

WORLD

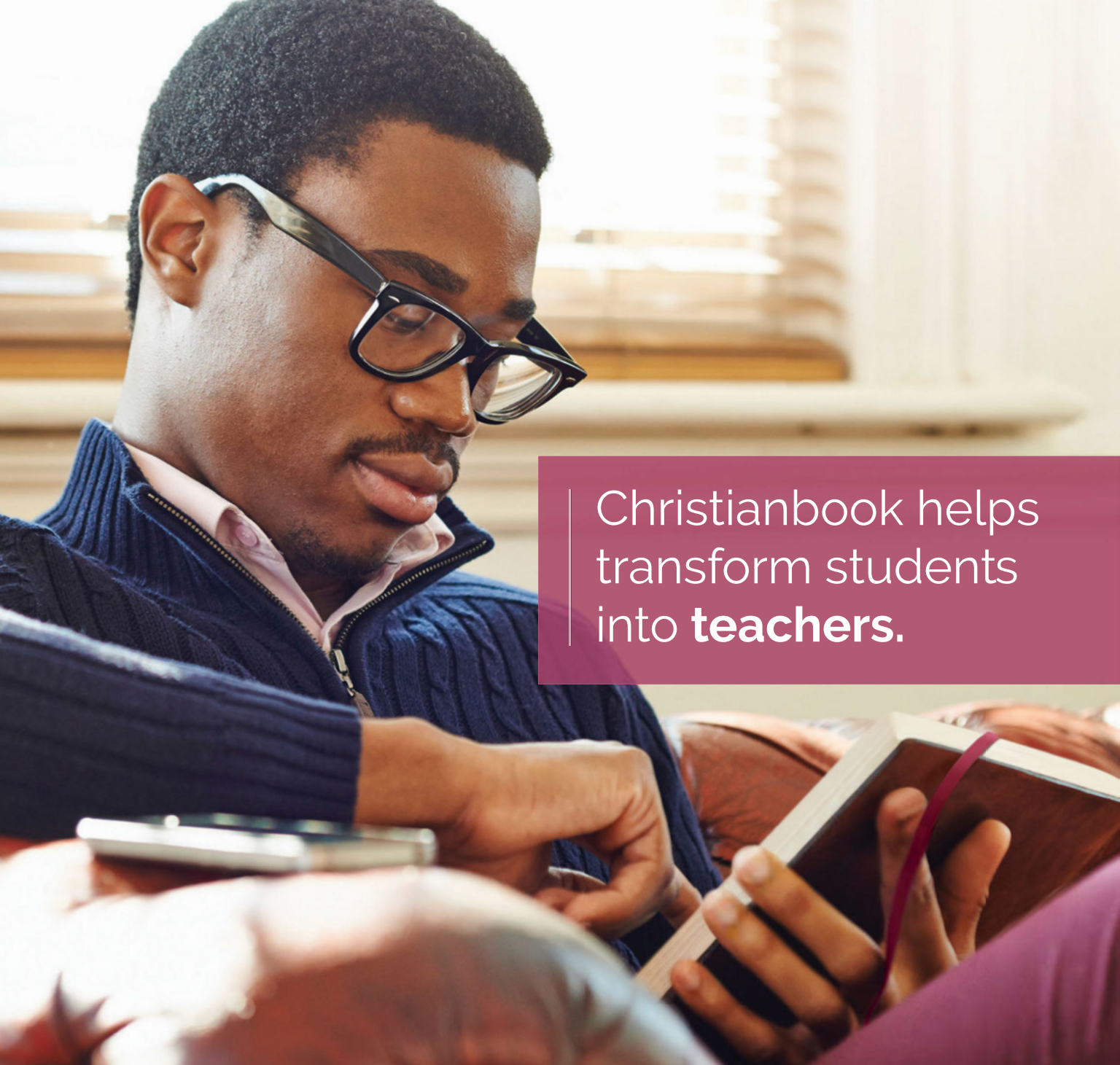
EARNING YOUR TRUST, EVERY DAY / APRIL 6, 2024

UNEQUAL JUSTICE

Leftist billionaires are bankrolling prosecutors who ignore the law p.42

by KIM HENDERSON



A close-up photograph of a Black man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue cable-knit sweater over a light pink collared shirt. He is looking down at an open book he is holding with both hands. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a window with blinds. A semi-transparent purple box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

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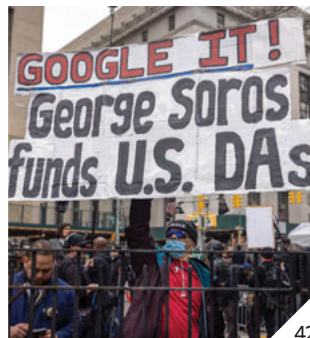
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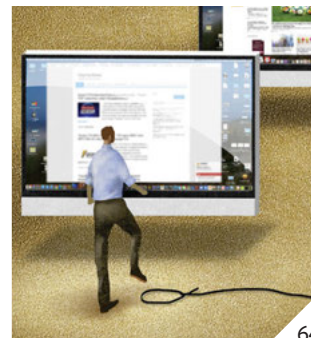
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Can opposition movements survive the violent oppression that extends far beyond Russia’s borders?

ON THE COVER: Illustration by Marian Femenias-Moratinos

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and those who dwell therein.” —Psalm 24:1

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CEO NOTES



WITH THIS ISSUE—specifically, this CEO Notes No. 192—we have reached a minor milestone: We now have been using this space for eight years for “communications from WORLD to you” (as I wrote in CEO Notes No. 1).

About 20 of the 192 CEO Notes have highlighted people at WORLD. That doesn’t include dozens of other columns that mentioned individuals in the context of another topic. I’ve tried to include some behind-the-scenes people, including in column No. 29 Caroline Harbin, a long-serving editorial assistant who retired in 1982, and in column No. 45 June McGraw, the longer-serving editorial assistant who took Caroline’s place. In that same column, I featured Judy Russell, our accounting manager who was retiring after 25 years.

News from here in the offices is a loosely defined category. Was the first such column No. 9, in which I reported on the results of WORLD’s fiscal year, or was it No. 15, in which I mentioned our combined WORLD “family”

reunion and 75th birthday party for Joel Belz? Either way, the topic took up only about a dozen columns over the years. I need to do better.

I encouraged our members to give charitable contributions to WORLD and gift subscriptions to friends on many occasions, but I counted about 20 columns that were specifically for those purposes.

The “big three” topics, each represented by more than 40 columns, are:

WORLD history: Column No. 3 looked back to 1941 and 1942, respectively, as the year Joel was born and the year Nelson Bell founded *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, WORLD’s predecessor publication. The most recent historical column was No. 188, describing how WORLD came to be headquartered in Asheville, N.C.

WORLD projects: Columns along these lines are meant to remind you of WORLD’s other projects and products. Column No. 4, regarding the World Journalism Institute course, was the first. WJI accounted for about half of all the columns in this category, but we frequently mentioned our student products, God’s WORLD News and *WORLD Watch*, as well as the other WORLD platforms, like Digital and Radio.

WORLD initiatives: These columns relate to all-new products or programs, and changes to existing WORLD products. I suppose column No. 1, in which I talk about our reasons for including a new “Notes from the CEO” column, qualifies in this category. That 2016 column coincided with a redesign of the magazine and the announcement of a new editor, Tim Lamer. It seems like there’s always something new right around the corner.

Speaking of which, some changes are coming to this CEO Notes column itself in coming issues. And those small changes are part of some rather big changes across the organization. That may have to wait for column No. 193. But who’s counting?

KEVIN MARTIN
kevin@wng.org

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Artistic tribute

Carne Griffiths' mesmerizing portrait of Joel Belz captured the light and glory of God's throne room, the mystery of a glorified body, and the joy of a believer who has heard "Well done, good and faithful servant." It's an astonishing artistic accomplishment!

SANDRA S. LANGLEY
Vienna, Va.

The portrait on the cover of Joel was captivating. What a great tribute to a great man. It is a true work of art.

PAM CODY
DuPont, Wash.

Your cover was so striking and a wonderful tribute. Thank you for such a memorial to a wonderful man. He was fully deserving of a special goodbye.

KATHY YOUNG
Melrose, Wis.

