reopening.

"She should have been allowed to leave as soon as they found the cancer."

Israel's government has mostly rebuffed taking responsibility for the sick and wounded Gazans. Last week, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, shot down a proposal by his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, to build a

field hospital for Gazan children along the border with the enclave.

Even before the war, the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of Gaza crippled the enclave's health sector, forcing many to seek treatment in Israel or the West Bank. Basic equipment such as X-ray machines could take years to arrive, if at all, and the toll led some doctors to emigrate.

After the Oct. 7 Hamas-led attack that triggered the war, Israel stopped allowing Gazans to enter for medical care. Gaza's hospitals were overwhelmed by the mass deaths and wounded, as well as by tens of thousands seeking safety from the Israeli offensive.

Already underequipped doctors struggled to cope amid shortages of medicine and of fuel for hospital generators. And Israeli forces stormed some medical facilities that they said Hamas

used for military purposes, including in tunnels underneath some hospitals. Hamas and Gaza health officials denied those claims.

In November, Egypt, in coordination with Israel, began allowing a handful of urgent cases, such as those of children with cancer, to leave through Rafah. Most of the evacuees were ferried to Egyptian hospitals; others were sent to Qatar, the United Arab Emirates or several European countries. A few were treated in the United States.

Early in the war, just 10 sick and wounded Gazans were permitted to leave daily, which expanded to roughly 50 by early May, before the crossing closed, said Dr. Shannon Barkley, a senior World Health Organization official for Gaza and the West Bank who is based in Jerusalem.

But demand has always outstripped those limits.

According to W.H.O. figures, Gaza officials have submitted at least 12,760 requests for people to leave for medical care since the war started. Nearly half were approved, many after delays of weeks or months.

Both Israeli and Egyptian security agencies vet the lists of those who can leave, according to Dr. Barkley. They rarely approve requests to transfer sick or wounded men aged 19 to 60, according to the W.H.O.

"The medical need is enormous because the health system has been decimated," Dr. Barkley said.

Mr. Ghanem, a former officer in the Palestinian Authority security forces, said he buried his wife in June without a proper funeral because there was an Israeli offensive in central Gaza. She, too, was a victim of the war, he said.

For one Gaza boy, even an unusual opportunity to circumvent the border closure came too late.

Nabil Kueheil, 5, was diagnosed with acute leukemia in mid-April, with the war in full swing, as his once well-to-do family was living in a camp for displaced Palestinians in Rafah.

"We were living in tents, flies descending in the daytime and mosquitoes at night," said his mother, Aya Kueheil, 28. "Suddenly, he was covered in bruises that turned first red, then purple. His stomach swelled; they told me there was growth in his spleen and liver."

On May 6, Nabil's name appeared on a list of evacuees who could leave the following day alongside a note indicating that his case was urgent. But by the next morning, Israel had launched its offensive in Rafah and seized the crossing.

For weeks, the family waited.

In late May, Ms. Kueheil received surprising news: Israel had approved Nabil for treatment at Augusta Victoria, a Palestinian-run hospital in East Jerusalem — a rare occurrence during this war.

The next morning, feverish and quaking, he was taken in an ambulance to the Kerem Shalom crossing, said his mother, who accompanied him.

Israel never publicized his evacuation, possibly fearing backlash at home. Some Jewish Israelis, including members of the governing coalition, have voiced opposition to humanitarian aid for Gazans.

Nabil "was in severe pain, with a high fever, dirty and covered in blue discolorations," said Dr. Khadra Salami, the pediatric oncologist who treated him in Jerusalem.

"It was clear that the leukemia had infiltrated all his organs," she said.

Two days later, Nabil died from a drug-resistant infection he had picked up in Gaza. Dr. Salami said the three-week wait after the closure of Rafah probably cost him his life.

"Every day of the delay mattered," she said.

Thousands made homeless for the Paris Olympics

PARIS, FROM PAGE 5

are hard to find. There are not enough homeless shelters. The pressure to tighten border controls and increase the deportation of illegal immigrants is high.

"You have people who continue to arrive in France and Europe every day," said Serge Grouard, the mayor of Orléans, south of Paris, who raised concerns in February about migrants being relocated to his city for the Olympics without notification. "The government sweeps it all under the rug," he said. "And when we do talk about it, we're dangerous extremists. Except that three-quarters of the French population are fed up."

France has invested billions in Seine-Saint-Denis for the Games, hoping that the event and its aftermath will lift the area.

Many in the district have welcomed the changes. "We should have new sports facilities that will enable us to do health-oriented sports activities," said Malo Le Boubennec, the events manager of the Seine-Saint-Denis sports clubs organization. "It can positively impact housing, residents and the department."

But sprucing up has led to the closing of dozens of squatter dwellings, evicting over 3,000 people. And the French government has bused many evicted individuals out of Paris ahead of the Olympics, promising housing but often leaving them stranded in unfamiliar locations like Orléans — or facing deportation.

In the spring of 2023, some 500 squatters were kicked out of a building that

A classroom for youths from nearby shelters or street camps in the Bathy-scaphe facility in an abandoned building in Seine-Saint-Denis outside Paris.

had previously been a cement factory close to the Olympic Village. Another building was recently shut down next to the Seine River walkway to the Stade de France arena.

Days before the Games are scheduled to start, a few squats remain. Squat Gambetta, named by activists after its street name, is where Ms. Komara lives with her husband.

Ms. Komara traveled to France last year to join her husband, who arrived in 2022. Despite his occasional car mechanic work, Ms. Komara said, they could not afford permanent housing. They also found no space in emergency shelters. For months, she said, they slept on chairs in subway stations. One night, she fell victim to a theft that left her without her phone and passport and with a knife wound on her right hand.

A stranger told her of the vacant building where she now lives. The other occupants are also mostly West African women and their children.

Only the children seem to notice the darting rats. Anju, 14, tall with braided hair and a large gap between her front teeth, called the rodents lucky.

"At least they don't have to pay rent," she said.

Ms. Komara spends every day, she said, dialing 115, the emergency housing center, praying that an operator will answer and offer space in a shelter. Occasionally, after hours of waiting, a re-



sponse comes, only to report full shelters.

But time is against her. This year, she and the other occupants received a court order to leave the building by

April, and the police could evict them at any moment.

Fighting to stay longer, she and other residents went to court twice.

"We are 60 people, sir," Ms. Komara

told the judge this month. "There are 15 children, some women are pregnant and there are small babies. We cannot survive on the streets."

Carcasses of former squats can be

seen all across Seine-Saint-Denis, some razed or guarded by security guards, others armed with alarm systems or fortified with cement walls. Every squat eviction sends dozens to hundreds of people back to the streets, packing the last surviving squats in return.

Thomas Astrup, an activist who has been opening squats in Seine-Saint-Denis for the past five years, defended them as part of the cityscape.

"Squats are places rich in diversity and community life," he said. "Many people would find themselves on the streets without them."

Some also are places for informal social activities, like one, called the Bathy-scaphe, where a nonprofit group runs French classes for youths who live in shelters or street encampments. It also holds concerts and art workshops.

Some city officials and landlords sympathize with squatters and have asked France's Interior Ministry to help find shelters for people who are evicted.

Inside the courtroom where Ms. Komara spoke, the judge eventually postponed the hearing to Aug. 5, midway through the Olympics. No decisions would be made that day.

Under her temporary roof, Ms. Komara continued dialing 115.

After nine months of calling, she received a text last week.

A shelter near Charles de Gaulle Airport, about a half-hour north, had space available. For exactly how long, she was not sure. But it meant she would leave Seine-Saint-Denis.

Ségolène Le Stradic contributed reporting from Paris.

WORLD

Roots of a president's defiance

WHITE HOUSE MEMO

Biden remains bitter about having felt pushed aside by his party in 2016

BY MICHAEL D. SHEAR

The seeds of President Biden's reaction to the Democratic Party's crisis of confidence in him were planted years ago.

Facing an extraordinary push by his friends and allies to end his political career, Mr. Biden has responded with defiance. For three weeks he has dug in, denied polling evidence and vowed to stay in the race, claiming that he is the only one who can defeat former President Donald J. Trump. Only in the last few days have people close to him said they believe he is more receptive to stepping down.

To many of his allies, he is in a surprising crouch for a politician who has built his identity on service to country over self.

But those who have been close to him for years say that Mr. Biden's response is a culmination of the regret, pride, anger and fear that has been building in him for at least the past decade. All of that is painfully evident, they added, from his own words.

It was in October 2015 when Mr. Biden, then vice president and grieving over the loss of his son Beau five months earlier, announced in the White House Rose Garden that he would not run against Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders for the Democratic presidential nomination. A few months later he looked back on the decision and said, "I regret it every day."

Publicly, he explained his decision not to run by saying that the grief process was unpredictable and that it "doesn't respect or much care about things like filing deadlines or debates and primaries and caucuses."

With President Barack Obama and his wife, Jill, by his side, Mr. Biden said that "it may very well be that that process, by the time we get through it, closes the window on mounting a realistic campaign for president." In conclusion, he said, "it has closed."

But privately, people close to him said he was furious at what he saw as a concerted effort to push him aside in favor of the other candidate. It was a precursor to the kind of pressure he is now under from fellow Democrats.

Then, as now, his friends made the case that he would lose — to Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Sanders, and later to Mr. Trump. David Plouffe, Mr. Obama's top political adviser at the time, sat down with Mr. Biden and showed him polling. The Atlantic reported. "Do you really want it to end in a hotel room in Des Moines, coming in third to Bernie Sanders?" (Eight years earlier, Mr. Biden had finished fifth in the Iowa caucuses and dropped out of the race.)

To Mr. Biden, the message was clear: Mr. Obama wanted him to stay on the sidelines. So did Mr. Obama's aides. And Mrs. Clinton. The grief over his son was real. But so was the feeling, according to several people who had conversations with him at the time, that he was being railroaded by people to whom he had been nothing but loyal for years. He deserved better, he told allies, and thought he would have proved them wrong if he had run.

David Axelrod, who as a senior adviser to Mr. Obama observed Mr. Biden closely for years, said the president had a chip on his shoulder about the decision, fueled in part by anger that he had been driven out of a race by people who never really respected him the way he thought they should have.

"That chip," Mr. Axelrod said, "is the battery pack that has driven him his entire life."

The president has rarely let that an-



Those close to President Biden say he feels that people he served loyally for years are railroading him for a second time.

ger show over the years since, but once Mr. Trump was in the White House, Mr. Biden was more open about his feeling of regret, and his belief that he could have won in 2016.

"I regret that I am not president, because I think there is so much opportunity," Mr. Biden told Oprah Winfrey in an interview toward the end of 2017.

In private, President Biden has asked how Vice President Kamala Harris might be able to win, according to some Democrats.

Pressed on whether he thought he would have won the nomination, had he run, Mr. Biden said yes, though he also said he was confident at the time that Mrs. Clinton was qualified.

"So I didn't feel like I was leaving the field and because I left the field that there wasn't anybody who could, you

know, run the country," he said. "I didn't feel that way."

Things are different now. Since his stumbling, unsteady debate with Mr. Trump on June 27, Mr. Biden has said publicly that only he can defeat the former president in November. Jennifer O'Malley Dillon, his campaign manager, insisted on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" on Friday that Mr. Biden is "in it to win it." But in private in recent days, Mr. Biden has asked how Vice President Kamala Harris might be able to win, according to Democrats briefed on his conversations.

Mr. Biden told ABC's George Stephanopoulos two weeks ago that "I don't think anybody's more qualified to be president or win this race than me." On MSNBC's "Morning Joe," this month, he scoffed at the people trying to tell him what to do, saying, "I don't care what those big names think" he should do, following the debate.

"I'm getting so frustrated but by the

elites," he said, his voice rising and his anger obvious. "I'm not talking about you guys, but by the elites in the party — they know so much more. But if any of these guys don't think I should run? Run against me. Go ahead and announce for president. Challenge me at the convention."

Mr. Biden's victory in 2020 might have erased some of the regret and anger he felt by having not run in 2016. Had he decided to serve only one term, his forever legacy might well have been that he was the one who prevented Mr. Trump from winning a second term in the White House.

But people who know him say Mr. Biden is driven by a deep reservoir of pride and a desire not to be seen as a one-term president, less successful — at least by that measure — than Mr. Obama or former President Bill Clinton, both of whom won the approval of voters to serve a second four years. In modern times, the only Democratic president to try and fail to earn a second term was Jimmy Carter.

It is also fear, said one person who worked closely with him for years, that haunts him: the fear of becoming irrelevant after so many decades at the center of the national conversation.

In a Vanity Fair interview in 2017, Jill Biden hinted at her husband's worry about drifting into irrelevance.

When she was asked whether she would ever tell him to just enjoy life, she responded: "Do you understand what 'enjoy life' means for Joe?"

She was suggesting that it was unthinkable that Mr. Biden would stay on the sidelines for long. Spending the Trump years as the namesake of an academic institute at the University of Delaware (staffed with people who would later fill out his White House and cabinet) was not like being in the center of the arena. As 2020 approached, almost no one around Mr. Biden was surprised that he wanted to try again.

"President Biden is motivated to 'finish the work' on behalf of the American people — having rich special interests pay their fair share in taxes, strengthening and expanding Social Security, restoring Roe, and bringing the country together," Andrew Bates, a White House spokesman, said on Friday.

Now, there is little doubt among people who know him that his narrative of this moment — being pushed out, against his better judgment — is at the heart of his decision-making.

"They were wrong in 2020," Mr. Biden said on "Morning Joe." "They were wrong in 2022 about the red wave. They're wrong in 2024."

Allies begin to consider Biden's exit inevitable

As the Republicans rally around their leader, chaos rules for the Democrats

BY KATIE GLUECK

For years, President Biden has deployed a self-deprecating line when confronting a challenging political environment: "Don't compare me to the Almighty," he urges. "Compare me to the alternative."

Democrats are doing just that — and when it comes to winning the election, a growing number of them believe that Mr. Biden is no longer measuring up.

At the White House and on the Biden campaign, senior staff members are increasingly worried that Mr. Biden could lose Virginia, a state that last backed a Republican for president two decades ago and is typically not regarded as a presidential battleground, according to a senior Biden aide who insisted on anonymity to speak candidly about internal assessments.

In Michigan, some Democrats worry that Mr. Biden would not only lose the state in November to former President Donald J. Trump, but could sink candidates down the ballot, for Congress and state legislatures.

And from Connecticut to California, long-simmering doubts about Mr. Biden's ability to win are bursting open, revealing a Democratic Party in utter chaos roughly one month before its convention in Chicago is set to begin.

"I've never seen a more despondent environment for my party," former Representative Steve Israel of New York, who served as head of the House Democratic campaign arm and has been a Biden donor, said on Thursday morning.

"People are either angry or sad or engaged in wishful thinking," he added. "The Republicans are cruising on the highway towards their destination. And Democrats are having a fight about whether there's an off-ramp. It's not a sustainable model. You can't win an election this way."

Since Mr. Biden's disastrous debate performance late last month, a pattern has taken hold.

A smattering of Democratic lawmakers will speak out, publicly urging a new nominee or going right up to the line. Party strategists predict the floodgates of high-ranking opposition to Mr. Biden will soon open. And then something happens — endorsements from members of the influential Congressional Black Caucus, a passable news conference from Mr. Biden, a shocking assassination attempt on Mr. Trump — that stops the public momentum of the president's critics.

But this time is different.

Mr. Biden has become more receptive to hearing arguments about why he should drop his re-election bid, Democrats briefed on his conversations said, after his party's two top leaders in Congress privately told him they were gravely worried about his prospects. Representative Nancy Pelosi, the powerful former House speaker, has also told Mr. Biden and House Democratic colleagues in recent days that she is pessimistic about his chances of beating Mr. Trump.

And as Mr. Biden sequesters himself in Delaware to recover from the coronavirus, the senior Biden aide said that at the campaign and the White House, senior staff members were increasingly, if informally, discussing among themselves their sense that Mr. Biden's exit from the race was starting to feel inevitable — only a matter of when and how.

Those conversations were taboo as recently as a few days ago, the person said.

Still, in a news conference on Thursday, Mr. Biden's team insisted that the president had no plans to go anywhere. "Our campaign is not working

through any scenarios in which President Biden is not at the top of the ticket," said Quentin Fulks, the president's deputy campaign manager. "He is going to be the Democratic nominee."

Asked about the Virginia concerns, Lauren Hitt, a spokeswoman for the Biden campaign, said that it had a strong ground game in the state and that Mr. Trump's positions on federal entitlement programs and abortion rights were "toxic in Virginia."

"It's why we beat him last time and how Democrats flipped the House of Delegates," she said. "We're confident we'll defeat him there again."

Crucially, Mr. Biden retains the support of many prominent Black leaders in the party.

"If we don't have Joe Biden as the head of our ticket, we will lose to Donald Trump," said former Senator Carol Moseley Braun, Democrat of Illinois and the first Black woman to serve in the Senate, overlapping with Mr. Biden. "I'm still very much supporting him and confused why these people — why the drumbeat has started for him to leave."

But others are beginning to openly express doubts.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, the civil rights leader, said he had told President Biden that it was time for "a serious calculation" of his standing in the 2024 presidential campaign and that remaining in the race might put at risk much of Mr. Biden's legacy in office.

One major reason more elected Democrats have begun sounding alarms is that public and private polling show Mr. Biden and members of his party in peril, even in places he won comfortably in 2020.

"Elections are not about — thank you for your previous service."

"You can swim against the current, but if the current is so fast, there's only so much a down-ballot race can do," said State Representative Phil Skaggs, a Michigan Democrat. "He's no longer an effective campaigner, and you don't get to be president unless you win the election. And so, elections are not about — thank you for your previous service."

Mr. Skaggs is engaged in conversations with other state legislators and local officials about potentially issuing a joint letter urging Mr. Biden to "pass the torch."

In recent days, a series of polls have made clear that Mr. Biden's challenges are not just with the party's "elite." Nearly two-thirds of Democrats said Mr. Biden should step aside and allow the party to select a different nominee, according to an Associated Press-NORC poll released last week.