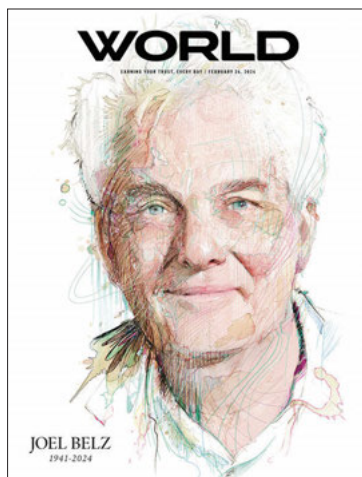
Voices: Joel Belz p10

You posted the perfect hymn as Joel's last column. Horatius Bonar's words fit his life and worldview so very well, and they are a great encouragement to us all: "Till trav'ling days are done."

STEPHEN LEONARD
Vidalia, Ga.

Let's see more of Joel Belz's columns. In his writings, we see wisdom and good advice. Joel, "being dead, yet speaketh."

JIM TOMS
Hendersonville, N.C.



FEBRUARY 24, 2024

Armenia's forgotten war p52

I had never understood the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict until now. Thank you for laying it out so clearly, maps and all. Great writing.

CHERYL IRISH
Bastrop, Texas

Thank you for not forgetting Armenia. Jenny Lind Schmitt did a great job.

JOEL CHRISTMAN
Justin, Texas

Walkable metropolis p64

How much better would we be physically and mentally, not to mention financially, if we were less car-dependent? More exercise, more interaction with neighbors, less air and noise pollution, less cost, less death—not to mention the stress of sitting in traffic. The earth is the Lord's and all it contains! Our urban

sprawl is an affront to the beauty of His creation.

SHARON SHAW
Richmond, Va.

Party animals p24

I have been a registered Republican since I proudly voted for Bob Dole in 1996. The Horned Shaman Wing of the GOP has prompted me to leave the party. Almost every day I pray that God will put forward a fit man (or woman) I can vote for with minimal reservations.

VERA VOLODIN
Charlottesville, Va.

I so much appreciate how WORLD reports on politics. It has been a comfort to read the magazine, knowing that I am informed and receiving the facts. From there, I can form my own opinions.

SUE QUIROGA
Lansing, Mich.

Who started the fire? p42

I'm comforted that nothing takes God by surprise—not Donald Trump or Joe Biden. God uses all kinds of people, even Nebuchadnezzar. And in Isaiah, it says, "The government shall be upon His shoulder."

JANET COZAD
Costa Mesa, Calif.

Striking musical gold p40

I appreciate Arsenio Orteza opening my eyes to the options on Bandcamp. I love how the recommended albums help me worship God in various ways.

LAURA LASTER
Kilgore, Texas

Cartoons p21

Your cartoons are a jarring satirical reality about our upside-down broken world. But I need some nonpolitical comic relief and the medicine a merry heart brings (Proverbs 15:30).

EDIE CUNNINGHAM
Jefferson, Maine

Correction

The Deering Center neighborhood is located in Portland, Maine ("Walkable metropolis," Feb. 24, p. 66).

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DISPATCHES



IN THE NEWS

Desperate measures

Nigerians suffer an economic crisis
alongside security woes

by ONIZE OHIKERE



DURING A SUNDAY SERVICE on March 17, David Oyedepo stood before his congregation in the 50,000-seat auditorium of the Living Faith Church Worldwide in Nigeria's southwest Ogun state. The charismatic megachurch's founder said it would formally launch food and clothing banks across 200 locations nationwide on March 27.

"If your neighbor comes asking you for help and it's in your power to do it, don't ask him to come back tomorrow if there's provision for it," he said.

Other Christian leaders and organizations have announced similar charity for Nigerians enduring the country's worst economic crisis in recent history. Annual inflation in Africa's largest economy and most populous nation stands at around 30 percent—the highest in almost three decades. Prices of staples like bread and rice have doubled in the past year, and Nigerians struggling to adjust to the rising cost of living have staged protests and in some cases engaged in looting. The crisis is compounded in the country's violence-prone

northern region, where kidnappings have surged in recent weeks.

Analysts blame Nigeria's current crisis on decades of structural and economic problems. After assuming office last May, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu launched a campaign to fix the country's economy. Tinubu's administration reversed a ban on rice imports and unified the country's multiple exchange rates, allowing market forces to determine the rate of the Nigerian naira against the U.S. dollar. He also ended decadeslong gasoline subsidies, saying they had become too costly for the government.

But the subsidy reversal brought a 200 percent increase in gas prices in a country without stable electricity and heavily reliant on gas-powered generators. The ripple effect was higher prices across the economy. Food costs have soared 38 percent in the past year.

Underscoring the desperation, the BBC reported residents in northern Kano state are now consuming *afafata*, a local name for a type of hard rice grain usually disposed of with rice hulls or turned into fish feed.

Noise outside the window caught Daniel Barry's attention March 3 as he joined other congregants for his church's 7 a.m. Sunday service in Dei-Dei, a suburb of Nigeria's capital, Abuja. In the street, he saw crowds of people running. Word had spread that →

Protesters rally in Abuja against soaring living costs as an economic crisis leaves many struggling to afford food.

people had broken into a nearby warehouse stocked by the Federal Capital Territory's Department of Agriculture.

Barry said local church congregants—including from his own church—joined the rush to see what they could grab from the government warehouse. They carted away bags of corn, millet, rice, and fertilizers—and even parts of the building, like corrugated roofing sheets and window panels.

"Everybody was packing whatever they could carry. ... People were complaining there [that] their salary is not enough, they don't have enough food," he recalled. "Starvation is too much."

In Karmo, another Abuja district, looters raided a warehouse stashed with foodstuffs, including maize, rice, and beans. In other states, looters have targeted trucks carrying spaghetti and bags of rice.

In parts of the country's north, Islamist-fueled violence has repeatedly

"It is crucial to maintain a focus on social protection and ensure that the most vulnerable segments of society are not left behind."

A woman prays for kidnapped students in Kuriga, Kaduna state, Nigeria.



disrupted farming cycles, making the food shortage especially severe.

Early in March, Mark Lipdo visited a camp for internally displaced people in Mangu county in the restive Plateau state. His Stefanos Foundation had planned to distribute food to about 600 families displaced that week by attacks from armed herdsmen who have targeted majority Christian farming communities.

But when the displaced families queued up to collect food items, other residents from the community also rushed over. "They also have needs in their homes," Lipdo said. His foundation has tracked at least 400 farms destroyed in five counties in the state.

Exacerbating the situation is a recent surge in abductions by Islamist rebel groups and criminal gangs seeking ransom payments. Between March 16 and 17, bandits kidnapped more than 100 people from Kajuru and Dogon Noma in Kaduna state. More than 500 people have been abducted in at least four other attacks across the north in recent weeks, including nearly 300 children from a school in Kaduna.

While the Nigerian government has faced criticism for failing to prevent the kidnappings, authorities have at least stepped up food assistance. On March 13, Nigerian authorities began distributing 42,000 metric tons of grains across the northwest. Late in February, Ukraine also sent 25,000 tons of wheat through the World Food Program to support crisis-plagued Nigerian communities in the northeast.

Meanwhile, President Tinubu has asked Nigerians to be patient with the ongoing reforms.

Glory Ehiremen, an analyst at the Lagos-based SBM Intelligence, said that while Nigeria needs to boost private sector development, create jobs, and attract investments, community safety needs to be included in the growth plans. "It is crucial to maintain a focus on social protection and ensure that the most vulnerable segments of society are not left behind," she said. ■



BY THE NUMBERS

Gains and losses

Tallying abortions after *Dobbs v. Jackson*

by JOHN DAWSON

1.28 million

The number of legal abortions (excluding certain telehealth abortions) performed in the U.S. from July 2022 through September 2023, according to a recently released Society of Family Planning report that relied on estimates and abortion provider surveys. While several states have effectively shuttered abortion facilities since the June 2022 Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, some women are finding ways around state laws.

120,930

The estimated reduction in abortions in the 15 months following *Dobbs* in 14 states that instituted total abortion bans.

42%

The increase in the average number of abortions performed each month in New Mexico, neighbor to abortion-restricting Texas, in the 15 months after *Dobbs* compared with the three months prior.

16%

The percentage of all abortions that were provided through telehealth methods in September 2023.