Former Representative Stephanie Murphy, a Florida Democrat, noted that voters had in fact long made clear that they had serious concerns about Mr. Biden's age and abilities headed into a re-election campaign.

"This is a conversation that should have happened a year and a half ago," she said. "After the debate, President Biden staying at the top of the ticket is putting the American voters and his Democratic Party in an impossible position."

Larry David, a creator of "Seinfeld" and the star of "Curb Your Enthusiasm," who played Senator Bernie Sanders on "Saturday Night Live," offered what was surely a sarcastic summation of the sentiment on the left.

Asked how he would characterize the mood of the Democratic Party — and his own — right now, he replied in an email: "Fantastic! I'm brimming with optimism and exclamation points!! I'm, dare I say, enthusiastic! What a time to be alive!!"

Reid J. Epstein contributed reporting.



Former Representative Stephanie Murphy noted that voters had in fact long made it clear that they had serious concerns about President Biden's age and abilities.

CORRECTIONS

• An article on July 6 about the battle over the claim to an ancient throne in Nigeria referred imprecisely to the system of succession in Kano. While only descendants of Ibrahim Dabo can ascend to the throne, the monarch is chosen from among them by kingmakers and the governor of Kano; it is not the case that the throne is hereditary.

• An obituary on May 14 about the movie producer and director Roger Corman re-

ferred incorrectly to Concorde-New Horizons, the production and distribution company he formed in 1983. He sold its library in 2018; he did not sell the company and its library in 1997.

This correction was delayed for research.

• An obituary last Tuesday about the sex therapist Ruth Westheimer referred incorrectly to her at one point. She was not a psychologist.



Mr. Biden has been driven by a desire not to seem less successful than former Presidents Barack Obama, left, and Bill Clinton.

Trump struggles to turn the page on ‘American carnage’

NEWS ANALYSIS

The candidate promised to bridge gulfs; much depends on the effort

BY LISA LERER
AND MICHAEL C. BENDER

Donald J. Trump has long been a man undone by himself.

He imperiled his presidency and political campaigns with personal grudges, impulsiveness and an appetite for authoritarianism. His casual approach to the rule of law — and unwillingness to accept electoral defeat — resulted in \$83 million in penalties, nearly three dozen felony convictions and additional legal trouble ahead.

But on Thursday night, with his right ear still bandaged, five days after he was wounded by a would-be assassin's bullet, Mr. Trump attempted a politically cunning transformation.

He opened his address by casting himself as a unifying figure, promising to bridge political divides he had long delighted in deepening. He mentioned President Biden by name only once. At brief moments, he struck tones more similar to President Barack Obama's message of hope and healing than to the dark version of America that Mr. Trump described in accepting his first two Republican presidential nominations.

“The discord and division in our society must be healed — we must heal it quickly,” Mr. Trump said on the Republican convention's final night. “As Americans, we are bound together by a single fate and a shared destiny. We rise together — or we fall apart.”

With the Democrats divided and polls tipping in Mr. Trump's favor, Republicans used their national gathering in Milwaukee to bask in the moment. In their view, Mr. Trump — twice impeached, repeatedly indicted, convicted, fined and possibly soon to be sentenced — appears on the verge of regaining control of the world's most powerful office.

Yet even this speech, designed as the debut for the new message, underscored Mr. Trump's challenge with discipline. He stuck to the script at the start. But as the clock ticked well beyond the one-hour mark, he couldn't resist falling back into the kind of rambling, unscripted diatribe that has long been his signature style. At more than 90 minutes, it was the longest Republican nomination address since at least 1956, when the American Presidency Project at the University of California-Santa Barbara started tracking the statistic on the Republican side.

And at his first campaign rally since the convention, Mr. Trump on Saturday launched a litany of attacks that suggested his call for national unity had faded entirely into the background.

Over the course of an almost two-hour speech in Grand Rapids, Mich., Mr. Trump insulted President Biden's intelligence repeatedly, calling him “stupid” more than once. He said Vice President Kamala Harris was “crazy” and gleefully jeered the Democratic Party's in-fighting over Mr. Biden's political future.

Mr. Trump's ultimate success will depend on whether, for the final 15 weeks



Former President Donald J. Trump taking the stage on the final night of the Republican National Convention. He opened by promising to be a unifying figure, but later fell into a rambling diatribe lasting more than 90 minutes.

of the campaign, he can contain his self-destructive tendencies and temper his preference for vengeance and unpopularity, hard-right policies. Since voters rejected him at the ballot box in 2020, Mr. Trump has embraced an increasingly unrestrained and radical version of conservatism that has often bordered on authoritarianism.

Last March, he framed his campaign as the “final battle” against his political opponents and told supporters, “I am your retribution.” In October, he declared that immigrants were “poisoning the blood” of the country. A month later, on the U.S. Veterans Day holiday, he degraded adversaries as “vermin” who needed to be “rooted out.” In December, he said he'd be a dictator — but only on his first day back in office. Last month, Mr. Trump promised to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate President Biden and Mr. Biden's family.

For a night at least, such open threats and nakedly vicious imagery were largely absent. Still, in a speech designed to place a friendlier face on Trumpism, the former president couldn't resist a handful of exaggerations and personal attacks on Democrats.

He derided former House Speaker

Nancy Pelosi as “Crazy Nancy.” Less than four years removed from office, he said America was already a “nation in decline.” He waxed hyperbolic about the immigration crisis, calling it “the greatest invasion in history” and compared undocumented migrants to Hannibal Lecter, the fictional serial killer and cannibal from “The Silence of the Lambs.”

If it endures beyond the convention, Donald J. Trump's new approach poses fresh challenges for Democrats.

“In fact, I am the one saving democracy for the people of our country,” Mr. Trump said, ignoring his role in setting off the Jan. 6, 2021, riot by his supporters on the Capitol.

Unlike what he has done in speeches at so many of his political rallies, Mr. Trump largely played down the causes that have dominated his political life since leaving office — his false charges that the 2020 election was stolen and that Democrats were weaponizing the justice system against him.

“I am running to be president for all of

America, not half of America, because there is no victory in winning for half of America,” Mr. Trump said.

According to close allies of Mr. Trump, much of the former president's newfound temperance was a result of a near-death experience at his campaign rally on July 13.

Privately, Mr. Trump has long been terrified by the prospect of being assassinated — as president, he told at least two allies that he feared his killer would come from within his own administration's intelligence or law enforcement agencies. After narrowly escaping with his life this month, Mr. Trump revealed a rarely seen level of reflection behind closed doors, as he talked to advisers about his legacy and how he may be remembered by his grandchildren.

If it endures beyond the convention and the Saturday was just a lapse, Mr. Trump's new approach poses fresh challenges for Democrats. For eight years, Mr. Trump has been their most potent political weapon, a way to rally their base against a leader they reviled even more than they loved the leaders of their own party.

They have tried to transform this race into yet another referendum on Mr.

Trump, rather than the question of whether Mr. Biden remains fit for a second term. Already, Biden aides say they've struggled to combat what some call “Trump amnesia,” a sense that many Americans have forgotten how much they disliked the chaos and division of the Trump years.

The speech was a capstone to what has been a strikingly effective convention for Republicans.

Rather than focus on Mr. Biden, whose hold on the Democratic ticket seems to grow more precarious by the day, Republicans rallied around the type of unity that has evaded them for much of the Trump era. They devoted the week to recasting the former president as a devoted grandfather, caring friend and compassionate leader. Republicans portrayed their party as a kind of big tent of ideas with speeches from a top union leader and pro-business Republicans, conservative insurgents and establishment politicians.

It was a sharp departure for a party that has spent a decade revolving around the whims and views of one man. But Republicans who have crossed the former president have retired, been defeated or been forced to embrace his

agenda. The result is a party that has fully embraced an unadulterated strain of Trumpism.

On the convention's opening night on July 15, Mr. Trump appeared to be almost overcome by emotion when he entered the hall for the first time, seeming to fight back tears amid the roar that greeted him from his supporters. It was a notable moment for a man who built a political brand on populist rage and who views vulnerability as a weakness.

As the event came to a close on Thursday, the former president tried to draw on some of his new feelings to describe America's “true potential” and pivot away from “American carnage” — the bleak theme of his inaugural address.

“As long as our energies are spent fighting each other, our destiny will remain out of reach, and that's not acceptable,” he said. “We must instead take that energy and use it to realize our country's true potential — and write our own thrilling chapter.”

But after eight years in the spotlight, it will most likely take more than a meandering hour and a half on the stage to determine which story, and which version of Mr. Trump, America will remember.

Democrats' likely substitute becomes a target

TRUMP, FROM PAGE 1

authorized to speak publicly. A change at the top of the ticket could throw a remarkably stable race into chaos — particularly if Ms. Harris, who would be the first Black woman elected president, were to become the nominee.

Shortly before the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee last week, as a growing number of Democrats called for Mr. Biden to leave the race, the Trump team prepared anti-Harris signs and videos to show the delegates in the arena and the television audience at home, according to people briefed on the plans. But they scrapped those plans after a young man tried to assassinate Mr. Trump in Butler, Pa., on July 13, two days before the start of the convention. With the nation still in shock, the pressure on Mr. Biden to leave the race abated, and the Trump team assumed that the Harris contingency plans were no longer necessary.

The Trump campaign was always going to make Ms. Harris, who has repeatedly said that Mr. Biden is the nominee and that they're running together, part of the story, particularly with Mr. Biden's visible physical struggles, said Liam Donovan, a former National Republican Senatorial Committee aide.

“But with the prospect of a switch at the top of the ticket, there's a sudden sense of urgency around defining Kamala Harris and cementing a lackluster image that has long made Democrats queasy,” Mr. Donovan said. But he also noted a potential pitfall for Mr. Trump: “Being the front-runner against another history-making candidate would introduce new risks for a campaign hoping to reap historic gains among Black voters.”

Some Trump aides say privately that Ms. Harris might be better at delivering certain messages than Mr. Biden has been, particularly on abortion rights, an issue that galvanized Democrats in the 2022 midterm elections. And as a former prosecutor, she may be positioned to make a sharp argument about Mr.



Former president Donald J. Trump's campaign team has prepared dossiers on Vice President Kamala Harris and other Democrats.

Trump's criminal indictments, including his conviction in New York on charges that he falsified business records to conceal a hush-money payment to a porn star in 2016.

But they also believe that Ms. Harris will have to own every unpopular Biden-era policy, which will cancel out the gains she might make. In particular, the Trump team plans to attack her over the border crisis, one that the president tasked her with finding the “root causes” of. Aides to Ms. Harris have said that Mr. Trump has distorted her role and have noted that regardless, border crossings have fallen since a Biden administration curtailing of asylum.

They are also looking to define her based on her tenure as a senator in California and, before that, her time as the state's attorney general and as the district attorney of San Francisco, where her record during her 2020 presidential campaign was alternately criticized as too conservative or too lenient toward first-time drug offenders.

According to people briefed on the strategy, if Mr. Biden drops out of the 2024 race but doesn't resign as president, Republicans will argue that the reasons he quit the race are the same reasons he's unfit to remain as commander in chief. They will try to tie Ms. Harris to Mr. Biden by claiming there

was a broad effort to prevent the public from seeing the president's deterioration and suggest that she was part of that effort.

Republicans running in competitive congressional races are already adopting this message. After Senator Sherrod Brown, Democrat of Ohio, on Friday called on Mr. Biden to leave the race, his Republican rival Bernie Moreno posted on X: “If Joe Biden is unfit to run, he is unfit to serve. I am formally calling on Joe Biden to resign the presidency because his continued presence in the situation room is a national security threat. I hope Senator Brown will join me.”

In a statement, Brian Hughes, a

spokesman for the Trump campaign, said, “While we are rightly considering the implications of the Democrats' internal chaos, the real story is the implication that someone is too unhealthy to run but not too unhealthy to serve. That's absurd.”

Republicans have long criticized Ms. Harris. She has been on the receiving end of similar Republican attacks, particularly about the border and Mr. Biden's acuity, for years. And despite not rolling out videos or signs, several Republicans made her part of their focus during their convention last week.

While Democrats are stumbling toward resolution, the Trump campaign has marveled at its position heading into the general election. Mr. Biden's team has spent tens of millions of dollars in advertising this year, but the president has not gained ground in the race against Mr. Trump. The Trump campaign and its allied outside groups, however, have spent far less and are said to have significant cash reserves for the months ahead.

In the nine days since the assassination attempt against Mr. Trump, a collection of outside groups run by a former Trump aide, Taylor Budowich, has raised \$75 million, according to a person briefed on the amount. Both the Trump campaign and allied groups have been conserving resources, particularly since Mr. Trump had a fund-raising windfall after he was criminally convicted in New York at the end of May.

The super PAC that Mr. Budowich runs, MAGA Inc., has conducted its own opposition research on prospective nominees who might replace Mr. Biden. But the group, like the campaign, assumes that Ms. Harris is the likeliest prospect.

A New York Times/Siena College poll this month found Ms. Harris in a slightly stronger position against Mr. Trump than the president. The poll, however, was completed before the assassination attempt on Mr. Trump.

Still, Jim Hobart, a pollster whose firm, Public Opinion Strategies, is helping to conduct NBC's bipartisan poll, said that Ms. Harris is starting from a fairly defined place nationally.

In the most recent survey, he said, “50 percent of voters already have a negative opinion of Harris. Just 32 percent have a positive opinion,” he said. “Could those positive numbers improve if she is the nominee? Sure. But remember, she has never shown herself to be a particularly skilled candidate.”

He pointed to her narrow win in the 2010 attorney general's race, and the bust that was her presidential campaign in 2020.

A change at the top of the ticket could throw the race into chaos.

The Republican National Committee is closely tracking possible changes on the Democratic ticket, and is leaving open the possibility of lawsuits related to the potential transfer and use of Biden campaign funds, according to one official with knowledge of the matter.

For instance, if a new committee is created for Ms. Harris, and donors who have already donated the \$6,600 maximum to the Biden-Harris campaign try to donate to her, Republicans are likely to sue, arguing it's an over-the-limit donation, the official said. They're also watching whether Ms. Harris as the presumptive nominee would try to access money before she is formally nominated by her party.

And should the Biden team try something untested, like transferring its money to a super PAC that supports a candidate, a lawsuit is also likely to follow, the official said.

Even if such lawsuits don't stop the actions, they could gum up the gears of the new Democratic ticket moving forward and highlight the chaos that Democrats have been facing.

Business



Last year, China installed more solar panels than the United States has in its entire history. Almost two-thirds of big wind and solar plants under construction globally are in China.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GILLES SABRIÉ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Positive sign on emissions

Data from China suggests biggest greenhouse gas producer isn't getting bigger

BY MAX BEARAK

China, the world's biggest source of planet-warming greenhouse gases for most of the past two decades, is seemingly on the verge of bending its emissions curve from years of steep growth into a flat plateau.

The implications for climate change could scarcely be greater. Since China's emissions surpassed those of the United States in 2006, China's global share has grown to almost a third — a huge number, even with population differences taken into account.

A recent spate of data from China's government, as well as reports by energy analysts, have provided positive signs that while China's emissions may not decrease significantly, they also may not grow.

China's president, Xi Jinping, had pledged to reach that turning point by 2030.

"The important thing to understand is that when China's emissions stop growing, it likely follows that the world's stop growing, too," said Dave Jones, global insight director at Ember, an energy think tank.

The biggest factor in the shift is changes in how China produces its electricity. In short, renewable sources are replacing coal, the most polluting fossil fuel.

Last year alone, China installed more solar panels than the United States has in its entire history, and connected most of them to its electricity grid.

Almost two-thirds of big wind and solar plants under construction globally are in China, according to a report this month from Global Energy Monitor. That is more than eight times the wind



A coal power plant in China's Shandong Province. The country's emissions trajectory will come down to how quickly renewables can displace coal in its electricity mix.

and solar capacity being planned in the United States.

And in May, China generated 53 percent of its electricity from coal, its lowest share since its government began publishing energy data decades ago, while nearly all the rest of it came from non-fossil-fuel sources. "This indicated that China may have peaked" its emissions, said Belinda Schäpe, a China analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

However, some observers caution that "peak" was perhaps the wrong word to describe the current trend in China.

"We've been talking about whether there's been a peak for almost a decade," said Li Shuo, the director of China Climate Hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

"Peaking assumes persistent emissions decline after it is passed. That's

not an assumption we can or should make."

Mr. Li said it was more likely that China's emissions would plateau. And, he cautioned, while renewable energy has been replacing coal in electricity generation, other factors — such as China's recent real estate crisis and sluggish post-pandemic economy — have led to less consumption of energy overall, which might skew the data downward, but only temporarily.

"If you look at China's emissions profile of the past two decades, one particular source was hugely significant: real estate and construction, whose supply chain made up about a third of all emissions," he said. "That's cooling off."

More-reliable signs have come from recent policy shifts, he said. In particular, a new ban on permits for steel factories that would use coal to fire their blast furnaces could have far-reaching

effects. A huge push toward electric-vehicle production has also dampened demand for oil.

But, ultimately, China's emissions trajectory will come down to how quickly renewables can displace coal from its electricity mix. While coal's share has fallen, China is still investing in it as a power source.

China accounted for two-thirds of the world's newly operating coal plants last year. In 2023, new coal-plant construction hit an eight-year high in China. If China were to build all the others it has proposed, it would add the equivalent of one-third of its current operating fleet. Today, China accounts for around 60 percent of the world's coal use.

Some of China's coal build-out is meant to provide a fallback option for when wind and solar generation dips. But China is also investing heavily in pumped-storage hydropower. Pumped hydro is a way to store energy by pumping water uphill to a reservoir during times of low demand for electricity, then releasing it later to generate extra electricity if demand surges. Those systems could help reduce the demand for coal power during peak times.

Oil and gas are also used in Chinese industry as power sources. But Mr. Li cautioned that while both China's domestic production of petrochemicals was growing as well as its imports of them, the deciding factor in China's emissions trajectory will be coal's decline.

In the coming months, China's government is expected to unveil new commitments to reduce emissions ahead of November's United Nations-sponsored climate summit, COP29, in Azerbaijan.

"Diplomatic attention is fixated on the question: Has China peaked or not," said Mr. Li. "You could imagine that if the answer is yes, so far ahead of schedule, it might give China more reason to be even more ambitious with its reduction targets."

Digital disaster displays a system's weaknesses

NEWS ANALYSIS
ASPEN, COLO.

Adversaries didn't cause the CrowdStrike debacle, but they'll learn from it

BY DAVID E. SANGER

In the worst-case scenarios that the Biden administration has quietly simulated over the past year or so, Russian hackers working on behalf of Vladimir V. Putin bring down hospital systems across the United States. In others, China's military hackers bring chaos, shutting down water systems and electric grids to distract Americans from an invasion of Taiwan.

As it turned out, none of those grim situations caused Friday's digital meltdown. It was, by all appearances, purely human error — a few bad keystrokes that demonstrated the fragility of a vast set of interconnected networks in which one mistake can cause a cascade of unintended consequences. Since no one really understands what is connected to what, it is no surprise that such episodes keep happening, each incident just a few degrees different from the last.

Among Washington's cyberwarriors, the first reaction on Friday was relief that this wasn't a nation-state attack. For two years now, the White House, the Pentagon and the nation's cyberdefenders have been trying to come to terms with Volt Typhoon, a particularly elusive form of malware that China has put into American critical infrastructure. It is hard to find, even harder to evict from vital computer networks and designed to sow far greater fear and chaos than the country saw on Friday.

Yet as the "blue screen of death" popped up from the operating rooms of Massachusetts General Hospital to the airline management systems that keep planes flying, America got another reminder of the halting progress of cyber-resilience. It was a particularly bitter discovery then that a flawed update to a trusted tool in that effort — CrowdStrike's software to find and neutralize cyberattacks — was the cause of the problem, not the savior.

Only in recent years has the United States become serious about the problem. Government partnerships with private industry were put together to share lessons. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Security Agency, along with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency at the Homeland Security Department, issue bulletins outlining vulnerabilities or blowing the whistle on hackers.

President Biden even created a Cyber Safety Review Board that looks at major incidents. It is modeled on the National Transportation Safety Board, which reviews airplane and train accidents, among other disasters, and publishes "lessons learned."

Just three months ago, it released a blistering account of how Microsoft allowed intrusions into its cloud services that permitted Chinese spies to clean out State Department files about Beijing and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo's emails. But by the time the report came out, American officials were focused on a more urgent problem: the spread of ransomware attacks, many from Russia.

It was the Russians, in fact, who woke America up to the vulnerability of the software supply chain problem that lets small errors ripple into large consequences.

In the run-up to the 2020 presidential campaign, Moscow's most skilled intelligence service bored into a component of that supply chain, worming its way into

the update systems of software made by Solar Winds. The company's products are intended to manage large computer networks, and the Russians knew that once they had access to the update system, they could spread a lot of malicious code fast.

It worked. Hackers soon gained access to the Treasury and Commerce Departments, parts of the Pentagon and scores of America's biggest companies. They did no visible damage. They did not set off panics like the kinds seen on Friday. But they got the incoming administration's attention.

"In a globally interconnected economy, we need to ensure that we have the resilience" when an event like this happens, said Anne Neuberger, the deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging technologies.

Ms. Neuberger was awakened by the White House Situation Room at 4 a.m. on Friday in Aspen, Colo., where she was preparing to speak on a panel titled "Securing Trust in the Global Digital Economy." She spent the day assessing the risks to U.S. government systems, then calling allies and executives, including the chief executive of CrowdStrike, George Kurtz. She asked, "Is there anything we can do to help?"

Ms. Neuberger, a former senior official at the National Security Agency, knows better than most that for now, there are no magic bullets. By the time an event like this happens, the only response is to mount a painstaking effort, step by step, to patch the error, push it out and try to wrench thousands of systems back online.



A digital meltdown that affected airports, hospitals and TV stations on Friday was caused by a bug in a software update.

"This is not something that is new, but it has been accelerated by technology and by the interconnectivity," Sir Jeremy Fleming, the recently retired leader of GCHQ, Britain's famed code-making and code-breaking agency that is the equivalent of the N.S.A. And these days, he worries more about criminals than nation-state attacks.

Criminals will certainly be gleefully learning lessons from the CrowdStrike debacle, learning how to exploit the kinds of vulnerabilities that brought television stations and insurance companies to a halt. So will Mr. Putin and President Xi Jinping of China, who now have, by accident, a more detailed road map for disruption.

It is not hopeless. "We are optimistic that A.I. is actually allowing us to make significant — not transformative yet, but significant — progress in being able to identify vulnerabilities, patch holes, improve the quality of coding," Kent Walker, the president for global affairs at Google, said at the Aspen forum.

But that will take awhile. And in the meantime, unintended cascades of chaos will keep rippling around the globe — some, like Friday's, a product of error. The fear is, in an election year, that the next digital meltdown may have a deeper political purpose.

The data sources that power A.I. are disappearing fast

THE SHIFT

BY KEVIN ROOSE

SAN FRANCISCO For years, the people building powerful artificial intelligence systems have used enormous troves of text, images and videos pulled from the internet to train their models.

Now, that data is drying up.

Over the past year, many of the most important web sources used for training A.I. models have restricted the use of their data, according to a study published last week by the Data Provenance Initiative, a group led by researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a dozen other organizations.

The study, which looked at 14,000 web domains that are included in three commonly used A.I. training data sets, discovered an "emerging crisis in consent," as publishers and online platforms have taken steps to prevent their data from being harvested.

The researchers estimate that in the three data sets — called C4, Refined-Web and Dolma — 5 percent of all data, and 25 percent of data from the highest-quality sources, has been restricted. Those restrictions are set

up through the Robots Exclusion Protocol, a decades-old method for website owners to prevent automated bots from crawling their pages using a file called robots.txt.

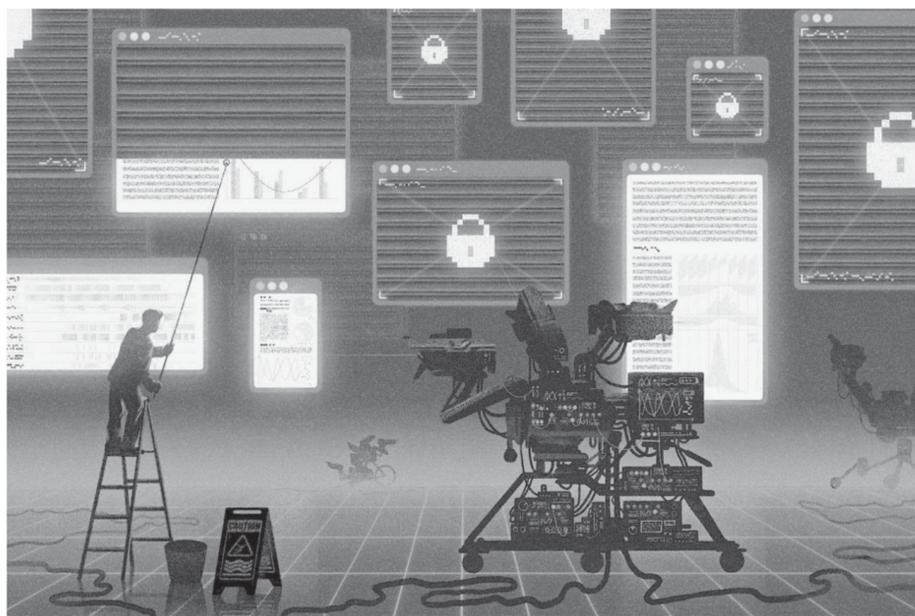
The study also found that as much as 45 percent of the data in one set, C4, had been restricted by websites' terms of service.

"We're seeing a rapid decline in consent to use data across the web that will have ramifications not just for A.I. companies, but for researchers, academics and noncommercial entities," said Shayne Longpre of M.I.T., the study's lead author.

Data is the main ingredient in today's generative A.I. systems, which are fed billions of examples of text, images and videos. Much of that data is scraped from public websites by researchers and compiled in large data sets, which can be downloaded and freely used, or supplemented with data from other sources.

Learning from that data is what allows generative A.I. tools like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini and Anthropic's Claude to write, code and generate images and videos. The more high-quality data is fed into these models, the better their outputs generally are.

For years, A.I. developers were able



RAVEN JANG

to gather data fairly easily. But the generative A.I. boom of the past few years has led to tensions with the owners of that data — many of whom have misgivings about being used as A.I. training fodder, or at least want to be paid for it.

As the backlash has grown, some publishers have set up paywalls or changed their terms of service to limit the use of their data for A.I. training. Others have blocked the automated web crawlers used by companies like OpenAI, Anthropic and Google.

Sites like Reddit and StackOverflow have begun charging A.I. companies for access to data, and a few publishers have taken legal action — including The New York Times, which sued OpenAI and Microsoft alleging copyright infringement last year, saying the companies used news articles to train their models without permission.

Companies like OpenAI, Google and Meta have gone to extreme lengths in recent years to gather more data to improve their systems, including transcribing YouTube videos and bending their own data policies.

More recently, some A.I. companies have struck deals with publishers including The Associated Press and News Corp, the owner of The Wall A.I., PAGE 9

Markets seem indifferent to the election, so far

STRATEGIES

BY JEFF SOMMER

With the Republican Convention behind us, the Trump-Vance ticket is the favorite in polls and in markets where you can predict the winner of the presidential race.

The stock market has absorbed this information and more. On Monday of last week, when markets in New York reopened after the attempted assassination of former President Donald J. Trump on July 13, stocks rose. They did so again on Tuesday, but fell the rest of the week.

Celebratory T-shirts are on sale, showing Mr. Trump's defiant, blood-streaked, near escape from death, as an American flag unfurled against a blue sky.

This image, evoking patriotism and courage, contrasts with the sound and pictures of President Biden, looking frail and bewildered during his disastrous performance in the presidential debate last month.

There are more than three months until Election Day on Nov. 5. The Democrats could conceivably recoup and win the election, but the possibility of a Republican sweep to victory in both the House and Senate can't be dismissed. In this fluid season, anything could happen.

The stock market, however, is remarkably indifferent to the United States' political fortunes. Early last week, there were big moves in stocks perceived as benefiting from a Trump presidency, but that exuberance didn't last. Instead, the market seems to be focused on issues that have little to do with politics, like the possibility of a Federal Reserve rate cut, heartening corporate earnings reports or the allure of artificial intelligence stocks.

THE TRUMP MARKET

On May 16, former President Trump's odds of victory began to exceed those of President Biden on the PredictIt market, and the gap has widened since the debate, raising the possibility of a Republican landslide. From May 16 through Tuesday, the S&P 500 gained almost 7 percent.

Mr. Trump has an established record, and the markets evidently find it comforting.

That may seem strange. After all, Mr. Trump is the first former president to have been convicted of a felony, and he has a well-documented propensity to stretch the truth, if not deny it en-



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tirely. If re-elected, he promises to disrupt the status quo on immigration, tariffs, trade, taxes, regulation, U.S. support for Ukraine and NATO and countless other matters. A Trump victory could require wholesale re-adjustments in thinking about the economy — and the markets are said to abhor uncertainty.

But apparently of greater import for traders is the reality that Mr. Trump presided over a raging bull market in stocks, albeit one interrupted by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

That Trump market rally really began months before his inauguration

in January 2017. At first, as returns trickled in on Election Day in November 2016, the stock futures market cratered when it became apparent that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the presumed winner, was actually losing to Mr. Trump.

But then, shortly after 2 a.m., the new president-elect pledged to work together with Mrs. Clinton and other Democrats "to unify our great country." Obviously, that harmonious political future never happened — but the market immediately started to levitate.

In fact, the stock market during the Trump administration ranks fourth

among records for all presidents since 1901, using Dow Jones industrial average returns calculated by Bespoke Investment Group, a financial market research company. Stocks gained 12 percent, annualized, under President Trump. That placed him behind only Presidents Calvin Coolidge, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

By comparison, so far in the Biden administration, the annualized gain is 7.1 percent, according to FactSet, a far more pedestrian figure. If that stock market growth rate were to continue until Inauguration Day in January, the return for Mr. Biden's first (or only)

term would be absolutely middling — ranking 11th among 21 presidents since Theodore Roosevelt became president after the assassination of William McKinley.

SOUND AND FURY

It's impossible to discern whether the market really favors the prospect of another Trump administration over a continuation of a Biden administration, or one led by another Democrat.

But I think it's more likely that the market doesn't care much one way or another.

As I've noted before, the stock market is amoral and apolitical. There have been market misfortunes under both political parties but, for the most part, the stock market has done well under both Democrats and Republicans.

It's more likely that the market doesn't care much one way or another about the election.

It's easier to find patterns in the market than it is to prove that they matter.

A comparison of market returns during the Obama and Trump administrations is startling. "The performance of sectors during the presidencies of Obama and Trump shows that the impact of the person in the Oval Office may not be as significant as often assumed," Bespoke Investment Group said. "While the two were polar opposites in terms of policy and style, the stock market sectors that led and lagged during each president's tenure were largely the same."

"In President Obama's eight years, the three top performing sectors were consumer discretionary, technology and health care; for Trump, the three top performing sectors were the same," the group said. "Likewise, energy was the worst performing sector for both presidents, and financials was in the bottom three."

Similarly, former President Trump and President Biden aren't remotely alike in terms of policy, character, style or adherence to the rule of law. Countless Wall Street reports say, quite logically, that specific market sectors may do better under one leader than the other, though the more I look at it, the less I'm sure even of that.

President Biden has taken strong positions on climate change. Former President Trump has played down the problem when he's acknowledged it's a problem at all, and he has favored

fossil-fuel companies. Yet consider the returns of exchange-traded funds that track the clean energy and fossil-fuel stock sectors:

- The iShares Global Clean Energy E.T.F.: 26.6 percent, annualized, under Mr. Trump; minus 19.8 percent, annualized, under Mr. Biden.
- The SPDR S&P Oil & Gas Exploration and Production E.T.F.: minus 13.3 percent under Mr. Trump; 26.9 percent under Mr. Biden.

The Ukraine war and a burst of global inflation had more to do with the rising price of oil and the surge in fossil-fuel stocks than any Biden administration policies, in my estimation. And the increasing popularity and profitability of clean energy companies during the Trump administration didn't stem from administration policy, which favored fossil-fuel companies.

I think the only reasonable conclusion, and one that savvy investors make all the time, is that market returns and presidential ambitions don't necessarily go hand in hand.

GRIDLOCK, OR A SWEET

It's frequently said that the markets prefer gridlock, meaning a divided government, with the opposition party controlling at least one house of Congress and preventing presidents from achieving all they desire. With limited interference from Washington, companies can do what they do best: make profits. Or so the thinking goes.

History doesn't entirely bear this out, though. Adjusting for inflation, from 1901 through January, the Dow gained 7.1 percent, annualized, when Republicans had unified control; when Democrats had it, the Dow rose 2.8 percent, annualized, according to Ned Davis Research, another financial research firm. Unified government was fine with the stock market, especially under Republicans.

This helps explain why the market has been so calm lately. It may be concentrating on economic issues: declining inflation, the increasing likelihood of Fed rate cuts, corporate profit growth and the prospect of A.I.-driven productivity gains.

This will turn out to be shortsighted if the election has economic consequences so severe that profit-seeking markets can't cope with them. I expect a happier future — yet think it important to stash enough cash and high-quality bonds to ride out several years of potential trouble. For the long-term, though, investing in the entire stock and bond markets through low-cost index funds is probably the way to go.

An improvisational economic policy

Trump's notion to scrap taxes on tips is seen as key to working-class votes

BY ANDREW DUEHREN

In Donald J. Trump's telling, the idea was born over dinner at his Las Vegas hotel, where the waitress serving his table complained about the burden of paying taxes on her tips.

"I was actually surprised to hear it," Mr. Trump said last month at a rally in Virginia, adding that he quickly decided to address the waitress's problem with a new campaign pledge: "No taxes on tips!"

The proposal has rapidly become more than just a rally talking point. The Republican Party has officially embraced it in its platform, and House Speaker Mike Johnson, Republican of Louisiana, has said he would "pass it as soon as we can." Some Democrats are also warming to making tip income tax-free: The two senators representing Nevada, a swing state with large restaurant and casino industries, have endorsed the idea.

The sudden popularity of exempting tips from taxes is a reminder of the improvisational nature of economic policymaking under Mr. Trump. Several economists involved in advising the Trump campaign said they hadn't heard of the idea until Mr. Trump announced it publicly. But Republicans now see it as a key way to appeal to working-class Americans during the campaign against President Biden.

Mr. Trump has encouraged his supporters to leave notes on restaurant tabs telling service staff members that a Trump victory in November would mean no taxes on tips. Roughly four million Americans work in jobs where tips are common, according to an estimate by the Budget Lab at Yale.

"It's not like a gang of economists sitting around a table came up with that," Stephen Moore, a Trump economic adviser, said. "I thought, 'I don't know if he's being serious or not,' but as a political matter it's a home run."

Eileen Scott is a cocktail waitress on the floor of Harrah's Las Vegas, a casino where she makes much of her money in cash tips. Under an agreement she said Harrah's has with the Internal Revenue Service, her employer withholds taxes from her paycheck, based on an estimate for how much she earns in tips.

The arrangement means that she and other employees do not have to record each of their tips, but Ms. Scott said it also seems that the I.R.S. assumes she makes more than she actually does — and therefore she owes more tax.



Republicans are being encouraged to leave notes on restaurant tabs saying their candidate would eliminate taxes on tips.

"We want to pay our fair share, but we also don't want to be taken advantage of," she said. "I say it's like the mob: They take what they want from us."

Although Ms. Scott said she was glad Mr. Trump had proposed a fix, she still favored Democrats. "I just want the conversation to be started, so we can get to the point where we can take care of our families and pay our bills and not pay something we're not making," she said.

The four-word slogan Mr. Trump has put forward — "no taxes on tips" — still leaves several important details unaddressed. Namely: whether the exemption would apply to all taxes. In the Senate, Ted Cruz, a Republican from Texas, introduced a bill that would spare tips from income taxes only. Since many working-class Americans do not make enough money to owe much in income taxes, the savings for low-wage waiters and waitresses could be limited.