DEPARTURES

Thomas Stafford

Stafford, a veteran NASA astronaut known for his 1975 handshake in space with a Soviet cosmonaut, died March 18 at age 93. Stafford first went to space as part of NASA's Gemini program in 1965. In 1969, he commanded Apollo 10, a mission to orbit the moon and find a landing spot for the famed Apollo 11. The flight made Stafford one of only 24 astronauts to fly to the moon. In 1975, Stafford commanded the American side of a joint U.S.–Soviet Union mission called Apollo-Soyuz that featured spacecraft from both nations docking in space. After the two craft docked, Stafford shook the hand of cosmonaut Alexei Leonov, a gesture that symbolized thawing relations between the two countries.



Paul Alexander

A victim of childhood polio who became a reputable Dallas lawyer, Alexander died March 11. He was 78. After a polio diagnosis in 1952 at age 6, Alexander became paralyzed and began living in an iron lung. A therapist eventually taught him to use his throat muscles to force air into his lungs, permitting



Alexander enough freedom to spend hours at a time outside the iron lung and ultimately earn a law degree from the

University of Texas in 1984. Later in life, Alexander gave up his law practice when he became unable to live outside the machine. Instead, he wrote a book about his life in the lung. At his time of death, Alexander was one of just two Americans living in the device.

Denmark calls women into army



Denmark Women in this Nordic country will likely soon be required to serve in the military. Denmark, a founding member of NATO, announced March 13 it plans to introduce military conscription for women, pending approval from the country's parliament. The government also said it would extend military service from four to 11 months for both men and women and boost defense spending to meet the NATO target of 2 percent GDP, all part of an effort to overhaul Denmark's army of roughly 8,000 professional troops. Prime Minister **Mette Frederiksen** said she hoped to boost deterrence "in a world where the international order is being challenged." —*Jenny Lind Schmitt*

Philippines Authorities have arrested nine people for alleged human trafficking after raiding a "love scam" center on March 14. Police rescued hundreds of victims from the Philippines, China, and other countries who were trapped in a building in Bamban town that masqueraded as an online gambling operation. The captors forced victims to lure others into romantic relationships online and dupe them into investing in fake schemes. A Vietnamese man in his 30s informed police about the facility after escaping from it himself. Human traffickers running cryptocurrency scams lured him to the Philippines in January with what they said was a job offer as a chef. Authorities found signs of torture on the man, including electrocution marks. According to a United Nations report, organized criminal gangs have trafficked hundreds of thousands of people to Southeast Asia to work in online scam operations that generate billions of dollars each year. —*Joyce Wu*



POPULATION
116.4 million

LANGUAGE
Tagalog, Bisaya, Hiligaynon

RELIGION
79% Roman Catholic, 6% Muslim, 4% other Christian

GOVERNANCE
Presidential republic

GDP
\$921.82 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Integrated circuits, office machinery/parts, insulated wiring, transformers, semiconductors

Russia Authorities have detained a South Korean missionary for alleged espionage, according to a March 11 report from Russia's state news agency. The man, identified in media reports as Baek Kwang-soon or Baek Won-soon, was arrested earlier this year. The Global Love Rice Sharing Foundation, the Christian group he works for, denies he was spying. "He was a conscientious and deeply religious person appointed by the group to help migrant laborers, the poor, and people in hardship," foundation head Lee Sun-gu told Reuters. The Russian state news agency said this is the first time a South Korean has been arrested for spying, but Moscow regularly detains foreigners. In March 2023, authorities arrested *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich on spying charges. —Emma Freire



POPULATION
141.7 million

LANGUAGE
Russian, Tatar, Chechen

RELIGION
20% Russian Orthodox, 15% Muslim, 2% other Christian

GOVERNANCE
Semi-presidential federation

GDP
\$4.03 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Petroleum

South Sudan A leading activist and Harvard fellow living in the United States faces charges of conspiring to purchase and illegally export millions of dollars' worth of weapons. U.S. officials detained **Peter Biar Ajak** and Abraham Chol Keech in Arizona, according to a federal criminal complaint unsealed March 5. The documents claim both men ordered weapons worth nearly \$4 million. They planned to smuggle them to South Sudan through a third country. The men could face up to 20 years in prison. Ajak was a former child soldier who sought U.S. asylum in 2020, claiming South Sudanese leaders sought to detain or kill him. —Onize Obikere



Peru Hundreds of police officers arrested 18 people on March 13 in a "mega-operation" that targeted arms traffickers linked to a political assassination. About 700 officers searched houses and office buildings in the capital, Lima, and several regions on Peru's border with Ecuador, seizing guns and documents as well as the suspected traffickers. Jorge Chavez, head of the national prosecutor's office, told Reuters that several companies allegedly imported weapons, mainly from the United States and Turkey, and funneled them to criminal gangs. Chavez believes they likely supplied the weapon used to assassinate Ecuadorian presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio in August. —Elizabeth Russell

Australia Nearly a dozen Palestinians already en route to Australia had their visas canceled by the Department of Home Affairs, citing a change in status or circumstances. The applicants ended up stuck in Egypt and other countries. Officials said the applicants, who are relatives of Australian Palestinians, never intended a temporary stay and questioned how they managed to escape Rafah into Egypt. They say the use of unofficial visa brokers could jeopardize Australia's national security. But political pressure brought a quick reversal, and officials reinstated at least eight visas. Australia has granted temporary visas to 2,400 Israelis and 2,200 Palestinians. Australia is one of a handful of countries that designates the entirety of Hamas as a terrorist organization. —Amy Lewis



POPULATION
26.5 million

LANGUAGE
English, Mandarin

RELIGION
20% Roman Catholic, 18% Protestant, 3% Muslim

GOVERNANCE
Federal parliamentary democracy

GDP
\$1.28 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Iron ore, coal



U.S. BRIEFS

Cru employees fired

Texas One of the nation's largest campus ministries has dismissed two long-time employees who publicly questioned the way it addresses theological issues surrounding sexuality and gender. **Uriah and Marissa Mundell**, who live and work in Austin, voiced their concern over Cru's policies in a *WORLD* story published Feb. 22. Two weeks later, the organization formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ terminated their employment.

"Our primary concern is that the level of dissonance you have with Cru's position on biblical sexuality that led you to go to public spaces to communicate your disagreement with the ministry," the human resources department said in a March 13 email.

Last year, after completing the ministry's new mandatory sexuality training, the Mundells, who are both 42, said they raised concerns with their supervisors, the human resources department, and other Cru leaders, including the director of theological development, Keith Johnson. Each time, they said, their concerns were dismissed.

The Mundells questioned whether it is Scriptural for Cru to allow staff to adopt LGBT identity labels—including identifying as "gay Christian" or using a person's preferred pronouns—and to refer to same-sex attraction as a "disordering of sexual desire," not sin.

"We know that Cru's position on biblical sexuality is an area of deep concern for you," the email from the HR department said. "It is important that you realize you can hold your views and continue to serve with Cru as long as they don't conflict with our statement of faith or our missionary vows."

The organization's first two missionary vows include affirming "Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord" and "the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God and [I] willingly submit to the authority of God's Word." The Mundells were told they broke the sixth vow, which states, "I pledge to work for the peace and unity of Cru."

Cru's communication department declined to comment on the Mundells' firing. —*Mary Jackson*

Alaska A joint session of the state's Legislature fell one vote short of overriding a veto from Gov. Mike Dunleavy on a multimillion dollar education funding package. Legislators passed the bipartisan bill in February, giving the state's per-student funding formula a \$680 bump. The measure also earmarked additional funding for rural schools to get faster internet and help students struggling with reading. But Dunleavy criticized the bill for not including funding for teacher bonuses and not giving his personally appointed education board control of approving charter schools. After the vote, Dunleavy, a former educator, assured school boards that "education funding will be prioritized" going forward.

—*Christina Grube*


Montana A rancher pleaded guilty March 12 to conspiring to create huge hybrid sheep for hunting preserves. Arthur Schubarth, 80, used tissue and testicles from Marco Polo argali sheep trafficked from Kyrgyzstan to clone and inseminate ewes. Argali sheep often weigh more than 300 pounds with horns extending more than 5 feet. Schubarth also illegally obtained genetic material from the state's wild-hunted big-horn sheep and forged false veterinary inspection certificates. A U.S. Justice Department attorney called the plan an "audacious scheme to create massive hybrid sheep species to be sold and hunted as trophies." Schubarth faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for each felony count.