In the House, two Republicans have a broader bill that would exempt tips from income taxes and from payroll taxes, which are collected from Americans' wages to fund Social Security and Medicare. It could cost as much as \$250 billion in lost tax revenue over a decade, according to the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

Because low-income workers generally owe more in payroll taxes, the House version could give more money back to waitresses, barbers and others, but potentially at a cost. Having paid

less in payroll taxes, those workers might not be able to claim as many retirement benefits from Social Security and Medicare.

"Exempting tips from payroll tax actually would increase their take home pay," Howard Gleckman, a senior fellow at the Tax Policy Center, a think tank. "The downside is they wouldn't pay into Social Security and Medicare, and so they would get fewer benefits or maybe no benefits at all."

Investment managers could try to solicit gigantic, tax-free tips from clients, instead of collecting taxable fees.

Then there are broader questions. Some economists wonder whether the federal government should offer such a juicy tax break just to workers who depend on tips, leaving other low-wage employees without a similar benefit. Doing so could also create an incentive for all types of Americans, especially ones with sophisticated accountants, to try to classify their income as tips to avoid owing taxes. Investment managers, for example, could try to solicit gigantic, tax-free tips from clients, instead of collecting taxable fees.

"Anytime you have a category that's untaxed, some of your tax base will slip into that category," said Casey Mulligan,

an economist who worked in the Trump White House and helped write this year's Republican platform.

The I.R.S. has in recent years taken steps to try to collect more taxes owed on tip income. The tax agency said that Americans appeared to underreport earnings in cash tips, and it started a new voluntary compliance program last year for employers. Americans reported roughly \$38 billion in tip income in 2018, according to I.R.S. data.

When Senator Kevin Cramer, Republican of North Dakota, worked as a host and bus boy during college, he said he probably was not reporting the tips he earned to the tax collector. Still, he said Mr. Trump's proposal inspired him as a way for Republicans to combat the "constant criticism that we favor the rich."

Many of the tax cuts that Republicans passed into law in 2017 are set to expire at the end of next year, and the desire to renew them has created a rare opportunity to create tax policy in Congress. The 2017 cuts included both business tax breaks that primarily benefit the wealthy, as well as individual provisions that create savings for working-class Americans.

Mr. Cramer said adding the exemption for tips to a broader bill next year would help bring more benefits to low-income Americans. "In that context, that's where it really becomes genius — it says no one is being left out of these Republican tax cuts," he said.

Finding new content to train A.I. models

A.I., FROM PAGE 8

Street Journal, giving them ongoing access to their content.

But widespread data restrictions may pose a threat to A.I. companies, which need a steady supply of high-quality data to keep their models fresh and up to date.

They could also spell trouble for smaller A.I. outfits and academic researchers who rely on public data sets and who can't afford to license data directly from publishers. Common Crawl, one such data set that comprises billions of pages of web content and is maintained by a nonprofit organization, has been cited in more than 10,000 academic studies, Mr. Longpre said.

It's not clear which popular A.I. products have been trained on these sources, since few developers disclose the full list of data they use. But data sets derived from Common Crawl, including C4 (which stands for Colossal, Cleaned Crawled Corpus) have been used by companies including Google and OpenAI to train previous versions of their models. Representatives for Google and OpenAI declined to comment.

Yacine Jernite, a machine learning researcher at Hugging Face, a company that provides tools and data to A.I. developers, characterized the consent crisis as a natural response to the A.I. industry's aggressive data-gathering practices.

"Unsurprisingly, we're seeing blowback from data creators after the text, images and videos they've shared online are used to develop commercial systems that sometimes directly threaten their livelihoods," he said. But he cautioned that if all A.I. training data needed to be obtained through licensing deals, it would exclude "researchers and civil society from participating in the governance of the technology."

Stella Biderman, the executive director of EleutherAI, a nonprofit A.I. research group, echoed those fears.

"Major tech companies already have all of the data," she said. "Changing the license on the data doesn't retroactively revoke that permission, and the primary impact is on later-arriving actors, who are typically either smaller start-ups or researchers."

A.I. companies have claimed that their use of public web data is legally protected under fair use. But gathering new data has gotten trickier. Some A.I. executives I've spoken to worry about hitting the "data wall" — their term for

the point at which all of the training data on the public internet has been exhausted, and the rest has been hidden behind paywalls, blocked by robots.txt or locked up in exclusive deals.

Some companies believe they can scale the data wall by using synthetic data — that is, data that is itself generated by A.I. systems — to train their models. But many researchers doubt that today's A.I. systems are capable of generating enough high-quality synthetic data to replace the human-created data they're losing.

Another challenge is that while publishers can try to stop A.I. companies from scraping their data by placing restrictions in their robots.txt files, those requests aren't legally binding, and compliance is voluntary. (Think of it like a "no trespassing" sign for data, but one without the force of law.)

Major search engines honor these opt-out requests, and several leading A.I. companies, including OpenAI and Anthropic, have said publicly that they do, too. But other companies, including the A.I.-powered search engine Perplexity, have been accused of ignoring them. Perplexity's chief executive, Aravind Srinivas, told me that the company respects publishers' data restrictions. He added that while the company once worked with third-party web crawlers that did not always follow the Robots Exclusion Protocol, it had "made adjustments with our providers to ensure that they follow robots.txt when crawling on Perplexity's behalf."

Mr. Longpre said that one of the big takeaways from the study is that new tools are needed to give website owners more precise ways to control the use of their data. Some sites might object to A.I. giants using their data to train chatbots for a profit, but might let a nonprofit or educational institution use the same data, he said. Right now, there's no good way for them to distinguish between those uses, or block one while allowing the other.

But there's also a lesson here for big A.I. companies, who have treated the internet as an all-you-can-eat data buffet for years, without giving the owners of that data much of value in return. Eventually, if you take advantage of the web, the web will start shutting its doors.

Opinion

The subtle beauties of learning Japanese

Translation tools are great, but they can't replace the joys of exploring a new language.

Mark Vanhoenacker

One morning late last autumn, I took off from London's Heathrow Airport, my base as a Boeing 787 pilot, and landed the next morning at Haneda Airport in Tokyo. By early afternoon I was walking under the turning foliage of Rikugien, one of my favorite gardens, where I paused by a wooden sign at the edge of a stream. Despite having studied Japanese for years, the text on the sign — something about slippery stones ahead — included several characters I didn't recognize, so I fired up an app I'd recently discovered. It scanned and translated all of them instantly.

Such tools — and others that can translate speech — are astonishing. But with this magic at our fingertips, is the study of foreign languages now pointless?

Not at all. In fact, foreign languages are more rewarding than ever, in part because technology has made them easier than ever to learn.

My love of languages began in childhood. Growing up in rural Western Massachusetts, I associated the wonder of foreign languages with that of globes and maps and the graceful airliners I dreamed of someday flying to distant places. I learned some French and Dutch from my Belgian father and studied Spanish in high school. The language I really fell for, though, is Japanese, which I first studied during a summer homestay in Kanazawa.

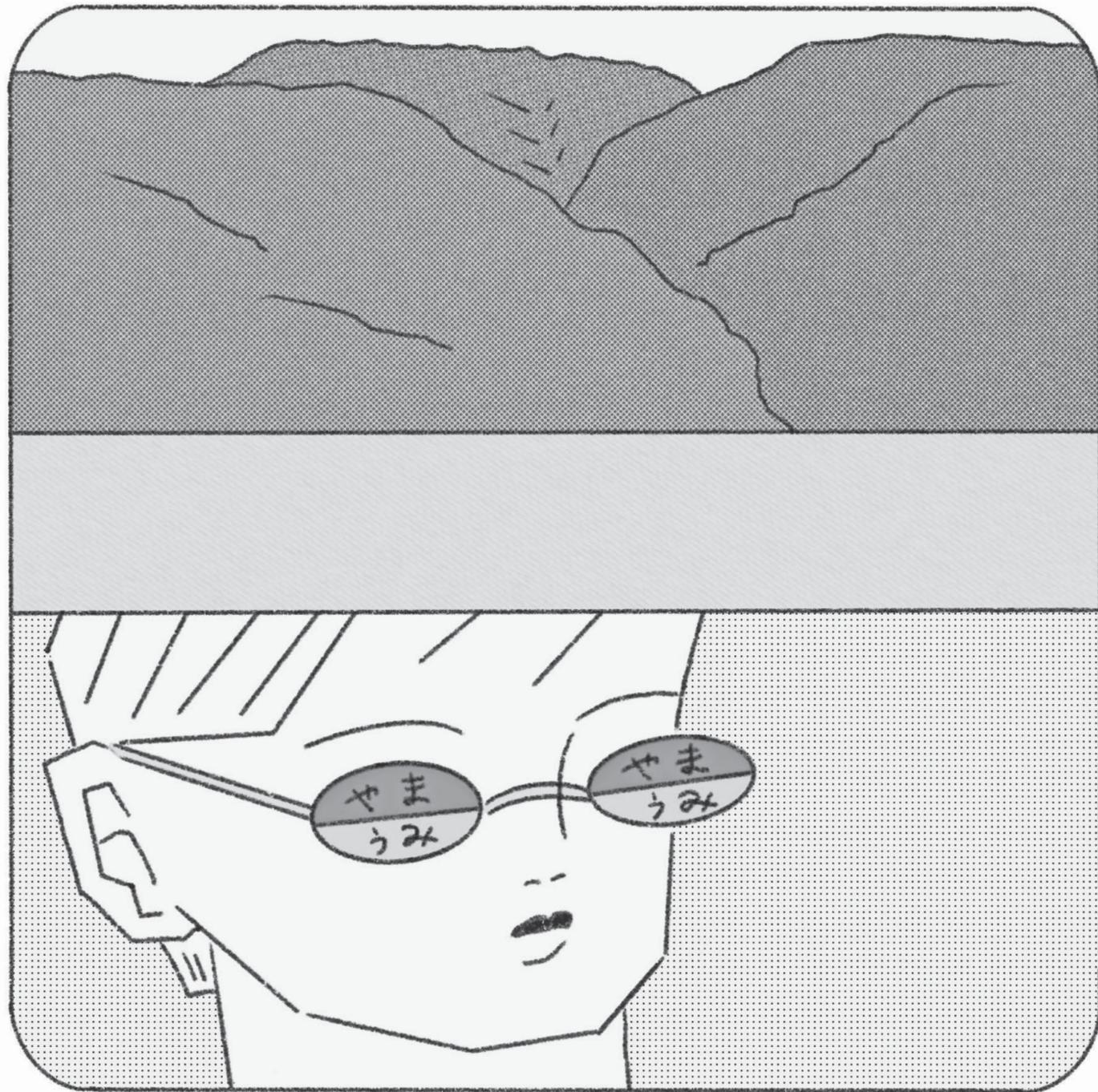
The world has changed a lot since the summer of 1991. But there are still reasons for us to invest in foreign language studies. Despite the global preeminence of English and the growing sophistication of translation tools, U.S. businesses and government agencies have an unmet need for language skills. Yet as of 2017, only about one in five K-12 students study a foreign language, and enrollment in U.S. college foreign language classes dropped by almost one-third between 2009 and 2021. These gaps mean that career opportunities are plentiful for language learners, both

There are still reasons for us to invest in foreign language studies.

at home and abroad. It's true that many English speakers don't need language skills to travel these days, especially with smartphones that can translate a menu (or even what a waiter is saying) in real time. But few people would argue that the existence of calculators means we needn't study math. Language learning is associated with enhanced memory, creativity and concentration. It boosts overall academic performance and may also delay neurological decline as you age. For all of us, language learning is a gym for the brain.

For me, the benefits of learning a language go beyond chatting with customers on my flights to Tokyo, or more easily navigating the world's largest metropolis after touchdown. Wherever I am in the world, Japanese is a reliable and seemingly endless source of fascination and fun.

I love, for example, its counters. English has words like "sheet," which we use to count various flat, thin items like paper, pastry or metal. But Japanese has hundreds of these words, including hon for long, thin things such as pencils, rivers and flights, and rin for flowers and attached — as opposed to unattached — wheels. Before studying Japanese, had I ever compared the shapes of flowers and wheels? I love, too, Japanese onomatopoeia. A Japanese speaker might describe snowflakes, for example, as falling hara hara — twirling down like petals — or



CHOU CHAYU

shin shin — steadily on a cold night. Had I ever before considered the different ways snow might fall? Wonders like these are obscured by translation tools, which can't easily convey the marvelous subtleties through which meaning is formed.

Every language is also a doorway to new worlds of stories, poems and songs. And when you take a new language on the road, it reliably brightens your journey and deepens your experiences. As more of us focus on traveling with awareness and sensitivity, the offering of a few words, however mangled, is an easy courtesy.

Last month, for example, my partner and I traveled around Lithuania. While I won't be dipping into a Lithuanian novel anytime soon, I'll never forget the word for thank you — which is pronounced something like "achoo" — which we deployed each time we stopped for kibinai, or traditionally savory pastries.

After a vacation, such far-born words are often among my favorite souvenirs.

The challenge, of course, is getting started. Luckily, new digital tools help us fit language learning into daily life. I'm hooked on Wanikani, a web-based tool that uses targeted repetition and irreverent mnemonics to teach kanji, the logographic characters of the sort that puzzled me on the sign in that Tokyo garden. (How to recall shitsu, a reading of the character that means "room"? Imagine a tiny dog. "The shitsu likes to come into your room and pee everywhere.") I'm also a fan of Pimsleur and JapanesePod101, which offer short lessons I can do anywhere — instead of scrolling social media.

Most usefully, I found a tutor on Preply, a start-up founded in 2012 by three Ukrainian friends who seamlessly connect language learners and instructors across the world. Akiko-sensei, my teacher, is a Japanese native who lives

in Toronto; I often sign into our video lessons from hotels in the dozens of cities I fly to for work. (The first topic is invariably the weather wherever I happen to be.)

It's possible to shape an entire journey around language learning. The group that ran my homestay, The Experiment in International Living, arranges similar programs today, while other organizations offer language-based travel for people of all ages. Alternatively, ask a tour guide on your next trip for an hour of language practice — a welcome break, perhaps, from busy sightseeing — over coffee or a local dish. And why not seek out conversation partners in your own community? Or try one of the many free online conversation exchange websites, which offer the satisfaction of sharing the intricacies of English with a potential friend on the far side of your world. My love of languages has fostered

enduring connections. My friendship with my college buddy Jamie, for example, was forged in our grueling first-year Japanese classes. Thirty-two years after we first struggled to master the Japanese particle wa — which spotlights the topic but not necessarily the subject of a sentence — or to conjugate adjectives into their past tense, or to deploy the humble versions of everyday verbs, I asked him what those early efforts mean to him now. In response, he likened learning a language to reading fiction. Both, Jamie said, expand our horizons by compelling us to consider the minds of others. In this way, he explained, learning a new language "is an exercise in empathy."

And there's never been better time to take the plunge. This summer, pick a language and dive in.

MARK VANHOENACKER is a pilot who flies the Boeing 787 from London Heathrow.

Russia punishes those who seek the truth

Evan Gershkovich is a victim of Putin's campaign to silence independent journalism.

The Editorial Board

The only surprise in the guilty verdict against Evan Gershkovich, a Wall Street Journal correspondent who was arrested in Russia last year on phony charges of espionage, was that it came so quickly. The charge itself was a farce. No evidence was ever made public, the hearings were held in secret, and Mr. Gershkovich's lawyers were barred from saying anything in public about the case.

Mr. Gershkovich's arrest, trial and conviction all serve President Vladimir Putin's goal of silencing any honest reporting from inside Russia about the invasion of Ukraine and of making Russians even warier of speaking with any foreigner about the war.

Independent Russian news outlets have been almost entirely shut down and their journalists imprisoned or forced to leave the country, so foreign correspondents are among the few remaining sources of independent reporting from inside Russia. Mr. Gersh-

kovich's last published article before his arrest, on March 29, 2023, was headlined "Russia's Economy Is Starting to Come Undone" — just the sort of vital independent journalism that challenges Mr. Putin's claims of a strong and vibrant Russia fighting a just war. Russian prosecutors claimed that Mr. Gershkovich, acting on instructions from Washington, used "painstaking conspiratorial methods" to obtain "secret information" about Uralvagonzavod, a Russian weapons factory near Yekaterinburg, where he was arrested and tried.

The existence of this massive industrial complex is well known, but the charge of espionage allowed Russian prosecutors to keep the entire proceeding secret while fueling Mr. Putin's propaganda about efforts by the United States and Europe to destabilize Russia.

Mr. Putin's crackdown on free expression, especially about the war in Ukraine, is unrelenting. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Russia is the world's fourth-worst jailer of journalists, with at least 22 in detention, including Mr. Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva, a U.S.-Russian dual citizen and an editor with the U.S.-government-funded Radio

Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Over the past few weeks, the Kremlin has banned 81 European Union media outlets, including Der Spiegel and Politico, for "systematically disseminating false information about the progress of the special military operation" — the only legal way to refer to the war against Ukraine. Russian authorities have also designated The Moscow Times, an English-language publication that now publishes from outside Russia, an "undesirable organization," making it dangerous for anyone in Russia to have any contact with it. M. Gessen, a Times Opinion columnist, was tried in absentia and sentenced to eight years in prison last week for criticizing the Russian military.

Just as important to Mr. Putin's political aims: He has been able to use Mr. Gershkovich as a hostage, as he did with the American basketball player Brittney Griner, who was freed in 2022 after 10 months in prison in exchange for Viktor Bout, a Russian arms dealer imprisoned in the United States.

There is a sliver of good news here. This trial could have dragged on for years if Mr. Putin had so desired. That it

ended just hours after closing arguments strongly suggests that a deal has been reached on swapping the American reporter for a Russian imprisoned in the West. On Wednesday the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, said that the United States and Russia were holding talks on a possible swap. The most likely candidate is believed to be Vadim Krasikov, a Russian assassin serving a life sentence in Germany for the murder of an exiled Chechen commander in Berlin. If a swap happens, we welcome the possibility that Mr. Gershkovich could be quickly released and returned to his family in the United States.

But Mr. Gershkovich has already spent 16 months in detention in Moscow's Lefortovo prison, and the

conviction means he would have to serve his sentence in a high-security penal colony. Several other Americans are also being held in Russia, and one or more of them could also be released as part of a deal. Any celebration over Mr. Gershkovich's potential release is overshadowed by the utter cynicism of Russian authorities' decision to detain him in the first place.

Mr. Putin's police state has made a habit of seizing hostages any time one of its agents is caught. And yet the determination of reporters like Mr. Gershkovich, and the many Russians who are risking their freedom to describe the realities behind Mr. Putin's elaborate myths, has not been crushed. They have no illusions about the risks, but they understand the critical importance of puncturing Mr. Putin's lies. That is journalism, not espionage, and it deserves the unwavering support of the United States and the world.

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Why are Democrats speaking in ancient Greek?

John McWhorter

As the Democratic Party mulls how to respond to the rhetoric emerging from the Republican National Convention last week, I dearly hope it does not continue to describe Donald Trump as a threat to democracy.

That's not because I disagree with that assessment or even because Trump just survived a horrifying attempt on his life. My complaint is not political, it's linguistic: "Democracy" is an inert word.

It has a noble ring to it, but outside of a classroom or seminar, what does it mean, exactly? The problem goes back to the word's origins. "Democracy" is built from Greek roots: The "demo" part means "people," while the "cracy" part means "power." That's a vivid combination — if you know Ancient Greek.

If Democrats want voters to understand how Trump threatens this ideal,

notion that Latin or Greek words are grander than Saxon ones, and unnecessary words like 'expedite,' 'ameliorate,' 'predict,' 'extraneous,' 'deracinated,' 'clandestine,' 'subaqueous' and hundreds of others constantly gain ground from their Anglo-Saxon opposite numbers." Winston Churchill stressed native English words as fundamental to effective oratory, advising, "Broadly speaking, short words are best, and the old words, when short, are best of all."

My beef is closer to Churchill's than Orwell's: a concern with communication. Many of our political terms have drifted so far from their original intention that it can be hard to know what we are talking about. Take "liberalism." We know that it's related to liberty and freedom. But in philosophy and political theory, "liberalism" is used to mean both freedom to do things, such as engaging in the pursuit of happiness, and freedom from things, like violence and government control. Modern liberalism is left of center, but the classical liberalism of laissez-faire

JD Vance is a D.E.I. candidate



Lydia Polgreen

Ever since speculation began that Vice President Kamala Harris might replace President Biden at the top of the Democratic ticket, there has been a steady, ugly chorus on the right. The New York Post published a column that declared that Harris would be a "D.E.I. president," and quickly the phrase ricocheted across the conservative media ecosystem.

The invocation of diversity, equity and inclusion programs meant to bring people from underrepresented backgrounds into institutions of power and influence clearly implied that a Black woman got power because of racial preferences. Black achievement, in this narrative, is always unearned and conferred without regard to merit.

Listening to JD Vance's speech at the Republican convention last Wednesday night, as he laid out his remarkable biography — a young man with roots in an economically devastated backwater who scaled the heights of the American elite — I couldn't help thinking to myself: If Harris is a D.E.I. candidate, so is Vance. It just depends on what kind of diversity you mean. It depends, indeed, on how you understand the role of identity in shaping the opportunities that define anyone's life.

All politics is, at some level, identity politics — the business of turning identity into power, be it the identity of a candidate or demographic group or political party or region of the country. For modern presidential and vice-presidential candidates, one of their most valuable assets is their life story. Some elements of that story are bequeathed at birth, but what makes politicians successful is their talent at narrating that story in a manner that allows voters to see some version of themselves and their own aspirations in the candidate. This kind of storytelling, embedded in American archetypes and ideals, has shaped our politics.

Vance's entire business and political career has flowed from his life story, which is embedded in identities he did not choose: Born a "hillbilly," of Scotch-Irish descent, he grew up in poverty, son of a single mother who was addicted to drugs. Overcoming this adversity, these disadvantages, lies at the core of his personal narrative. His ascent would hardly be so remarkable if he started from a life of middle-class comfort. But no one is portraying Vance's elevation to the Republican ticket as the outcome of some kind of illegitimate identity politics, nor is Vance perceived as having benefited from a political form of affirmative action.

And yet he almost certainly did. Race is not the only kind of diversity that gets noticed and embraced. Elite institutions love up-by-your-bootstraps Americans, and that archetype is all over Vance's life story. A promising white candidate from a county that sends few students to an elite college like Yale would get a strong look, even if that person's grades and test scores were less impressive than other applicants'. (To be clear, I have no idea what kind of grades or scores Vance had.) Regardless of race,



DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

applicants from working-class backgrounds, especially if they were the first in their family to attend college, are deemed to add class diversity.

Natasha Warikoo, a professor of sociology at Tufts University whose scholarship focuses on affirmative action and ideas about meritocracy, told me that race is a highly visible identity and the one that is most likely to be associated with unearned advantage. Yet race is not the only kind of identity that excites elite institutions looking for diversity. "We want a variety of perspectives and lived experiences," Warikoo said.

The labor historian Gabriel Winant, who crossed paths with Vance at Yale, wrote of him last year: "If you spend enough time at elite universities, you should be able to recognize this as a type: conservative white men from

outside the WASP elite who have figured out how to present themselves as persecuted minorities and be rewarded for it. Although Vance no doubt did feel out of place at Yale, elite universities love

promising young conservative men like him. Institutions often seek them out and do them favors; doing so makes faculty and administrators feel broadminded."

Vance benefited from one of the most powerful forms of affirmative action that elite universities practice to attract low-income students: need-blind admissions. Like many elite schools, Yale pledges to help cover the cost of attending for poor students, and Vance wrote about receiving generous financial aid for law school, not "because of anything I'd done or earned — it was because I was one of the poorest kids in school." I am familiar with this phenomenon — my much less elite college had a similar policy. Our family was penniless, so I received aid that covered nearly the entire cost of my expensive education.

The sort of affirmative action that helped Vance gets easily overlooked — it's less visible than race, making it

easier to ascribe the achievements of white men to merit alone. The playing field is never tilted to help white men, the theory goes. If anything, it is tilted against them, in favor of women and minorities, we're told by the right. And if there are any advantages for white men, they exist only to help elites remain elites — legacy admissions, preferences for athletes and players of expensive sports like sailing, old-boy networks.

In truth, it is pretty common for white men to get a leg up for some special part of their identity. Yet these men do not get labeled D.E.I. beneficiaries. No one worries that their surgeon or pilot or president was a "D.E.I. hire," even though he might have gotten his spot at an elite college because he was the son of a wealthy alumnus, or because he happened to come from a state that is historically underrepresented in elite higher education. Indeed, he may have impressed an admissions officer with an unusual story of overcoming obstacles — a family riven by poverty and addiction in a forgotten corner of the country.

I wonder: Why do people look at Vance's life story and achievements and see a vice president, and they look at Vice President Harris's life story and achievements and see a "D.E.I. candidate"?

You have to look pretty far into history to find a vice-presidential nominee with a slimmer résumé than Vance. In fairness, he is only 39. Before he entered the Senate 18 months ago, his public service experience consisted of a stint in the Marine Corps, which is a solid early entry on a political résumé. This champion of forgotten America made his fortune by writing a best-selling book that portrayed the rural white community he came from as lazy and undisciplined, responsible for its poverty and misery. He got even richer working as a venture capitalist in Silicon Valley, hobnobbing with the billionaire fleecy crowd at invitation-only conferences among the uber elite. He is clearly a person of talent and drive. But it is hard to imagine that he could have gotten this far were it not for the value that elite institutions place on biographies like his.

Affirmative action of a kind is built

into our political system. The drafters of the Constitution did not have the term "diversity, equity and inclusion" at hand, but how else do you describe a system that gives two senators and at least three Electoral College votes to a state that based on population qualifies for only one member of the House of Representatives? Our Constitution does not lecture Wyoming, Alaska, the Dakotas, Vermont and Delaware to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and do a better job of competing for residents with states like California and New York in order to earn their disproportionate representation.

Some of the earliest settlers of the United States were religious minorities fleeing persecution, and protection of the rights of certain minorities lies at the core of our founding documents. For better or worse, our Constitution finds value in tempering the power of the majority, though that has worked out in ways no one fathomed in the 18th century. It is telling that these kinds of preferences, the valuing of geographic and religious diversity, are so deeply embedded in our history and do not read to most people as unearned or unjust.

Personally, I think powerful institutions should value this kind of diversity. In my career I have hired and promoted many people, and diversity in the broadest sense has always been important to me. I have found that the best leaders I have worked with are a range of geographic, religious, class, ideological and, yes, racial and ethnic backgrounds as possible.

Kamala Harris and JD Vance, despite their political differences, have a few things in common. They were raised by tough, charismatic patriarchs. They both pursued legal careers. They both sought and won high elected office. They both come from backgrounds that are underrepresented in the halls of power. And now they are both engaged in the core work of politics — translating their stories into power. We would do well to ask why only one of these two remarkable Americans stands accused of getting where she is based on D.E.I. The answer, I fear, is written on their faces.



PABLO DELCAN

instead of saying it in Greek, it would be more effective to speak English. Referring to "the power of the people" or "people power" would get the reality across. Or, to get even more meat-and-potatoes direct, "Donald Trump will keep you from voting for what you want," or "Donald Trump wants to take power away from the people and keep it for himself."

I join a long line of writers who have worried that Latin and Greek words can make English harder to understand. Such complaints were especially the fashion in the 1500s and 1600s, when scholars of the classics brought a flood of foreign words into English, on the belief that they connected the relatively young language to humankind's most sophisticated thoughts. Words like "rational," "medicate," "psychology" and "democracy" are

Democracy is vital. "Democracy," the word, is inert.

The incursion offended some observers. In about 1560, the scholar and statesman John Cheke argued that "Our own tongue should be written clean and pure, unminged and unmingled with borrowing of other tongues." The poet Edmund Spenser, in his 1579 Shepherdes Calendar, deliberately elevated what he called "good and natural English words." Judge Thomas Wilson complained in 1553 that "some seek so far for outlandish English that they forget altogether their mothers' language. And I dare swear this, if some of their mothers were alive, they were not able to tell what they say." Ralph Lever, a priest, proposed in 1573 that instead of the Latinate word "definition," we should have the plain-spoken "saywhat" and that "reason," derived from the Latin "ration," should instead be "witcraft."

Skepticism persisted into the 20th century. "Bad writers," observed George Orwell, "and especially scientific, political and sociological writers, are nearly always haunted by the

economics and limited government is associated with the right.

Then there's neoliberalism, which holds that markets are more just and efficient than governments. The word has become a slur of choice among many on the left.

Liberalism as a term now qualifies as a lexical nuisance. It is in good company. In which way are commodities commodious? What are derivatives derived from? Alas, we are for the most part stuck with these words and their incongruous meanings. The drift in their meanings is analogous to the random sprawl of the street layout in Lower Manhattan or the wiring in an old house, the result of eons of kludges implemented along the way rather than building from the bottom up.

It's interesting to imagine what the language would be like if we could start over and just use the original roots, especially for a concept as crucial at this moment as democracy.

I think of the difficulty that contemporary audiences can have understanding Shakespeare. It's a result of drift in meanings; e.g., to Shakespeare, "wit" referred to knowledge rather than a sense of humor, and "addiction" referred to a mere tendency rather than a compulsion. This difficulty arises far less in other countries, because his work is often translated not into some archaic version of their language but rather into something more contemporary and accessible. Two Americans told me independently that the first time they truly understood a Shakespeare performance was when it was in French.

Think how many people might for the first time viscerally understand the urgency of democracy if they got to hear about it in English.

JOHN MCWHORTER is an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University and the author of "Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America."

How I'd script this moment for Joe Biden

SORKIN, FROM PAGE 1

to stop Donald-Trump-at-all-costs unity, but with its originality and sense of sacrifice. So here's my pitch to the writers' room: The Democratic Party should pick a Republican.

At their convention next month, the Democrats should nominate Mitt Romney. Nominating Mr. Romney would be putting our money where our mouth is: a clear and powerful demonstration that this election isn't about what our elections are usually about it, but about stopping a deranged man from taking power. Surely Mr. Romney, who doesn't have to be introduced to voters, would peel off enough Republican votes to win, probably by a lot. The double haters would be turned into single haters and the Nikki Haley voters would have somewhere to go, Ms. Haley having disqualified herself when she endorsed the leader of an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the government.

Does Mr. Romney support abortion rights? No. Does he want to aggressively raise the minimum wage, bolster public education, strengthen unions, expand transgender rights and enact progressive tax reform? Probably not. But is he a cartoon thug who did nothing but watch TV while the mob he assembled beat and used Tasers on police officers? No. The choice is between Donald Trump and not-Trump, and the not-Trump candidate needs only one qualification: to win enough votes from a cross section of Americans to close off the former president's Electoral College path back to power.

Part of the wish fulfillment of "The West Wing" was that oratory can be

persuasive. So Barack Obama could come forth at the Democratic convention next month in Chicago and remind us, once again, that we're not red states and blue states but the United States by full-throatedly endorsing his old rival. And Mr. Romney could make the case that the Democrats are putting country before party in ways that the MAGA movement will not, and announce his bipartisan cabinet picks at the convention as well.

After the assassination attempt on Mr. Trump on July 13, rallygoers pointed at reporters and shouted, "You're next!" and Republicans in Congress and on television were blaming Mr. Biden and D.E.I. for the shooting, so it doesn't look as if that terrible moment will serve as the healing event we've all been waiting for. But Democrats nominating a Republican could be. And when it loses the popular vote for the eighth time in nine presidential elections, the Republican Party can then rebuild itself back into a useful force for democracy.

The writing staff would tell me I was about to jump the shark, that this is a "West Wing" fantasy that would never, ever happen. But as Bradley Whitford used to say, "Isn't the biggest fantasy on television a mafia boss in therapy?" The Democrats need to break the glass and this is a break-glass plan, but it's more than that. It's a grand gesture. A sacrifice. It would put a lump in our throats. But mostly, it would be the end of Donald Trump in presidential politics.

AARON SORKIN is a playwright and screenwriter.



ERIN SCHAFF

Sports

Never too old to skateboard, at the Olympics

At 50, Andy Macdonald feels it more keenly when he falls, but he's still rolling

BY VICTOR MATHER

Skateboarding often favors the young. The gold medalists in Tokyo in 2021, when the sport made its Olympic debut, were 22, 19, 18 and 13. An 11-year-old, Zheng Haohao of China, will compete in Paris this summer.

So will Andy Macdonald. He's 50. Macdonald, who was born in the United States but is representing Britain because he has a British father, will be 51 by the time he competes in the park event, in which skaters do tricks in a bowl with ramps, bumps and pipes. (The other event, street, mimics an urban environment with elements like stairs, handrails and curbs.)

He qualified for Britain's team by finishing high enough in the Olympic Qualifier Series this year, along with the teenagers Sky Brown and Lola Tambling, both younger than the oldest of Macdonald's three children. Macdonald will be the oldest skateboarder at the Games.

Macdonald spoke with The New York Times about skating, aging and being a first-time Olympian.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

Did you think you could make the Games?

I thought I could make the British team. That was the part I was optimistic about. But beyond that, I knew that qualifying for the Olympic Games would be a long shot.

There are 22 spots for the Games. Coming into the Budapest qualifier, my coach said I'd have to make the semifinal. To that point in the series I'd never even made a quarterfinal.

I'd have to do the hardest tricks, the best run I'd ever done, to even have a shot. All the strategy I've developed over the years was out the window. I had three chances to do the hardest run I could possibly do. You get three runs. I fell on my first two. On my last run I pulled it off. I scored 11 points higher than I had ever scored on the tour. And even then I qualified by the skin of my teeth.

Even when my coaches were telling me I did it, I wouldn't believe them until I heard it officially.

How is skating different at your age? It hurts more when you fall. It takes longer to heal. But just don't stop. That's how you keep doing it into your 50s.

I'm skating with kids a third of my age, and I get their youth and their exuberance and their resilience through osmosis.

I'll see them take a fall and think, "Man if I fell like that, I'd be out for two weeks." And they'll just bounce right up and be, "Let's try that again."

There are tricks that take more commitment and have a higher risk factor: a 720, that's the most I'll probably ever spin on a skateboard. Two rotations.

The last time I had done one, it had



Andy Macdonald was born in the United States, but he will compete for Britain at the Paris Olympics. "Even when my coaches were telling me I did it, I wouldn't believe them until I heard it officially," he said.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SKATEBOARD GB

been almost a year. Two weeks ago at a demonstration with Tony Hawk, because there was an arena with 30,000 people and the energy was high I decided to try a 720, and I made it first try. I became the oldest person ever to do one.

I used to go to an empty warehouse by myself and put down a 720. The older you get, the harder it is to get that motivation: I'm going to put it down or I'm going to slam trying.

Have you had a lot of injuries in your career?

I broke my ankle early in my career and my kneecap about 2002. Most of the injuries come from repetition, years and years of overuse: There's not much cartilage left in my knees, the tendons in my wrists; I've had an ankle surgery and two knee surgeries. But other than that, I've been pretty lucky. The longest I've been out is two months.

How do you relate to teenage and even preteen teammates and competitors?

I feel like I'm one of them. Skateboarding is the fountain of youth.

I was at the park before they were born. Chances are, I taught them where to put their feet or how to pump. Years later they're beating me.

Skateboarding is old enough that it has this history. It's not written down anywhere.

Ofentimes I'll be skating with my teenager teammates, and they'll be trying a trick, and chances are I was either there when that trick was invented or know the guy who invented it and how it got its name. Or I invented that trick myself.

How has the sport changed since you started?

It has developed exponentially in the skill levels, especially of younger kids. When I started skating at 12, that was

kind of the median age to start. Now, by the time kids are 12, they're spinning 900s. They're starting at 5 and 6.

That's partly because skateboarding has developed its facilities and public access. When I was growing up, if you wanted to skate a halfpipe ramp, you had to know somebody with a ramp in their backyard, and you had to go knock on their door and bring them a six pack.

Now, where there's cement, there's skateboarding.

What should fans be looking for in the park event?