—*Sharon Dierberger*

Georgia More than a dozen current and former female college athletes are suing the National Collegiate Athletic Association over a policy that allows men to compete in women’s sports. The 16 women, led by former University of Kentucky swimmer **Riley Gaines**, filed the lawsuit in federal court in Atlanta on March 14. They say the NCAA is discriminating against women and violating their Title IX rights and the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment by allowing males who identify as females to participate in women’s athletics. According to the lawsuit, the 2022 NCAA Division I Women’s Championships for swimming spurred the athletes to take legal action. During the 200-yard freestyle final, Gaines tied for fifth place with the male swimmer known as Lia Thomas from the University of Pennsylvania. Thomas received the trophy, and he later won the 500-yard freestyle race. Gaines and her fellow athletes are pushing the NCAA to reverse its transgender policies and revoke any award or record from male athletes who competed in women’s events. —*Lauren Canterberry*



Wyoming It will soon be illegal in the Cowboy State to produce, process, or sell hemp products with synthetic additives that cause marijuana-like effects when eaten or inhaled. Delta-8 THC occurs naturally, but the kind sold as hemp products in edibles and smoke or vape shops is more potent and unregulated. In 2018, Congress legalized the sale of hemp containing less than 0.3 percent delta-9 THC, the chemical responsible for most of marijuana’s psychoactive effects. But it didn’t address synthetic delta-8, often called “diet weed,” that produces less hallucinogenic effects than marijuana but contains added harmful chemicals. National poison control centers handled more than 2,300 delta-8-related calls in a 14-month period, contributing to appeals for increased oversight. More than two dozen states now ban, restrict, or heavily regulate the sale of delta-8 THC. Wyoming’s ban takes effect in July. —*Todd Vician*



POPULATION
581,348

GOVERNOR
Mark Gordon*

U.S. SENATORS
John
Barrasso*,
Cynthia
Lummis*

INDUSTRY
Mining, tourism



Massachusetts Six students from Southwick Regional School are facing criminal charges for sending racist Snapchat messages. The students, who are all 13 or 14 years old, created a group chat “that included heinous language, threats, and a mock slave auction,” according to Hampden District Attorney Anthony Gulluni. The “slave auction” messages targeted two of the students’ classmates. The students sent the messages the night of Feb. 8. By the next day, someone had reported the chat to school officials. The school swiftly suspended the students, but the incident has shaken the small town outside Springfield. At a March 14 press conference, Gulluni said he would not release the juveniles’ identities. They are charged with several crimes under state law, including interfering with civil rights, threatening to commit a crime, and witness interference. Gulluni did not say if the targets of the racist messages have returned to school. —*Elizabeth Russell*

BACKGROUNDER

Can kids really consent to transgender procedures?

by JULIANA CHAN ERIKSON



ENGLAND'S National Health Service on March 12 confirmed it would no longer routinely prescribe puberty blockers for children with gender dysphoria. But many doctors have no qualms about such protocols. Files leaked from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health and published on March 4 revealed member doctors encouraging one another to prescribe transgender interventions to patients as young as 9—including hormones and surgeries—even as some doctors expressed uncertainty. Currently, U.S. gender clinics rely on WPATH's pro-transgender guidelines for treating kids.

What was in the leaked files? Online forum discussion threads showed doctors and other WPATH members agreeing transgender procedures were important and shouldn't be denied to minors or the mentally ill. But some asked whether such patients had the mental capacity to understand the risks and long-term consequences of cross-sex hormones and surgery.

Did the WPATH doctors admit transgender procedures are harmful? They openly discussed complications faced by their patients, including genital pain, vaginal atrophy, sexual dysfunction, infertility, and cancer.

Did they obtain informed consent from young patients? All claim they did. But among the leaked files is an 82-minute video of a WPATH virtual meeting where doctors admitted their difficulties defining and obtaining informed consent from minors. Dr. Daniel Metzger, a pediatric endocrinologist at BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver, British Columbia, told participants that many kids know little about the organs they're asking to modify: "It's always a good theory that you talk about fertility preservation with a 14-year-old, but I know I'm talking to a blank wall."

Do these kids know what they're getting themselves into? Many don't. Doctors in the online discussion forum, for example, couldn't agree whether a 13-year-old girl who showed signs of an eating disorder and wanted a prescription for testosterone was capable of giving informed consent.

What about their parents? Another WPATH member, University of Minnesota psychologist Dianne Berg, said during the virtual meeting, "What really disturbs me is when the parents can't tell me what they need to know about a medical intervention that apparently they signed off for."

What's ethically required for medical informed consent? The American Medical Association says doctors should assess whether a patient can make an "independent, voluntary decision" and inform him about the diagnosis, treatment options, and risks in a way the patient can understand.

Do harmed children have any legal recourse? Some former patients say they regret irreversible procedures like double mastectomies that they agreed to as teens. Now adults, they have lawsuits pending against their doctors, surgeons, and therapists. ■

QUOTABLES

“Only God can change this place because from where I’m sitting I can’t see where any other change is coming from.”

Displaced Port-au-Prince, Haiti, resident FARAH OXIMA, telling the BBC she was struggling to feed her nine children as armed gangs fight for control of the capital.



“Sometimes science doesn’t work out quite the way you hope.”

JOSH COHEN, who co-invented the FDA-approved drug Relyvrio to treat Lou Gehrig’s disease. A new clinical trial shows the drug doesn’t work, *The Washington Post* reported.



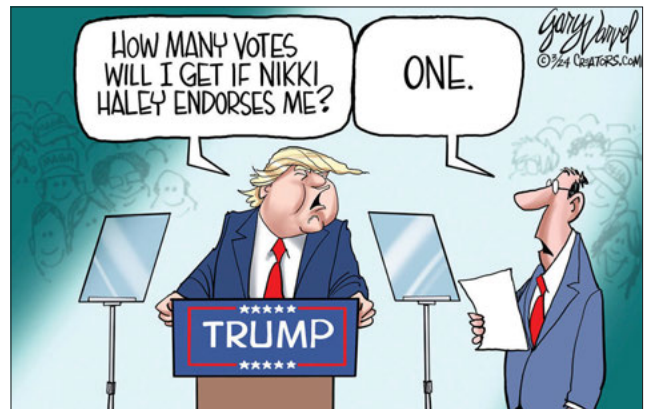
“I’m here at this healthcare clinic to uplift the work that is happening in Minnesota as an example of what true leadership looks like.”

Vice President KAMALA HARRIS in comments during a March 14 visit to a St. Paul, Minn., Planned Parenthood, the first abortion facility tour for a sitting VP.



“I’d like to thank my veterinarian—I mean wife, Susan Downey—over there. She found me a snarling rescue pet and you loved me back to life.”

ROBERT DOWNEY JR., in his acceptance speech for best supporting actor at the Academy Awards on March 10.





QUICK TAKES

Damsel in distress

Trapped in a tower, British woman uses cosmetic bag staples to make her escape

by JOHN DAWSON

→ **LIKE A RAPUNZEL/MACGYVER MASHUP**, a British academic who found herself trapped in a medieval tower engineered her escape using eyeliner and a cotton swab. Krisztina Ilko, a postdoctoral fellow and historian, found herself locked in a bathroom in late February at her Queens' College residence in a tower on the campus of Cambridge University. Finding the lock jammed—and knowing that a cleaning crew would not arrive until four days later—Ilko considered her options. “I was trying to remember how long a person can survive on just water and hoping that I wouldn’t die there,” she told *The Independent*. After spending seven hours trapped in the tower bathroom, Ilko used an eyeliner pencil and a cotton swab shaped into a hook to pick the lock and regain her freedom.

Drama at the Iditarod

Musher Dallas Seavey won the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race on March 12 despite receiving a two-hour penalty for improperly gutting a moose. During the nearly 1,000-mile Alaska race, a wild moose tangled with Seavey’s team, injuring one of his dogs. Seavey had to shoot the moose, and race rules require that any large animals killed by mushers be gutted on site. “I gutted it the best I could, but it was ugly,” he told *Iditarod Insider*. Race officials later determined he didn’t do a good enough job and assessed a penalty. Still, Seavey made up the lost time to claim his record sixth Iditarod victory.