It starts with skateboarding being a judged event. There's always that drama over who gets what score. In skateboarding, it's particularly tough.

There are certain markers. The use of the course, the difficulty of the trick, the style, the amplitude. But at the end of the run the judge gives a score on overall impression. One score.

How did they feel about his run?

In the run I qualified with in Budapest, in the first third of my run I went up to do a trick I had fallen on the run before. It was a flip trick: You ride up to the top of the bowl, and you kick your board and it flips once, you catch it and you put it back on your feet.

My coach was like, "Don't try to flip your board." I was like: "No. It's a flip trick, I have to try every trick I can. I'm just going to go faster."

I went harder and faster, and as I went to flip it, the board floated out in front of me and I missed. But I reached out and grabbed it and put it on my feet as if I meant to do it.

In skateboarding, that's extra points. The judges say, "Well, he didn't do the skill correctly, but he should have fallen and he didn't: Extra points." It's extra exciting. "How is he still doing it? He's still on, he's still going."

And any time the board comes off your feet, any time you flip it and grab

it, the timing has to be perfect. Even if you've done it a hundred times, that one time when they call your name and it doesn't work out . . .

You've won eight X Games gold medals. How does the Olympics rank in your career highlights?

Already, just qualifying is up there. It's something I never thought would happen. When I started this journey, I was like, "This is going to be a fun trip — and maybe long shot, I'll qualify." Just making it is kind of the medal for me. Of course I'm going for the gold medal, but I'm happy to be there.

So are you going to try to qualify for Los Angeles in 2028?

Ask me after Paris. If they were to add vert skating [skateboarding on a high ramp] for L.A. — I would hope they have their sense to do that. If they do, maybe I'll be there riding for Team 55 and Up.

Sanders still believes in a breakthrough for Colorado

Commentary

BY STEWART MANDEL
THE ATHLETIC

LAS VEGAS Deion Sanders, the coach of the University of Colorado football team, was notably more measured during his interviews at Big 12 media days this month than he was after that stunning season-opening upset of Texas Christian last September, when he walked into his postgame news conference and loudly asked, "Do you believe?"

He did, however, still have a security guard right behind him and a camera crew documenting his every move.

Anyone who paid attention to Colorado football last year remembers the arc of Sanders's first season there. After starting 3-0 and becoming the talk of the sports world, the Buffaloes were drilled, 42-6, by Oregon and won just once more to finish 4-8. A lot of people took delight in seeing Coach Prime humbled in humiliating fashion.

But Sanders viewed his debut season more favorably, noting that most of the losses were one-possession games. "We were close, but we didn't have what we needed to get over the hump," he said. "The record was what it was, but when you're talking about progress, before we got there . . ."

At that point, he paused, thinking carefully about what he would say next. You could tell he was reluctant to throw the former Colorado coaches and players under the bus.

The Buffaloes' 1-11 team in 2022 was abysmal, losing 10 games by at least 25 points, including the last five by at

least five touchdowns. Compared with that team, the 2023 Buffs may as well have been the university's 1990 national title team.

"It's going to take one more touchdown," quarterback Shedeur Sanders, the coach's son, said of winning close games. "I feel like I've got one more touchdown in me after this off-season work."

Led by Shedeur Sanders, one of the top quarterback prospects in the 2025 N.F.L. draft, and the two-way sensation Travis Hunter, Colorado ranked in the top 30 nationally in pass efficiency (149.3) in 2023. But that was about all that went right. The Buffaloes ranked last out of 133 Football Bowl Subdivision teams in rushing yards per attempt (2.31) and second to last in sacks allowed (56).

As for the defense, it finished 115th in yards per play allowed (6.27). After all the hype, the team finished in the same place in the last-ever Pac-12 standings as it did the season before: alone in last place.

That is the glass half-empty perspective.

But on July 10, Deion Sanders raved about the improvement he saw this spring at nearly every position group and highlighted his largely remade staff. Speaking about his defensive coordinator, Rob Livingston, formerly the Cincinnati Bengals' secondary coach, Sanders said, "I feel like we're going to kick butt, we're going to win, and he's going to be a head coach in college or pros or whatever he endeavors because he's that good."

On the defensive line, coached in part by a former Nick Saban assistant, Sal Sunseri, since last season, Sanders raved about "the way these young men are working and the athletes that they are and the bodies that they have." He



A huge amount of hype has accompanied Deion Sanders since he took the head football coaching job at the University of Colorado.

called the outside linebackers coach, Vincent Dancy, one of the best coaches on the whole staff.

The offense will again be led by the former N.F.L. coach Pat Shurmur, who took over at midseason last year when Sanders demoted Sean Lewis, who is now the head coach at San Diego State. Of Shurmur, Sanders said: "His compatibility and his relationship with Shedeur is amazing. And what they

plan to do this season, I can't wait to see it myself."

Again: glass half-full. Take a closer look at that new staff, and one might notice that Livingston, who spent the past 12 seasons with the Bengals, has never been a play-caller. His lone college experience was as an analyst at Furman and Vanderbilt. Or that Sunseri, 64, moved to an off-field role under Saban before Sanders came

calling. Or that Dancy was hired last year after a 10-38 stint as the coach at Mississippi Valley State.

Or that the new offensive line coach, the former Oklahoma and N.F.L. tackle Phil Loadholt, had never had an on-field coaching role. He will be responsible for improving Colorado's most visible weak spot from last season.

Again: glass half-empty. Sanders did not shy from hyperbole

in talking about some of his players. He was aghast that Hunter did not receive the highest player score in the new EA Sports College Football 25 video game (he was tied for second). He expressed excitement when a reporter mentioned that the Las Vegas Raiders might be looking at his son, but said he also hoped they did not lose enough games to draft that high. Sanders said Trevor Woods "is going to be the next Brian Urlacher," and suggested that defensive end B.J. Green could develop into a first-rounder.

"We want four in the first round," he said about the N.F.L. draft. "The only way that's going to happen is that we win and they're dominant."

But it will not be a handful of high-end players who determine whether Colorado makes a big jump in 2024. It will come down to whether Sanders has been successful in upgrading the roster. The team will once again trot out a lineup heavy on transfer portal pickups, though Sanders made it a point to mention that 13 high school signees played as freshmen last season. And few players drew more praise from him than the former walk-on running back Charlie Offerdahl.

With the huge amount of hype that has accompanied Sanders since he took the job, progress will not move the needle next season. Just reaching a bowl game would be a big step for any other Colorado coach, but this one was hired to make a much bigger splash, such as 10 wins or conference title contention, or both.

And with this almost certainly being the last year he has Shedeur Sanders and Hunter, it may feel like a make-or-break season.

"I'm judged on a different scale," Sanders said. "My wins are totally different than your wins."

Aussie swimmers give U.S. plenty to worry about

Australia won more gold at worlds, and it may well do the same in Paris

BY NICOLE AUERBACH
THE ATHLETIC

For many years across Olympic swimming venues, the sound of “The Star-Spangled Banner” was ubiquitous.

From the 1992 Games in Barcelona through the pandemic-delayed 2021 Games in Tokyo, the United States swim team won more gold medals than any of its peers. Its anthem played over and over again, as the Americans received their gold medals atop the podium. The last time Team USA did not win the most swimming golds at the Olympics was in 1988, when it finished second to East Germany. None of the swimmers on the current roster were alive then.

U.S. swimmers have won the overall medal count and the gold medal count so often over the years that it almost has been taken for granted. Of course, it helps that Michael Phelps won 23 alone over four Olympics, but it wasn't just Phelps. The Americans were often the best in the world in their best events, and they often cleaned up in relays as well.

Now, that dominance is far from certain. Heading into the Paris Games, the Australians will be favored to win the most gold medals in the pool. The Aussies topped the Americans a year ago at the world championships in Fukuoka, Japan, winning 13 gold medals to the Americans' seven. Though Team USA won the overall medal count (38 to 25), it won fewer golds than usual.

Paris could be the same. It's a possibility the Americans are not shying away from and one they are determined to avoid.

“Historically, the U.S. has done the best job of any country in the world of being better and performing at a higher level,” U.S. head women's coach Todd DeSorbo said. “Certainly, there are some events for both genders where we've got a significant amount of ground to make up, but I'm confident in the motivation and excitement and commitment of everybody — men and women — on the team that are prepared to do that and do some pretty special things.”

Count the Australian star Cate Campbell among those hoping for the opposite. She enjoyed what she heard at worlds — or rather, what she didn't.

“Australia coming out on top is one thing, but it is just so much sweeter beating America,” Campbell told Australia's Channel 9 last August. “There were a couple of nights, particularly the first night of competition, where we did not have to hear ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ ring out through the stadium, and I cannot tell you how happy that made me.”

“If I (ever) hear that song again, it will be too soon.”

It was the first time since 2001 that U.S. swimmers did not take home the



DAVID GRAY/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES



MADONNE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

Left, the Australian Mollie O'Callaghan goes into the Paris Olympics as the favorite to win the 100-meter and 200-meter freestyle events. Above, Caeleb Dressel (right) and Thomas Heilman after competing in the 100-meter butterfly at the U.S. Olympic trials.

most gold medals at a world championship meet. Of the nine swimmers who won multiple individual gold medals, Katie Ledecky was the only American swimmer to do so. “The world is getting better,” Bob Bowman, the U.S. men's head coach at worlds, told reporters in Japan. The Aussies set five world records at that meet alone. Neither seven-time Olympic gold medalist Caeleb Dressel nor two-time gold medalist Simone Manuel competed in Japan, and both will swim in Paris.

Campbell failed to qualify for Paris, but her comments have reverberated

loudly — including one that called the Americans “sore losers” for celebrating the most overall medals when the Aussies nearly doubled their tally of gold. It struck a nerve with Phelps, who served as a commentator for NBC during the U.S. trials last month. He said if a competitor spoke like that about him, he'd “make them eat every word they just said about me” and hoped the Americans would use the clip as motivation.

“Well, the good news is the Olympics will be here shortly, and we'll be able to see what the results are,” Phelps said.

For the first time in a long time, it's

hard to know what to expect. Ledecky, a seven-time Olympic gold medalist, will be favored to win gold in the 800-meter and 1,500-meter freestyle events. Beyond that, the races are too competitive to confidently predict. And Ledecky's rival, Australian Ariarne Titmus, will be favored to win the 400-meter freestyle, with fellow Aussie Mollie O'Callaghan the headliner for the 100-meter and 200-meter freestyle events.

Dressel, the Americans' star sprinter, will have a chance to defend his gold medals from Tokyo in the 50-meter freestyle and 100-meter butterfly. He looked

strong at trials, but he's still in a comeback to the sport after an eight-month break from swimming from mid-2022 to early 2023. (At trials, he failed to qualify for the 100-meter freestyle in Paris as an individual event, so he will not get to defend his gold.) Bobby Finke will be favored to win the 1,500-meter freestyle, and Ryan Murphy will be expected to contend in both backstroke events. But overall, the three aren't obvious locks to repeat their Tokyo success.

Gretchen Walsh, Regan Smith and Kate Douglass will headline the women's team alongside Ledecky, but the trio brings far less Olympics experience than she does. Walsh (100 fly) and Smith (100 back) set world records at trials and will be in contention in Paris in their respective events, but this will be Walsh's first Games, and Smith took home two silvers (200 fly, medley relay) and one bronze (100 back) in Tokyo. Those events are loaded, too. Australian Kaylee McKeown will be tough to beat in both backstroke events, and Canadians Maggie Mac Neil and Summer McIntosh will be top contenders in the 100 fly, as will China's Zhang Yufei.

Douglass took bronze in the 200-meter individual medley in Tokyo, though she will be swimming a more comprehensive program after qualifying to swim individually in the 200 fly and 200 individual medley at trials. (She also qualified in the 100-meter freestyle but later dropped it.) Though she set multiple championship records at trials, she faces a tough road ahead with McIntosh, the Canadian phenom, and McKeown in the 200 individual medley (and her teammate Alex Walsh, too).

Of the biggest names on Team USA, many are likely to medal at the Games, though it might not be gold. Two-time gold medalist breaststroker Lilly King, versatile distance swimmer Katie Grimes and male breaststrokers Nic Fink and Matt Fallon could all medal. So could Carson Foster, though he most

likely won't take gold in either individual medley race because of the heavily favored Frenchman, Léon Marchand.

Relays will also be extremely competitive. Team USA will be favored in the men's 4x100-meter freestyle relay and the women's medley relay, but the American women lag behind the Aussies in both freestyle relays, and the men will face stiff competition from China in the men's medley and Great Britain in the 4x200-meter freestyle relay. The Brits won gold in that relay in Tokyo for the first time. It was the first time the U.S. (men or women) failed to medal in an Olympic relay event.

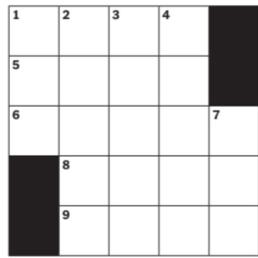
But what is perhaps most glaring is that the complexion of the team is fairly different from what it was even just two Games ago, with Phelps and Ryan Lochte headlining the roster in Rio de Janeiro alongside Ledecky in peak form and a schedule that stretched from the 200 free through the 800 free. Even with Ledecky and Dressel headed to Paris, this roster doesn't have the same star power American swimming typically does, particularly on the men's side. Dressel will swim multiple events, but he's long been an enigma and not someone who wants the world to know every little thing about himself.

Phelps and Lochte were endlessly captivating figures, and they were on TV nearly every day of the Games in their heyday because of the breadth of their events.

Still, Tim Hinchey III, the USA Swimming president and chief executive, has said the organization's goal is to win the total medal count and the gold medal count. But is that attainable? The Americans will find out soon enough.

“I thought we were in a good place relative to the rest of the world prior to trials, and coming out of trials, I think we were in even a better place,” DeSorbo said. “We're just ready to get to camp (in Croatia), get to Paris and let the Games begin.”

The Mini Crossword



7/22/2024 BY JOEL FAGLIANO EDITED BY SAM EZERSKY

- ACROSS**
- World capital with a museum dedicated entirely to pasta
 - Console for the game Halo
 - Number of degrees in each angle of an equilateral triangle
 - Inflatable bike part
 - Spot in Congress

- DOWN**
- Prescriptions, for short
 - “In memoriam” pieces
 - Spunk
 - For an additional cost
 - “You ain't seen nothing ___!”

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

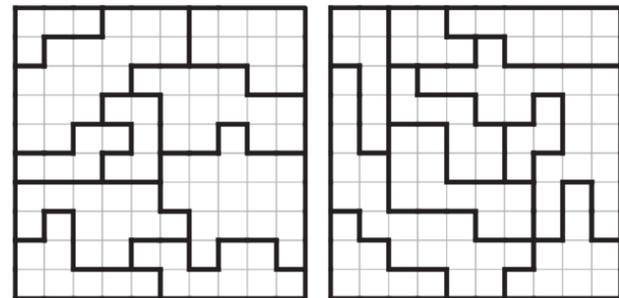
G	A	P
C	R	E
B	O	R
S	W	I
N	E	E

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Two Not Touch



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

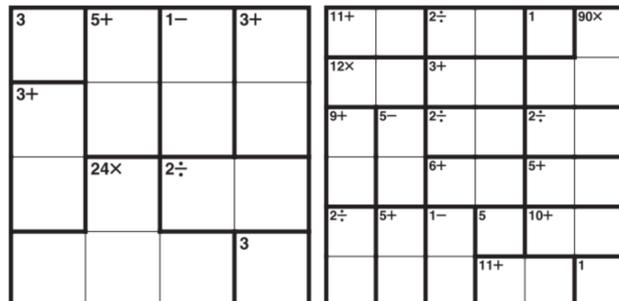
Brain Tickler

Name all five U.S. state capitals that start with the letter “A.”

PUZZLE BY WILL SHORTZ

SATURDAY'S ANSWER Potter's, protest, spotter

KenKen



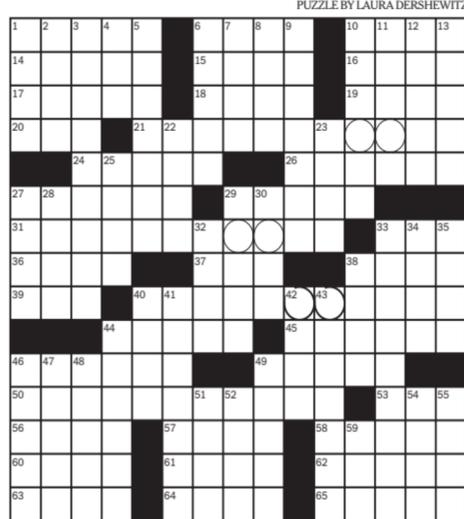
Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For more games: www.nytimes.com/games

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Crossword Edited by Joel Fagliano

- ACROSS**
- Lasagna-hitting-the-floor sound
 - Tail end of a lion's tail
 - Tupperware tops
 - Freeloading sort
 - Org. defending individual rights
 - Get one's story straight?
 - “I wish I could ___ that” (“Ew!”)
 - Blueprint
 - Opera set in Egypt
 - Understand
 - Explain something in steps
 - Brushes away, as a fly
 - Appeared to be
 - Join the army
 - Prickly plant
 - Acts like one's true self, colloquially
 - Hot chocolate holder
 - Optometrists check them
 - Goddess of the dawn
 - Lady ___ (“Shallow” singer)
 - Soak (up)
 - Was understated in one's description
 - Drive away
 - Baby's garment
 - Naval fleet
 - Defeat soundly, in slang
 - Sticky yellow squares ... or a description of the circled letters and what they follow?
 - Little devil
 - Like talking with one's mouth full
 - Went by bike, familiarly
 - Stone Age diet, familiarly
 - “Young Frankenstein” assistant
 - Like all leap years
 - Bird that's still getting wise to the world?
 - What the KonMari Method leaves you with
 - One direction
 - Academic hurdles



7/22/24

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

BUCKETLIST FLOG
INHOTWATER LANA
STARSONICE USER
COREYS STATTBD
ALMA PEN THEEYE
YDS TENOR EXXON
GUETTA SPINE
NOCANDO PLEATED
EVADE MAPOUT
ZEROS BLESS BEA
PROTIP GRE BICS
EDU NAPE ALIGHT
ROSS BABYBOOMER
CNET STRETTACO
EELY THATTRACKS

- DOWN**
- Quite pleased with oneself
 - Corn cake
 - Tossed and turned
 - Unreturned serve
 - Springsteen, to fans
 - Secures, as wrapping paper
 - The Bruins of the N.C.A.A.
 - Harsh criticism
 - Northernmost country in Africa
 - Follow the ___ (kids' game)
 - “Up in arms” or “break a leg”
 - “Where ___ go wrong?”
 - Rise to one's feet
 - Indian flatbread
 - Bluish green
 - Where low-rise jeans sit
 - Squeaks (by)
 - R&B singer with the 2006 #1 hit “So Sick”
 - Cook with direct heat
 - Workout break
 - Place for un bérét
 - Crazy talent, slangily
 - Wrinkly-skinned fruit
 - Marvin of Motown
 - Narrow valley
 - Mani-___ (spa treatment)
 - Stuck, with no easy way down
 - Wear a long face
 - Stuck, with no easy way out
 - Star assigners
 - Earth Day month
 - Makeup used to color the cheeks
 - Early PC platform
 - Artery opener
 - Smoked salmon
 - Poems of praise
 - Partner of greet
 - Collections of poker bets
 - Reaction to seeing the Northern Lights, perhaps

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Culture

This soprano sings 'the sound of the soul'



Ermonela Jaho, who has been starring in Puccini's "Madama Butterfly" at the Aix-en-Provence Festival in France. Below, with the tenor Adam Smith as Pinkerton. She can fill the theater with the softest of sounds.

VIOLETTE FRANCHI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

AIX-EN-PROVENCE, FRANCE

Ermonela Jaho has won ovations, critical praise and colleagues' adoration

BY ZACHARY WOOLFE

"Un bel di," the title character's great aria in "Madama Butterfly," begins with the soprano singing a hovering G flat. Puccini writes in the score that the note is to emerge not just pianissimo, or very soft, but also "come da lontano": as if coming from far away.

The opera is about a young Japanese woman convinced that the American naval officer who abandoned her will return, and "Un bel di" narrates her fantasy of seeing his ship sailing back into the harbor at Nagasaki.

At the Aix-en-Provence Festival in France, Ermonela Jaho condenses that desperate illusion into a haunting filament of tone. What's more, she sings the note while lying on her back on the floor in a bracingly intimate new production of the beloved work.

"The attack on the G flat, it's like hope is being suspended in midair, it's a sound like the ship appearing on the horizon," Daniele Rustioni, who conducts the Lyon Opera Orchestra in the production, said in an interview. "And Ermonela does it. You wait for that moment and she delivers."

Jaho, who turned 50 on Thursday, delivers these time-stopping threads of sound again and again at moments like Butterfly's ethereal entrance, marked even softer than pianissimo; during her love duet with Pinkerton, the callous American officer, when she says that the stars are like eyes, gazing at them; and later, when she insists that when Pinkerton returns, their son's name will change from Sorrow to Joy.

Barely audible yet theater-filling, with both the gauziness of a watercolor and the precision of a pen drawing, these high, quiet passages are a Jaho

specialty, capturing the essence of her fragile, suffering characters.

"The pianissimi, they're not only pianissimi; it's the sound of the soul," she said in an interview at a cafe two days before opening night. "It can be more dramatic than screaming."

Jaho's voice, while not huge, is secure enough that those pianissimi register even in vast houses. The Théâtre de l'Archevêché in Aix, where "Butterfly" will receive its last performance Monday, seats about 1,200. But even at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, with over three times that capacity, Jaho dares to murmur, making the audience's ears come to her.

Her combination of consummate technique and utter commitment — the cathartic sense that she is truly living the stories of some of opera's most heart-rending women — has earned her ovations, critical praise and the adoration of her colleagues.

"The courage she shows onstage to give you 150 percent of herself, and more, is really unique today," said the conductor Antonio Pappano, the just-departed music director of the Royal Opera in London.

Andrea Breth, her director in Aix, said, "I've never worked with such a beautiful artist." Rustioni said he told the festival, "I'm not interested in doing another 'Butterfly,' but if you give me Ermonela..."

Funnily enough, for an artist whose trademark is pianissimi, she grew up in a military family in Albania thinking that opera was only shouting. But when she was 14, she saw her first, "La Traviata." Not only did she fall in love with the piece, but she also immediately thought that she could have done it more believably than the soprano onstage. Her future was sealed, and a few years later she moved to Italy to study voice.

"I was a shy child," she said. "So it's interesting, even though I was a little timid, that I chose singing, putting my face in front of everyone. But I always felt free when I was singing."

Violetta in "Traviata" became a touchstone role, one she has sung several



RUTH WALZ

"Singers don't always have to be in transition. They can reap the benefits of being at the top of their game."

hundred times. But there is no feeling of routine in her performances of it: Last year, she brought unsettling shivers of reality even to the Met's dull staging.

"Sempre libera," the aria that brings down the curtain on Act I, was scarily defiant, almost a mad scene. "Dite alla giovine," in which Violetta abandons her dreams of love, was classic Jaho, hushed and sensitive.

"Of course, in forte she gets to you, and she can sing in the biggest theaters," Rustioni said. "But the quality of the pianos, the purity of the sound in long notes and, most important, the long

phrases with no breaths, that's the gold of her technique. The suspension without breath keeps you on your toes listening to her. I find her magnetic."

The production in Aix keeps the focus squarely on her, imagining "Butterfly," sometimes an ornate spectacle, as a spare, concentrated chamber drama, with the chorus always offstage. The playing space is compressed to a couple of painted screens and chairs in a small room, with a slow-moving conveyor belt around the perimeter, moving characters around like the hand of fate. A handful of Japanese dancers in Noh masks linger at the outskirts, ominous symbols of Butterfly's ancestors.

For all Jaho's old-fashioned, all-in quality, her performance is notably uncluttered and restrained. In the first act, when Butterfly is still just a girl, she had none of the coquettish vocal affectations

and gestures some sopranos bring to the part.

Her voice is straightforward and unembarrassed describing her unsavory past as a geisha; as her trusted servant, Suzuki, undresses her for her wedding night, Jaho's face silently registers pure satisfaction. After intermission, she seems somehow older: her voice a shade darker, her posture more stonily mature. But nothing feels like overkill, and even her stunningly delicate passages are organic expressions of the musical line, rather than tacked-on, look-at-me effects.

"Sometimes," Rustioni said, "there's a sense that for Butterfly you need a more powerful voice. But you don't need all this power to get to the audience."

While she pushes herself to her limits onstage, Jaho has been careful in the roles she takes on. Her repertoire these

days is centered on the doomed heroines of the Italian verismo school of the turn of the 20th century, a style Jaho inhabits with rare sincerity and clarity.

That includes lots of Puccini — Butterfly, Liù in "Turandot," Magda in "La Rondine," Suor Angelica in "Il Trittico" — as well as Giordano's Fedora, Cilea's Adriana Lecouvreur and the nameless protagonist of Poulenc's intense, one-woman "La Voix Humaine." Jaho's 2020 album, "Anima Rara," mixed chestnuts with verismo curiosities from the likes of Mascagni's "Lodoletta," Massenet's "Sapho" and Leoncavallo's "La Bohème" (rather than Puccini's).

But, she said, "I know my limits." She thinks the protagonists of Puccini's "Tosca" and "La Fanciulla del West," for example, are too heavy for her, as is Salome, which she's been asked to sing.

"I don't think she should be singing Tosca or Aida or things like this," Pappano said. "She's a classic lyric soprano, with all that implies about the heart and vulnerability and the ability to sing softly. And she should remain that. Singers don't always have to be in transition. They can reap the benefits of being at the top of their game."

Jaho's performances culminate after the opera has ended. Some singers come out for their bows with smiles and waves, even after the most tragic pieces. But Jaho seems almost destroyed. At the opening night of "Madama Butterfly," she practically stumbled across the stage, leaning on the set's thin columns for support as the audience cheered. Surely this was an over-the-top act? But Jaho insists — and everyone who works with her agrees — that she is not putting it on for show.

"After a performance, I'm completely empty," she said. "I gave everything. I don't even want to come onstage for the applause; I want to leave. I'm shattered."

Breth, her director, said: "In a way, I think she's like a child. Very vulnerable, and you have to be really careful with her; you have to give her shelter and a lot of love. But I can't think of another Butterfly than her."

Marvel gives new past to Israeli superhero

The studio says Sabra, a Mossad agent in print, will be American on film

BY MARC TRACY

When Marvel Studios announced two years ago that it had cast the Israeli actress Shira Haas to play Sabra, a superhero Mossad agent, in its next "Captain America" film, the news was cheered by Israelis and denounced by Palestinians.

The studio said at the time that the makers of the film, "Captain America: Brave New World," would be "taking a new approach to the character," but did not elaborate.

The contours of that reimagined character became clearer this month when Marvel released a trailer of the upcom-

ing film. The accompanying announcement made no mention of Sabra as an agent of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, as she is depicted in comic books, but described her as "a high-ranking U.S. government official."

The change drew criticism from some who saw it as diminishing Israeli and Jewish representation onscreen. A headline in Haaretz, the Israeli newspaper, proclaimed, "Sabra' Superhero in Marvel's 'Captain America' Stripped of Israeliness Amid pro-Palestinian Backlash," and one in The Jerusalem Post said, "Marvel removes Jewish superhero Sabra's Israeli identity for new Captain America movie."

The American Jewish Committee said on social media that Marvel's "decision to strip the Israeli identity of Sabra is a betrayal of the character's creators and fans and a capitulation to intimidation.



Shira Haas as the superhero Sabra in the upcoming Marvel movie "Captain America: Brave New World."

MARVEL/Disney

Sabra is a proud Israeli hero, and should be portrayed as such. Taking away such a central part of her identity would be like making Captain America Canadian."

It was not clear whether Sabra — alter ego: Ruth Bat-Seraph — still has Israeli origins in the movie, as her superhero name suggests. "Sabra" is a Hebrew word for a local cactus bush that

doubles as an affectionate term for native Israelis. It also the name of a refugee camp in Lebanon where Palestinians were massacred in 1982 by a Christian militia while Israeli troops stood by,

though the superhero predated that event. Haas appears only briefly in the new trailer, and a Marvel spokeswoman declined to comment.

When Marvel said Sabra would be introduced in this "Captain America" movie two years ago, the prospect drew criticism from Palestinians and their supporters who argued that the comic book character, which dates back to 1980, unduly glorified Israel. The hashtag #CaptainApartheid began to appear on social media.

"The bottom line is that to Palestinians, Marvel having an Israeli superhero whitewashes the occupation," Sani Meo, publisher of This Week in Palestine, a magazine about Palestinian issues, said at the time.

In the aftermath of Hamas's Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel, and Israel's war in Gaza, questions arose anew about how Marvel Studios, which is owned by Disney, would handle the character. Newsweek wrote in October that "Marvel's Israeli Superhero Poses Huge Headache for Disney."

Just what kind of character Sabra will be in the film, which is set to be released in February, remains to be seen.

Inside the mind of leaps and bounds

A growing scientific study explores the workings of the brains of dancers

BY MARGARET FUHRER

How does an art of the body affect the mind?

“Epiphany Machine,” a performance that’s also a scientific study, paints a picture of the brain on dance — onstage and in data. Two dancers move through a simple sequence of steps while wearing electroencephalography caps, which track their brains’ electrical activity. Lab technicians monitor the caps’ data on laptops. And on a large screen, kaleidoscopic projections illustrate the performers’ brain activity for the audience, in real time.

Feathery fractal trees grow, branch and recede. Chains of numbers snake around in circles, turning blue, then black. It is beautiful and eerie: a pas de quatre for two dancers and their busy minds.

“Epiphany Machine,” performed last month at Virginia Tech, is a product of the young field of dance neuroscience, which explores dance’s unusual brain-body connection. Imaging technology has helped reveal that dance’s multifaceted demands engage the mind as intensely as the body; that dance can root our minds more firmly in our physical selves; and that dancing together can help us relate to one another.

These are ideas that dancers grasp intuitively. Unsurprisingly, many scientists in the field are also dance artists, like Elinor Harrison, whose course on the neuroscience of movement at Washington University in St. Louis is subtitled “You Think, So You Can Dance?” “The way dance integrates the mind and the body, that’s something I’ve felt myself,” Harrison said. “So when we see evidence of these things on a functional magnetic resonance imaging scan” — which measures blood flow in the brain — “it’s the science justifying this embodied knowledge dancers have.”

Over the past few decades, dance has been used as a rehabilitation tool for people with neurological disorders, tying into a long history of dance as a healing practice.

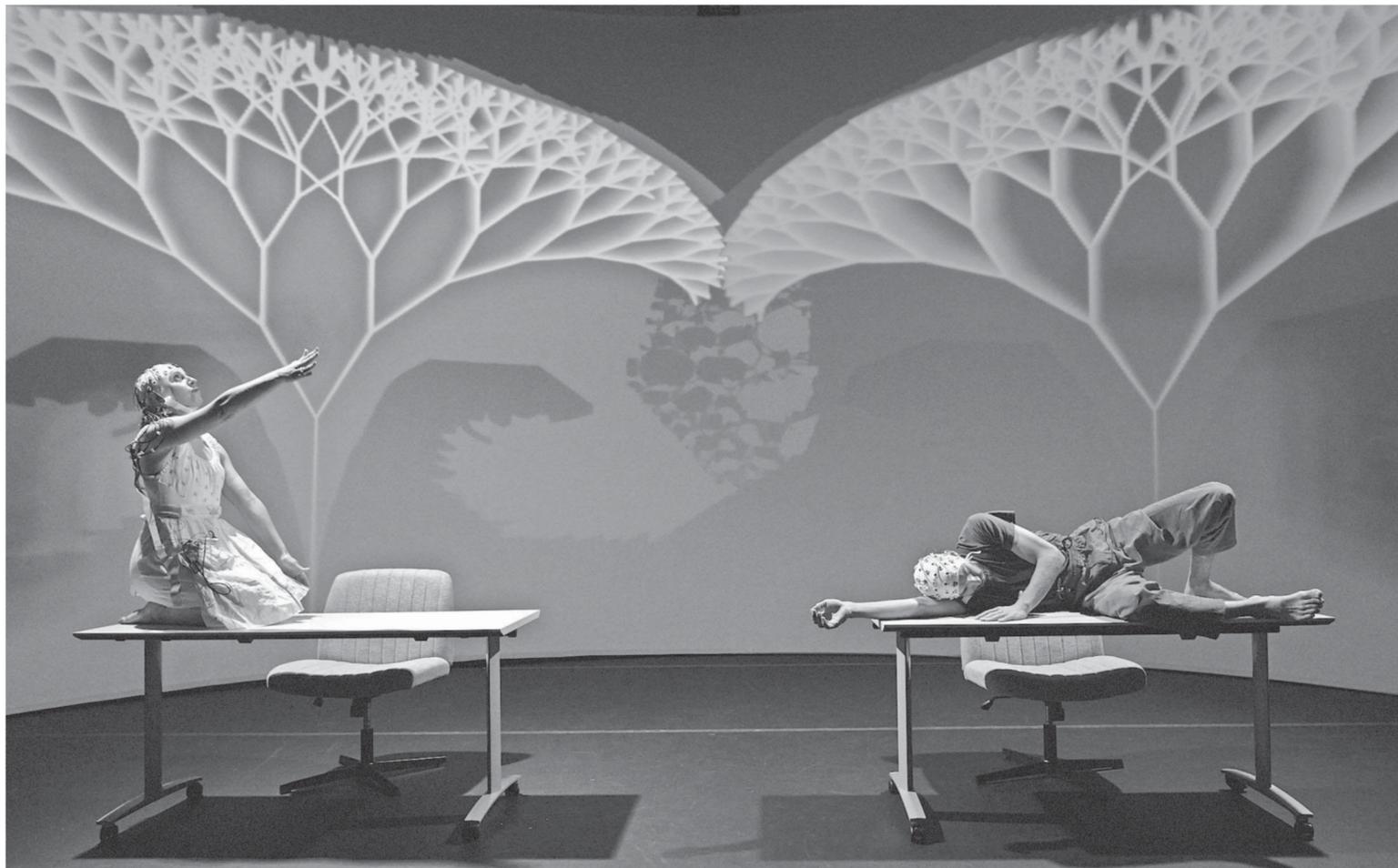
Participants in programs like Mark Morris Dance Center’s Dance for PD — which for more than 20 years has offered specialized classes for people with Parkinson’s disease — found them to be effective before science could fully explain why they worked. But dance neuroscience studies are beginning to reveal the neural mechanisms behind dance’s positive impact on motor function, cognition and mental well-being in people with a variety of neurological conditions.

“Dance is joyful and mindful for everyone,” said Julia C. Basso, one of the creators of and performers in “Epiphany Machine,” and the director of Virginia Tech’s Embodied Brain Laboratory. But for those whose brains are having difficulty communicating with their bodies, “it’s especially powerful.”

Despite anecdotal evidence of dance’s special brain-body connection, it has taken a while for dance neuroscience to gain momentum. Dance involves an unusually large number of brain regions — sensory, motor, cognitive, social, emotional, rhythmic, creative. That makes it difficult to study, said Constantina Theofanopoulou, a dancer and neuroscientist who is a research assistant professor at Rockefeller University: “It is a super complex behavior to decompose.”

Technology has also been a limiting factor. Functional magnetic resonance imaging, for example, requires that the head remain motionless, a hard thing to do while dancing. “To study the human brain in motion has been almost impossible for a long time,” Basso said.

Today it’s more possible, thanks to im-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN MEHRING FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

provements in what’s called mobile brain body imaging. Electroencephalography caps, like those used in “Epiphany Machine,” can now monitor brain activity with impressive accuracy. And as interdisciplinary study has become more common and accepted in academia, more dancer-neuroscientists have begun to explore brain imaging in dance contexts.

Theofanopoulou is part of a team of researchers who partnered with the Buthe choreographer Vangelina on “The Slowest Wave,” in which electroencephalography caps captured the brain activity of five dancers — the largest number tracked simultaneously using the caps — during a 60-minute performance.