Sugar-coated promise

Some politicians promise jobs. Others promise lower taxes. Tasmanian Premier **Jeremy Rockliff** said he’ll build the largest chocolate fountain in the world if voters in the Australian state return his Liberal Party to power in the March 23 election. Under Rockliff’s design, the government would fund nearly \$8 million to create a record-breaking chocolate fountain and chocolate-themed tourist attraction. The current world record for tallest chocolate fountain is a 40-foot fountain in Austria.



Extinguisher business blaze

They don't work if they're on fire. That's the lesson from a fire March 5 in a building that houses Friendly Extinguisher Sales and Service of Mount Airy, N.C. Although the business owner had plenty of fire extinguishers on hand, he could not prevent the blaze from spreading in the walls. "He made a valiant effort," Fire Chief Zane Poindexter told *The Mount Airy News*. Thankfully crews quickly contained the blaze. Noting the irony, Poindexter added, "Accidents happen to everyone."



Doughnut in dispute

Accusations of plagiarized pastries have led New York's Division of Food Safety and Inspection to launch an investigation of a Long Island bakery. In March, New York food inspectors confirmed they were looking into claims that The Savory Fig, a bakery in Patchogue, N.Y., substituted a Dunkin' Donuts pastry on an order for vegan and gluten-free doughnuts. John Stengel, a New Yorker who co-owns a vegan market, said he became alarmed when one of the doughnuts he ordered from The Savory Fig was covered in D-shaped sprinkles, a trademark of Dunkin'. The bakery's owner has denied the allegations on social media.

The burger king

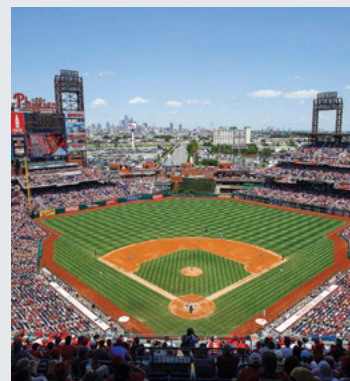
More than 34,000 down, and **Don Gorske** shows no signs of slowing down. The Fond du Lac, Wisc., 70-year-old walks 6 miles a day, and he still eats about two Big Macs a day. On Feb. 29, Guinness confirmed Gorske had extended his record of most Big Macs eaten in a lifetime to 34,128 after examining Gorske's saved receipts. The McDonald's fan said he started eating the calorie-laden sandwich in 1972. "Out of respect to my mother, from 1973 to 1981, I ate one non-Big Mac meal a day because she was worried about my health," he told Guinness. When he hadn't died, Gorske upped his Big Mac intake. He once ate a Whopper from Burger King—in 1984. He hasn't been back since.

*"The
throwing
was a
little bit
of a tipping
point."*



No more flying hot dogs

Philly fans unruly? That's the opinion of Philadelphia Phillies management, which announced Feb. 29 the ballclub's popular April promotion featuring \$1 hot dogs won't return this season. Officials said they are ending it to "provide a positive experience for all fans." Phillies Senior Vice President John Weber admitted the dollar dogs had sparked some uncouth behavior. "It wasn't just the throwing," he said, referencing an April 11, 2023, game when some fans threw hot dogs onto the field and at other patrons. Weber said the promotion also clogged the concourses with fans seeking cheap franks, but "the throwing was a little bit of a tipping point."





VOICES **LYNN VINCENT**

Moral reframing

Beware the new political Trojan horse

JUST UNDER A YEAR AGO, three Stanford sociologists—Jan Voelkel, Joseph Mernyk, and Robb Willer—published a paper titled “Moral reframing increases support for economically progressive candidates.”

Candidates “who champion redistributive policies designed to reduce inequality rarely win elections in the United States,” the researchers wrote. “Here we propose that progressive candidates achieve greater support by framing their policy platforms in terms of values that resonate beyond their progressive base.”

What kind of values? Well, conservative ones like patriotism, family, and respect for tradition. The trouble here is obvious: Today’s progressivism is antithetical to both patriotism and tradition. Progressives are fine with family, of course—as long as they get to define the term.

When Willer and company analyzed speeches by progressive candidates, they found the candidates rarely appealed to such values. The professors suggest progressives could “build broader coalitions” by “reframing” the values they associate with their platforms. You know, wrap ’em in the flag. Serve up some apple pie. While you’re at it, throw in dear old Dad.

Across two experiments, the professors found that when a presidential candidate reframed his progressive economic policies using such “binding” moral foundations, instead of individualistic ones such as “equality” and “social justice,” he received significantly higher support. This spike came from moderates and conservatives.

It was Robb Willer, with University of Toronto sociologist Matthew Feinberg, who first introduced the phrase “moral reframing.” In a 2015 study, the duo found that reframing political arguments to appeal to an opponent’s moral values is persuasive because it increases “the apparent agreement between a political position and the target audience’s moral values.”

Apparent agreement. Oxford offers this definition of *apparent*: “Seeming real or true, but ain’t necessarily so.” (OK, I added the “ain’t.”)

You may be asking, So what? All politicians prevaricate. They all spin and tap dance, hoping to yank the mushy middle their way. Certainly, the left doesn’t own the technique of approaching touchy topics by appropriating a target’s language. For example, I wrote last year about “He Gets Us,” the television ad campaign funded by deep-pocketed conservative evangelicals.

“He Gets Us” is peppered with left-friendly hashtags like #activist and #socialjustice. The technique, one might argue, is in step with the Apostle Paul’s becoming like the Romans in order to win them to the gospel.

But Paul’s gospel—Christ and Him crucified then raised to glory—never changed. By contrast, moral reframing dresses progressive values in fig-leaf phrases meant precisely to deceive.

This is not theory. In Europe, for example, the International Centre for Policy Advocacy (ICPA) now offers a reframing “toolkit” to help “progressive campaigners and activists/advocates” push back against the “populist narrative.” ICPA notes that “only arguing facts and rights is not serving the progressive agenda” on immigration. Instead, ICPA recommends progressives target the ignorant and skittish middle by creating “a warm feeling that easily engages the audience, feels nearly like common sense to them, and ultimately is appealing to the heart, rather than the head.”

Willer and Feinberg have also examined what kinds of moral arguments people typically make. The researchers asked liberals to convince a conservative to support same-sex marriage and asked conservatives to convince liberals to support English as America’s official language. Across two studies, most participants crafted messages with significant moral content, most of which reflected their own values—just the kind of arguments Willer and colleagues have shown are ineffective at persuading political opponents.

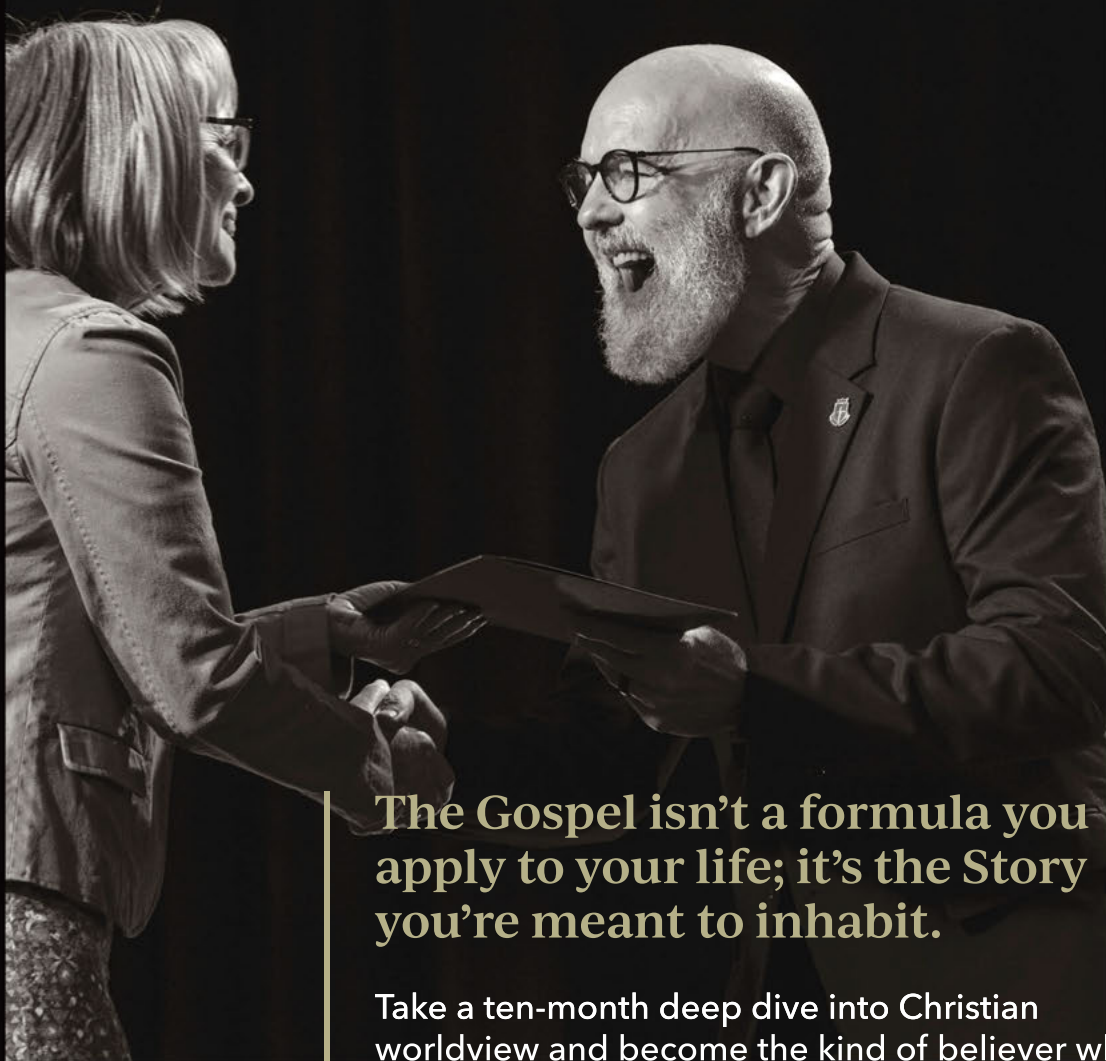
“The most effective arguments are based on the values of whomever you are trying to persuade,” Feinberg noted in a Stanford article about the research.