“What we are finding is that some of the same brain regions that are activated when we speak are also activated when we dance.”

The brain in motion, scientists are now able to see, does its own kind of intricate dance. One of the hypotheses to emerge from this kind of research is what Basso calls “intra-brain synchrony.” Dance doesn’t just activate several different areas of the brain — sensory, cognitive, emotional — it helps them talk to one another.

“Dance enhances the flow of neural communication,” Basso said. That increased connectivity might explain the flow state dancers know well. Sadye Paez, a dancer and neuroscientist who is part of the research team for “The Slowest Wave,” calls it the “magic moment” — when the body and brain are so in tune that there is “a seamless connection between the thinking part and the feeling part and the moving and sensing part.”

The brain is a natural problem solver; dance, by strengthening its internal networks, can help it find better solutions. Neurological disorders like Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s, for example, break down existing neural pathways. When that happens, said Sofia Martins, a neuroscientist and psychotherapist, the brain tries to create new pathways and neurons, so it can do the same tasks using alternate resources. “Because dance is so neurologically demanding,” she said, “it’s really giving the brain more options” — helping it locate or create new neural pathways to replace broken ones.

Partner dance can be particularly good for some neurological disorders. Madeleine Hackney, an associate professor at the Emory School of Medicine who was a professional contemporary and ballroom dancer, said that external movement cues — like the touch of a dance partner’s hand — can prompt the brain to sidestep its damaged regions.

Some of Hackney’s research has focused on Parkinson’s disease, which causes movement problems as nerve cells in the basal ganglia, a part of the brain involved in motor control, become impaired or die. A common symptom is freezing of gait, in which the feet seem glued to the floor. But “if you put your foot directly in front of the person’s foot,” Hackney said of someone afflicted with freezing of gait, “as you might do in tango, they can step over it. The cue from the partner helps the brain bypass the broken basal ganglia networks, and snap over to a different connection.”

Though neuroscientists have studied dance’s effects on neurological conditions including Alzheimer’s disease and autism spectrum disorders, much of the research has concerned Parkinson’s. In addition to being one of the most common neurodegenerative diseases,



Parkinson’s “has these sort of obviously very salient problems of motor ability,” Hackney said.

David Leventhal, a former dancer with the Mark Morris Dance Group who is the program director and a founding teacher of Dance for PD, has been a co-author on several recent scientific papers about Parkinson’s and dance.

“In Dance for PD, what we’re really doing is ‘re-music-ing’ the body,” Leventhal said. Because the basal ganglia are involved in rhythmic processing, people with Parkinson’s often lose their internal metronome, affecting their gait and speech. Music can be an excellent external cue to promote more rhythmic movement. “Music denotes a beat, it denotes a quality, it denotes phrasing — it’s basically a road map for people to move,” Leventhal said.

Morris’s choreography also uses music as a road map, hewing attentively to its rhythms and melodies. And it often

incorporates simple walking steps and upper-body gestures, which are both helpful and friendly to people with Parkinson’s. Leventhal has taught excerpts from Morris’s percussive “Grand Duo” and incandescently simple “L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato” in Dance for PD classes.

“What’s so beautiful about using dance in this context is that music and movement are fully entwined,” he said. The brain’s ability to do that kind of entwining, to synchronize movement to a beat, has deep evolutionary roots — which suggests that dance might, too. Theofanopoulou and Paez are researching the neurological processes behind rhythmic synchronization, a skill that appears to be distinctive to the small group of animals who are vocal learners. Vocal learners — humans, parrots, dolphins — can hear and then reproduce, using the tiny muscles of the mouth and larynx, complex sounds. They can also,

after hearing a musical beat, reproduce its patterns with their bodies. “What we are finding is that some of the same brain regions that are activated when we speak are also activated when we dance,” Theofanopoulou said. “It could be that the species that are able to speak also are able to dance because evolutionarily there were similar pressures guiding them toward needing to coordinate their muscles in a rhythmic fashion.” That might also, she said, make dance helpful for people with speech deficits.

The idea of dance as something primal and elemental will ring true to dancers. Neuroscience has even begun to explain one of the most spiritual aspects of dance: its ability to create a sense of connection within a group.

In both “Epiphany Machine” and “The Slowest Wave,” the electroencephalography recordings showed the dancers’ neural oscillations, or patterns of brain activity, beginning to sync up as they performed. “When we talk about ‘getting on the same wavelength’ — that’s basically what’s happening,” Basso said of the phenomenon. Maybe dance, by creating connections not just within but also between our brains, could help us all get along. “Talking with my colleagues, we’ve discussed, Well, could we use this in marriage counseling? Could we bring this into a political or government environment?” Basso said. “There are so many potential applications to explore.”

A gang, a baby and a struggling migrant L.A.

BOOK REVIEW

The Rent Collectors: Exploitation, Murder, and Redemption in Immigrant LA
By Jesse Katz. Astra House. 310 pp. \$28.

BY BEN EHRENREICH

On the evening of Sept. 15, 2007, 18-year-old Giovanni Macedo marched down a crowded sidewalk in the MacArthur Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, pointed a .22-caliber pistol at the head of a street vendor named Francisco Clemente and pulled the trigger five times. Clemente was severely injured, but he survived. One of the bullets that Macedo fired, though, killed an infant sleeping in a stroller a few feet away. His name was Luis Angel Garcia. He was 23 days old.

For decades, MacArthur Park has been the beating heart of immigrant Los Angeles, a mainly Central American community that, for all its vitality and hustle, carries a supersize portion of despair. Within a few blocks of the park that shares the neighborhood’s name, you’ll find the usual miseries of 21st-century urban poverty plus the legacy of traumas inflicted by U.S.-sponsored death squads in Central America during the 1980s; constant

pressure from a historically corrupt and brutal local police force; and the myriad humiliations suffered by people with the wrong kind of papers. The territories of four neighborhood gangs compete around the park; in the first decade of the millennium, shootings were not uncommon.

The killing of Luis Angel Garcia, though, was different. It felt as if the air had been sucked out of the neighborhood. The chronically amnesiac city raced as always into a shiny future just out of sight, but long after the candles and the flowers had disappeared from that patch of sidewalk, everyone remembered what had happened there.

So I was glad when I learned that the veteran L.A. journalist Jesse Katz had written a book about the incident. I was also apprehensive. In most media narratives, there are only two kinds of immigrants: victims and victimizers, angels and thugs. The shooting seemed made for this kind of dichotomy. Clemente was as noble as they come. He and his partner, a Los Angeles police detective told Katz, were “just outstanding people,” “true righteous victims.” And the baby was just a baby — his middle name was even Angel.

Macedo, meanwhile, a son of Central American immigrants, was a high school dropout who had joined the



Across from MacArthur Park in Los Angeles in 2007, days after the shooting of an infant.

Columbia Lil Cycos, a subset of 18th Street, one of the most infamous gangs in the hemisphere. He was every Trump voter’s nightmare, baldheaded and tattooed, with horns inked above his temples and a demon’s face covering the back of his head.

My anxieties, fortunately, were

misplaced. In Macedo, Katz found the story of a lifetime. Macedo’s bad aim put the entire gang in jeopardy. Killing a baby triggered an automatic “green light” from the Mexican Mafia, the prison gang that serves as an informal judiciary among Latino street gangs. It meant “open season” on the Columbia

Lil Cycos. The gang’s higher-ups saw only one way out. They drove Macedo across the border to Mexico, where they garroted him with a rope and tossed his body into a gorge. But Macedo didn’t die. By the time Katz reached him, he was back in the United States, serving a 51-year prison sentence in Southern California.

It’s a credit to Katz’s skill, compassion and sheer doggedness — he interviewed everyone from Macedo’s cellmate to his mother’s relatives in El Salvador — that Macedo emerges from this narrative not as the demon that he flirted with, but as an all too ordinary kid, sad and scatterbrained, neither malevolent nor particularly brave. His desperation for affection and belonging drove him to join the Columbia Lil Cycos and eventually annoyed the gang’s elders so much that they put him to the test. As the man who orchestrated Macedo’s botched execution put it, “He was a homie, but he was questionable.” When Clemente repeatedly refused to pay the “rent” the gangsters demanded for the right to hawk cheap headphones on the sidewalk, they put the gun in Macedo’s hand. Failure to do the job, he knew, would mean his own death.

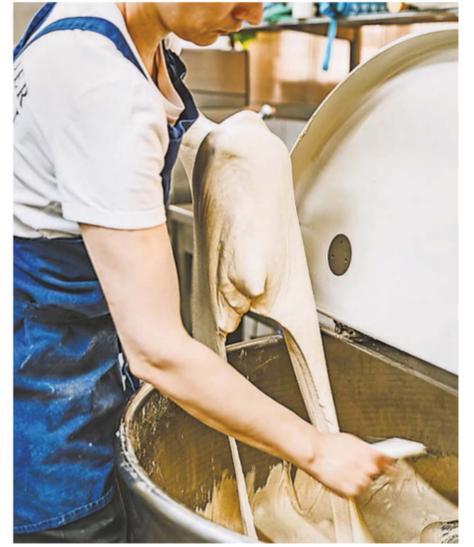
“The Rent Collectors” is filled with such choices that are not choices: impossible crossroads in the lives of

people constrained on all sides by forces that will not bend. Katz is acutely attentive not only to the flesh-and-blood personalities that make his story so compelling, but to the structures that both shape and confine them: the city’s hungry and impenetrable bureaucracy, its armies of police, the shadow universe of the prison system and the constant threat of deportation for sins as basic as working to feed one’s family. The state emerges as a character too, a predatory giant, blind and bumbling, creating the very conditions that it tasks itself with correcting.

Katz’s prose, dotted with street Spanish and macho metaphor — “His voice was low and sputtery, like an idling muscle car” — leans toward the hard-boiled. Don’t be fooled. For a tough-guy book about tough guys, this is a work of almost unerring tenderness. If its subtitle promises “redemption,” the book itself delivers something more honest: stories about people broken by powers larger than they are who nonetheless find the will to fight on.

Ben Ehrenreich’s most recent book, “Desert Notebooks,” was awarded an American Book Award in 2021. He worked out of an office in MacArthur Park for more than a decade.

TRAVEL



From left: Po-hsuan Chuang and Chih-ya Wang, the owners of the Parisian bakery Petite Île; the bakery Les Copains du Faubourg; tomato tartlets at Atelier P1; and signature sourdough at Ten Belles. The creations of these bakeries are worth a trip to Paris.

An insider's guide to the bakeries of Paris

New generation of artisans is returning to old ways, with cross-cultural flavors

BY ANYA VON BREMZEN

With more than 1,300 boulangeries and a profound baking culture, Paris has always been an awesome place for your morning pain au chocolat or baguette. But the lovable boulangerie de quartier might rely on additives and premixes. After a recent monthlong stay in Paris researching a book on bread, I found that a new generation of artisanal bakers across the city is replacing commercial yeasts with carefully nurtured sourdough starters, sourcing heirloom wheats stone-ground by small mills, and embracing creative techniques and cross-cultural flavors. Their creations are worth traveling for, as I happily discovered.

"The new-concept bakeries have a short range of products, a disruptive approach and strong personalities," said Christophe Vasseur, whose bakery, Du Pain et des Idées, by the Canal St.-Martin, helped kick-start the artisanal bread movement more than two decades ago. Now, tattooed bakers are "rock stars," as the newspaper Le Figaro called them. "This situation brings a new general appreciation of artisanal bread — which is such a great thing," said Apollonia Poilâne, the chief executive of the namesake family bakery, which has locations in Paris and London and still sets a mark of bakery excellence with its sourdough miches.

As crowds flood Paris for the Olympics and restaurant reservations become elusive this summer, these six boulangeries will satisfy your cravings for the crustiest boules and baguettes, the airiest brioches and the flakiest viennoiseries — even if you have to consume them on a park bench (or if you are lucky, in a stadium).

A baguette de tradition at the following bakeries costs just over 1 euro, and



Above left, Xavier Netry, head boulanger at Utopie and one of the most prominent Black bakers in France. He won the annual Paris baguette competition last April. Below left, everything served at Brigat' is impeccably elegant and technically perfect, the author writes, including its brioche aux framboise, above right, which is filled with vanilla custard and topped with fresh raspberries. Atelier P1, below right, has a convivial neighborhood vibe.



a loaf of bread is usually priced at €10 to €15, or \$11 to \$16, per kilo (just over two pounds). Breakfast viennoiseries start at €1.60 for a croissant. Individual pastries are priced between €5 and €8.

11TH ARRONDISSEMENT

UTOPIE

Raised in a rough Paris suburb by his Guadeloupean mother, the head boulanger at **Utopie**, Xavier Netry, had to drop out of school to support her by working in bakeries. He went on to become one of the most prominent Black bakers in France, winning the annual Paris baguette competition last April. Now queues start early outside the pint-size **Utopie** in the 11th Arrondissement for his crusty sourdough-starter-leavened creations, be it the golden baguette de tradition (currently being supplied to the Élysée Palace) or

aromatic green-tea loaves punctuated with crispy puffed rice. But don't miss Utopie's pastries, as its owners, Erwan Blanche and Sébastien Bruno — both Maison Ladurée veterans — have serious patisserie cred and adventurous palates.

Case in point: their sesame-lime composition, a striking orb of black sesame mousse on a crumbly sable base with a bright citrusy accent of lime confit.

Tip: Arrive early for the best bread selection and don't leave without a sourdough croissant and a bag of black-sesame mini-madeleines.

THE MARAIS

BRIGAT'

This chic minimalist Marais storefront represents the refined worldly vision of two Italian brothers, Lucio and Thom-

as Colombo. After nine years apart working in Europe and elsewhere at some of the top bakeries, hotels and more, the brothers opened **Brigat'**, named for their Italian home village. Everything served here is impeccably elegant and technically perfect — from the fragrant loaf of buckwheat polenta bread inspired by their northern Italian roots to the jewel-like gâteau de meringue, strawberries and chamomile cream.

But the true stars are riffs on levain brioche: the classic unfilled ones (citrus-scented buttery clouds with a gossamer sheen of vanilla glaze) and the swoon-inducing brioche feuilleté framboise, with a crunchy swirled cap concealing a center of intense raspberry filling.

Tip: Enjoy your celestial carbs at one of the tables inside, or eat them on the grass of Place de Vosges nearby. Ei-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOANN PAU FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ther way, don't miss the **Brigat' Gelato** a few doors down. And to take home: their majestic, moist panettone (€30).

PETITE ÎLE

The married Taiwanese couple Chih-ya Wang and Po-hsuan Chuang opened **Petite Île**, their stylish nook in the Marais, in 2022. A graduate of France's prestigious Ferrandi baking program, Ms. Wang creates exemplary sourdough einkorn and rye loaves, as well as honeyed pain de mie milk bread as light as an air kiss.

She also makes playful cross-cultural treats, such as the Japanese melon pan, which tastes more like brioche with a crackly cookie crumb crust, and the pain au chocolat aux sésames, a ruggedly beautiful thing that delivers a vigorous crunch and a dense chocolate filling with the added intrigue of black sesame. Also delightful is the puffy viennoiserie danoise, a riff on an almond croissant with caramelized praline oozing out from its sides and a top studded with different seeds — think croissant meets Danish meets everything bagel.

Tip: The friendly servers will pull you a fresh espresso on their Marzocco machine to take to the tables outside. A delicious bread of buckwheat, chestnuts and quinoa is a terrific gluten-free option. *

MONTMARTRE

ATELIER P1

Hailing from generations of bakers and millers, Julien Cantenot opened the arty boulangerie **Atelier P1** five years ago in northern Montmartre. His mission? Updating the breads and viennoiseries of his childhood with heritage grains, patient fermentation and painstakingly sourced organic ingredients.

Offering a view of young bakers at work, P1 has a convivial neighborhood vibe and a smiley staff happy to elucidate each small mill and farm they work with. So inviting is the wooden counter display, it's hard to choose between burnished loaves of signature einkorn bread, levain focaccia thick as an airport novel or a luscious pain au praliné loaded with a double dose of hazelnutty gianduja.

The gorgeous tomato tartlets (recipe courtesy of Mr. Cantenot's mother) are vegan and based on a whole wheat and olive oil pastry — a treat both indulgent and virtuous.

12TH ARRONDISSEMENT

LES COPAINS DU FAUBOURG

Les Copains du Faubourg, a homey spot in the 12th, looks like your average boulangerie de quartier, with customers noshing on bacon-egg rolls

at a few sidewalk tables. Inside, though, you'll note the whirring mill that grinds esoteric wheat varieties for the baker-owner Gérald Auvrez, who worked at Blue Hill at Stone Barns and now supplies bread to such gastropods as the chefs Alain Ducasse and Bruno Verjus (who is the chef and owner of the third-ranked establishment on the current World's 50 Best Restaurants list). Mr. Auvrez's masterpiece — it took him almost two years to develop — is the feuilleté au seigle beurré, a rye-and-wheat puff-pastry turban that combines rye's soulful toastiness with the buttery flakiness of the lightest croissant (come early to snag one).

Tip: The menu here offers sandwiches, salads and bakery items that include delicious éclairs and raspberry sables made by Mr. Auvrez's wife, Clara Bayonne Roman.

THREE LOCATIONS

TEN BELLES

A sweet success story of female bakers in a male-dominated métier, **Ten Belles** was founded in 2012 as a coffee shop by the Franco-British duo Anna Trattles and Alice Quillet and their partner, Anselme Blayney. Today, with three locations and a baking facility that supplies its signature high-hydration sourdough loaves to some 60 Parisian restaurants, Ten Belles is a vital part of the city's bakery/coffee shop culture. With chill vibes and design that bring to mind London or Brooklyn, the airy location in the 11th is perfect for viewing bakers at work while you polish off voluptuous little quiches and well-constructed focaccia ham sandwiches served with housemade mayo and pickles. Expect an exciting selection of coffees from small-scale producers, and try a cup with their roulé cannelle — much shared on Instagram.

Tip: Ten Belles' original Canal St.-Martin location makes for fun people watching, while the Rue du Cherche-Midi branch is a great Left Bank pit stop.