But when political values occupy opposite poles, when does moral reframing cross into lying as described in Psalm 12? “Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.” ■



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CULTURE



TRENDING

Canary in a cultural coal mine

The music of Billie Eilish captures the angst of a generation shaped by the internet

by TREVOR SIDES

TAYLOR SWIFT'S *Midnights* won Album of the Year at this year's Grammy Awards. In her acceptance speech, Swift announced that her new album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, would arrive on April 19.

It's an odd title for an almost universally beloved performer who is living a charmed life. (She is winning at everything, including the Super Bowl.) But Swift knows her audience, and "tortured" may be an accurate way to describe the mental health of today's teens and young adults.

Last May, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy joined the chorus of medical researchers and authorities sounding the alarm about internet use (particularly social media) and youth mental health problems (see p. 28). Murthy cited studies showing that teens who spent more than three hours per day on social media "faced double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety," and that high schoolers were spending more time than that—an average of three hours and 30 minutes per day—on social media. Murthy calls youth mental health "the crisis of our time."

Another pop megastar, Billie Eilish, whose mein and oeuvre seem more authentically "tortured" than Swift's, seems to have captured the angst Murthy describes. Eilish (and Finneas O'Connell, her brother/collaborator/producer) also collected hardware at the Grammys in February, winning Song of the Year for "What Was I Made For?"—the massive hit from the *Barbie* soundtrack. She won an Academy Award in March for the same song.

Eilish's young career is remarkable. She's only 22 and has nine Grammys. And there's depth and edge to her dreamy, synth-heavy pop that's missing from Swift's repertoire. For instance, take the following lines from Eilish's single "TV," off her 2022 EP *Guitar Songs*:

"I put on *Survivor* just to watch somebody suffer / Maybe I should get some sleep / Sinking in the sofa while they all betray each other / What's the point of anything?"

Such lines capture Eilish's voice, a singularly apocalyptic one among today's pop superstars. Her music reveals dark truths about life in the internet age in large and startling ways, as Flannery O'Connor might have put it. →

Eilish is a canary in the online coal mine. The quieter she gets, you might say, the worse the cultural air quality. It's not that Eilish is all that loud to begin with. Her voice is a contradiction in terms, at once powerful and ethereal, and she wields the power selectively. Still, when she's breathlessly quiet, as she is on the somber, piano-forward "What Was I Made For?," it means everything is not alright.

"What Was I Made For?" builds on the themes Eilish has developed in much of her previous work. Namely, that the internet is a terrible place to search for existential certainty around questions of fame, identity, purpose, and love. That maybe this experiment in rootless, distracted ways of inhabiting the world is leaving entire generations wondering why they're here at all.

Eilish's sophomore album, *Happier Than Ever*, is a slow-burn, mostly hushed (if not profane) meditation on the oppressiveness of Too Much Internet. As such, it contains contradictions. In order to "keep [herself] together," she gazes resolutely upon herself—a defining trait of the smartphone era. The album's title track is about the ugly end of a dysfunctional relationship. "When I'm away from you / I'm happier than ever" is a brutal opener for any breakup song but serves just as well as an epiphany about life without, say, social media.

The aforementioned "TV" is like a zeitgeist bingo card. There's binge watching, insomnia, alienation, loneliness, and anxiety over the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. Eilish's voice is as elegant as it is exhausted by it all. It's possible that this exhaustion leads to the surprising refrain of "Maybe I'm the problem" as the song quietly builds to its conclusion.

This step toward repentance would be a good starting point for understanding what we're made for. "What Was I Made For?" scores the climactic scene in *Barbie*. It's heavy on lament and longing, and it's weighed down with a kind of existential original sin ("I used to float, now I just fall down"). But the song betrays little interest in penitential



Eilish and her brother, Finneas, perform "What Was I Made For?" during the Oscars.

"Her voice is a contradiction in terms, at once powerful and ethereal, and she wields the power selectively. Still, when she's breathlessly quiet ... we do well to pay attention."

introspection. Eilish's answer to the Big Question is happiness.

And yet, in the online tunnels of our own making, we've sifted through an infinite number of dopamine deposits in pursuit of happiness and become spiritually numb. "I don't know how to feel," Eilish admits in the chorus.

In a way, the song sets the internet aside to consider the next big technological disruptor: artificial intelligence. If AI can make art, compose music, reply to emails, and provide the artifices of companionship, what, indeed, are we made for? What are we supposed to be doing here?

In *The Life We're Looking For*, Andy Crouch, drawing on Jesus' words in Mark 12, posits, "Every human person is a heart-soul-mind-strength complex designed for love." In other words, image bearers of the triune God. *This* is what we're made for. But many young Americans look to their devices for an image to behold, seeing only ourselves in the glass brightly. Crouch explains that we are indeed made to behold an image—just not one of our own making. So, maybe we are the problem—a truth that Billie Eilish seems to recognize. ■

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BOOKS

Kids on Mars

Gen Z and the dangers of a “phone-based childhood”

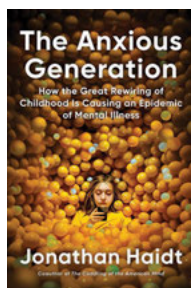
by CHELSEA BOES



“DADDY, CAN YOU take the iPad away from me? I’m trying to take my eyes off it but I can’t.”

Author Jonathan Haidt recalls these words of his 6-year-old daughter in *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (Penguin 2024), a hefty treatise on the effects of the new “phone-based childhood.”

Gen Z, Haidt argues, “became the first generation in history to go through puberty with a portal in their pockets that called them away from the people nearby and into an alternative universe that was exciting, addictive, and”—as Haidt demonstrates in about 370 pages of detailed explanation and endnotes—“unsuitable for children



The Anxious Generation

JONATHAN HAIDT

and adolescents.” He compares our gamble on the untested, phone-based childhood to sending our offspring off to grow up on Mars.

Childhood used to be play-based, says Haidt, but now it’s phone-based. Kids like his daughter inhabit a disembodied virtual world where users broadcast one-to-many instead of one-to-one. “People can block others or just quit when they are not pleased,” Haidt notes. “Communities are short-lived.” Haidt claims children are trading play for phones, relationships for followers, a sense of discovery for defensiveness, and confidence for anxiety. He cites teens’ reports of increasing loneliness and isolation—and that those addicted to digital activities “found that ‘nothing feels good anymore.’”

Haidt doesn’t lay the blame for teen anxiety and depression solely on smartphones. True, phones are “experience blockers,” using up precious childhood time that has to come from somewhere. But he says overprotective parents are experience blockers too.

In Haidt’s theory, parents and society underprotected children online but overprotected them in the physical world. Why did emergency room visits for self-harm skyrocket among girls after 2010? Because they were staring into TikTok and Instagram feeds, living the lyrics of pop star Olivia Rodrigo: “Co-comparison is killing me slowly.” Why did far fewer boys go to the hospital for unintentional injuries (such as broken bones) after 2010? Because they didn’t play enough. Because they were overprotected outdoors or they were engrossed by video games and online porn.

Not that we want more children breaking bones, of course. But Haidt rightly assumes that we *do* want them to live a life of discovery and to avoid what he calls the “four foundational harms” of the phone-based childhood: social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention deprivation, and addiction.

Haidt writes about several ways to “bring childhood back to Earth,” but, most of all, he asks everyone to act

“Haidt’s solution to the crushing loneliness, comparison, addiction, and anxiety imposed by the phone-based childhood is ‘shared sacredness.’”

together. Peer pressure will lose its hold only if the majority of parents begin setting boundaries around screen use.

His most startling suggestion is that people defy phone-based loneliness by going to church and observing a traditional church calendar. “I am an atheist,” Haidt notes, “but I find that I sometimes need words and concepts from religion to understand the experience of life as a human being. This is one of those times.”

Haidt’s solution to the crushing loneliness, comparison, addiction, and anxiety imposed by the phone-based childhood is “shared sacredness.” He criticizes our own time, saying, “There is no Sabbath and there are no holy days. Everything is profane.” But his assertion that “humans evolved to be religious by being together and moving together” feels like an absurd retreat.

What best explains the child mental health crisis? Not war, climate change, or even trauma. “People don’t get depressed when they face threats collectively,” Haidt insists, “they get depressed when they feel isolated, cut off, lonely, or useless.” Much of kids’ seclusion today arises not from an outside world of trouble but from the deceptive portal in their pockets. ■

BOOKS

Building a MANIAC

Novel explores the history and perils of AI

by BEKAH MCCALLUM



IN J.R.R. TOLKIEN’S *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the dwarfs of Moria mine too deeply and awaken a dangerous prehistoric beast. I was reminded of this while reading Benjamín Labatut’s *The MANIAC* (Penguin Press 2023), a novel exploring the early development of artificial intelligence. According to the story (which blurs the line between fact and fiction), mathematicians who dabbled in quantum mechanics used their findings to create the atom bomb. Those same concepts later gave rise to early AI.

This dark, heady novel suggests that mathematicians dug too deep and discovered something we still do not understand. The story revolves around the life of mathematician John von Neumann, told from the perspective of colleagues, friends, and family members. Neumann lays a framework for quantum mechanics, co-creates game theory, and serves as a consultant for the Manhattan Project. He helps to design the successor to Alan Turing’s primitive computer. Neumann dubs the machine the Mathematical Analyzer, Numerical Integrator and Computer—“MANIAC, for short.”

Neumann is a genius but one so bound by logic that he has no moral bearings. He views life as a game, explains his second wife Klára Dán.

“The problem with those games,” she writes, “is that when played in the real world ... we come face to face with dangers we have not the knowledge or wisdom to overcome.”

The book is heavy on mathematical details, so it’s a bit dry in places. Some characters infrequently swear. But it’s also a perceptive book, to a certain degree. Technology has presented the world with complex ethical questions (e.g., should everyone get a Neuralink implant?). And we face those questions in a time when a growing number of people lack the ethical framework to grapple with them.

Fans of *Oppenheimer* might recognize that this book ends with a similar sense of foreboding. Labatut warns humanity has reached the downward slope of technology’s return curve: In the last words of one of Tolkien’s dwarves: “We cannot get out.”

Labatut book correctly acknowledges that progress isn’t always a good thing but may err in assuming that technological progress and its fallout are the inexorable course of history.



The Maniac

BENJAMIN
LABATUT



BOOKS

Experiencing the Numinous

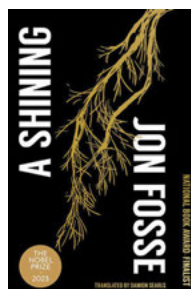
A chilling, comforting, and divine encounter

by PETER BILES



A SHINING (Transit Books 2023) is the latest work from Norwegian writer Jon Fosse, who won the 2023 Nobel Prize for literature for his gargantuan masterpiece *Septology*. Of that ambitious title, Merve Emre of *The New Yorker* said, “[It] is the only novel I have read that has made me believe in the reality of the divine.” *A Shining*, though less than a tenth the length of his magnum opus, carries the same kind of power.

The novella is narrated by a man who, out of boredom, goes on a drive to nowhere. He soon gets stuck on the side of the road as it starts to snow and walks aimlessly through the woods as it grows darker. The book’s title gives us



A Shining
JON FOSSE

reason to think he will encounter something luminary, which he soon does. A shining “presence” emanates in the dark forest and stops him in his tracks. But the shining outline doesn’t descend from above—it “separates” from the darkness, almost like it was part of it. The narrator’s wonder, awe, and perplexity over this mysterious figure take up a good 10 pages, and the reader feels like he’s right there in the woods too, sharing in the narrator’s sense of holy dread.

In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis talks about this disturbing, awe-inducing sense that a divine “presence” exists behind the visible world. He calls it the “Numinous,” which throughout centuries human beings have recorded, pondered, and been ever haunted by.

Lewis writes: “Now suppose that you were told simply ‘There is a mighty spirit in the room,’ and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger, but the disturbance would be profound. ... This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it as the *Numinous*.”

Fosse’s novella throws us headlong into the numinous territory, making us wonder, along with the narrator, whether the shining presence is real or just a figment of his imagination. That leads to the broader question of whether the general experience of the numinous might be mistaken for misfiring brain synapses. His visceral encounter with the shining presence, however, encourages us to assume it’s real. Fosse’s own belief in the divine supports the urge to take the presence at face value, too. But who, or what, is this strange being?

Eventually, the presence vanishes, and the narrator is left alone in the dark under a yellow moon and spread of stars. Suddenly the whole world is packed with beauty. And despite the darkness and silence, he still senses his invisible companion.

“Who are you,” he asks. Chillingly, comfortingly, numinously, the presence replies, “I am who I am.” ■

Reflections on heavenly hope

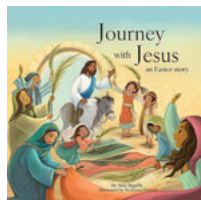
by EMILY WHITTEN



Jesus Moments: David

ALISON MITCHELL
(THE GOOD BOOK COMPANY 2024)

On the road to Emmaus, Luke says, Jesus “interpreted” for His disciples “the things concerning himself” in the Old Testament. This picture book serves a similar purpose for children today. With Noah Warnes’ stylized illustrations, Mitchell highlights some of David’s most poignant early moments in Scripture, including his anointing by Samuel, his battle with Goliath, and his hope to build a temple. The book also contains a hidden-picture element that prompts readers to look for crowns marking moments when David reflects Jesus in some way. At the end, five spreads unpack these “Jesus moments,” showing Christ as our greater King. A powerful theological package that will delight readers, especially boys. **Ages 4-8**



Journey With Jesus: An Easter Story

ANN INGALLS
(PARACLETE PRESS 2024)

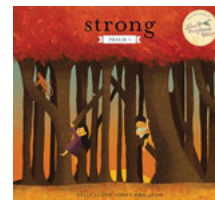
This small picture book features rhyming couplets and straightforward illustrations that retell Jesus’ journey to Easter morning. From His triumphal entry to the Resurrection, the book highlights familiar scenes as well as some scenes less often included in children’s books—e.g., Christ washing the disciples’ feet. While the book offers colorful pages and musical language, some couplets do feel stilted and may need explanation for younger readers. Steliyana Doneva’s illustrations also tend toward the predictable (for instance, Jesus wears white). Overall, the book is a respectful but familiar treatment of the Easter story. Some families may want to provide context for the book’s final words, “Now all can enter paradise.” **Ages 4-8**



The Friends and the Traveller

SAM BREWSTER
(10PUBLISHING 2024)

When two friends encounter a stranger on the road to Emmaus, their “gloom” over Christ’s death turns into joy. Brewster’s conversational and (mostly) rhyming couplets will likely draw children in, and Hannah Green’s relatable illustrations give the book a playful feel. Although the book loses some narrative force near the end, Brewster does help children see how they fit into the story. Readers also see the disciples’ emotional range—going from despair to joy—which shows how the Easter story is good news to transform our hearts and lives. An enjoyable book that will likely engage children’s imaginations and invite conversation. **Ages 5-8**



Strong: Psalm 1

SALLY LLOYD-JONES
(ZONDERKIDZ 2024)

The author-illustrator team behind *The Jesus Storybook Bible* join up for another offering in their board book series. In *Strong: Psalm 1*, Lloyd-Jones first tells children, “By a stream is a good place for a little tree to be.” She then shows how a stream can help trees grow “strong and beautiful.” In the last few pages, she brings the analogy of Scripture to bear: “Close to you, God, is a good place for me to be.” While appropriately simple, Lloyd-Jones’ language is crisp and clear and captures the heart of Psalm 1. Jago’s bold, vibrant illustrations add plenty of interest, making this an option both little ones and adults can appreciate. **Ages 0-4**



A train car at the Auschwitz II Birkenau extermination camp

BOOKS

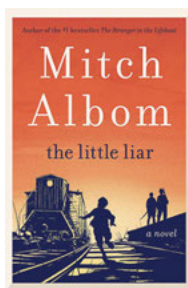
Lies and consequences

A fragmented gospel lies within a Holocaust story

by BEKAH MCCALLUM

→ **IT'S THE EARLY 1940s** in the halcyon town of Salonika, Greece, where 50,000 Jews, including the Krispis family, listen for news of the war. By V-E Day, some 2,000 Salonika Jews have survived the Holocaust. *The Little Liar* (Harper 2023) by Mitch Albom details a little-known chapter in the narrative of Hitler's Final Solution. It's fiction but grounded in historical events. The author doesn't underplay the darkness of the Holocaust, and the moving story sets the bar for what Christian fiction could look like.

Everyone loves 11-year-old Nico Krispis since he's handsome, kind, and



The Little Liar
MITCH ALBOM

never ever lies. His older brother Sebastian envies Nico, because everyone, including Sebastian's crush, Fannie, clearly prefers Nico.

Crushes and petty rivalries fade into irrelevance when the Nazis invade and block the Jews from education, worship, and owning private property. Udo Graf, a high-ranking German officer, confiscates the Krispis' home. Instead of making Udo a clichéd villain, Albom explains why following Hitler gives Udo a sense of purpose.

Graf tricks gullible Nico into spreading the myth of "relocation" to the Jews. Partly in response to Nico's message, many Jews obediently board trains bound for camps like Auschwitz. Once the child realizes his mistake, he begins to hide from the weightiness of truth, which eventually assumes a capital T.

If it were a movie, the book might get a PG-13 rating thanks to a mild swear word or two, a couple of suggestive jokes, some Holocaust-related imagery, and an oblique mention of marital intimacy. On balance, though, there's little objectionable content.

The story is told from the perspective of Truth, who uses several parables. Full of references to God and the Bible, the book sounds fairly consistent with Scripture. In the face of profound cruelty, Albom offers the only plausible answer: "Humans are broken. Susceptible to sin. ... They lie. And those lies let them think they are God. Truth is the only thing that stops them."

Truth does stop Nico, but only after he spends his adulthood trying to atone for his failure. Here, Albom may imply that a person can make up for his sins by doing the right thing. There is a clear moment of forgiveness in the end, albeit a conditional one.

Thus, the story might point readers in the direction of gospel redemption, but it does not take them all the way there. ■



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Kevin J. Vanhoozer, PhD
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TELEVISION

Testament: The Story of Moses

by COLLIN GARBARINO

► Rated TV-14

► Netflix

THE UNEXPECTED popularity of *The Chosen*, Dallas Jenkins' series about the life of Jesus, sparked the entertainment industry's interest, causing it to pay more attention to faith-based projects over the last few years. Movies and series with religious overtones have improved in quality, and many are finding bigger audiences. But Netflix's new docudrama *Testament: The Story of Moses* shows what can happen when religious entertainment is designed for the widest possible audience.

The miniseries comprises three 80-minute episodes. The first epi-

sode, "The Prophet," begins with Moses' life as a prince in Egypt and takes him into the land of Midian where he fled after killing an Egyptian taskmaster. "The Plagues" recounts Moses' attempts to convince Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go and the various calamities God unleashed on the stiff-necked ruler. The third episode, "The Promised Land," feels misnamed, considering Moses never makes it to Canaan. The episode begins with the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea and culminates with Moses' giving of the Ten Commandments.

Each episode dramatizes the life of Moses as he grows into becoming the liberator and lawgiver of the

Hebrew people, and in many ways, the miniseries looks and feels like other dusty Bible epics. The production values are reminiscent of *The Chosen*, though perhaps a little better. Netflix didn't break the bank with the budget, but it gives viewers satisfactory visual effects for the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. The script and dialogue are adequate, though the actors slip into annoying mock-Middle Eastern accents. I was also annoyed that the actor playing Moses was about 40 years too young.

Testament: The Story of Moses doesn't merely aspire to be a dramatization; it wants to project the authority of a serious historical documentary. The showrunners include interviews with supposed experts between each scene. Tom Kang, lead pastor of a nondenominational church in Los Angeles, and liberal Bible scholar Peter Enns individually are meant to provide the Christian perspective on Moses. The series also includes Jewish rabbis and Muslim teachers who offer their own commentary.

The three Abrahamic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, all recognize Moses as a prophet, but they don't interpret Moses' importance the same way. In editing these interviews, Netflix glosses over significant differences of opinion, offering a syncretic perspective on the lawgiver.

One might expect the Christian and Jewish views of Moses to be fairly compatible, but in this miniseries they diverge considerably. The Christian tradition relies exclusively on the Pentateuch for the details of Moses' life, but the rabbis featured in this series introduce events and interpretations found in the extra-Biblical Midrash. Similarly, the Muslim teachers rely on speculative stories found in their own traditions. The series purports to offer a history of Moses, but it's a history lacking in scholarly rigor because it grants any source that mentions

“Christians firm in the faith might be interested in watching the show to learn about Jewish and Islamic teachings.”

Moses equal authority regardless of authorship or date of composition.

People unfamiliar with the Bible will finish this series confused about who the Moses of Scripture was, but Christians firm in the faith might be interested in watching the show to learn about Jewish and Islamic teachings. The dramatization incorporates these fanciful elements into the story. The relationship between Moses and his wife Zipporah gets more attention than the Pentateuch gives it, and we also meet Moses’ adoptive Egyptian mother Bithiah, whom you won’t find in the Bible. Bithiah forsakes her brother the Pharaoh to leave with the Hebrews during the Exodus. The emphasis on these two women adds a dash of feminism to the story.

The series commendably avoids demythologizing Moses’ life and miracles, but it fundamentally misses the mark concerning Moses’ importance. In Christian theology, Moses serves as a type of Christ. Moses rescued his people from Egypt and bondage; Jesus rescues His people from sin and death. To his credit, Pastor Kang mentions Jesus a couple of times, but on the whole this Netflix series neglects how the story of Moses points to Christ, turning the great lawgiver into a broad-minded multicultural prototype of ourselves. ■



DOCUMENTARY

Girls State

by COLLIN GARBARINO

► Rated NR

► Apple TV+

BOYS STATE and *Girls State* are leadership programs sponsored by the American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary. In 2020, documentarians Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss gave viewers an inside look with *Boys State*, a film about high school boys in Texas who get hands-on experience with the democratic process. Released in the midst of election season, the documentary depicted our contentious politics in microcosm. Now, just in time for another election, McBaine and Moss are back with *Girls State*, focusing on the female perspective.

Girls State follows Missouri high school girls during their weeklong experiment with democracy. All the subjects are go-getters, but they bring disparate backgrounds, personalities, and political preferences to the program. The film’s main subject

is a politically conservative Christian girl who senses her pro-life convictions are in the minority.

The *Dobbs* decision that reversed *Roe v. Wade* looms large over the documentary, and much of the conversation about abortion will disappoint thoughtful viewers. The pro-life girls have trouble speaking with conviction, and the pro-choice girls merely regurgitate shallow talking points from social media.

This lack of political depth could lead some to despair over the next generation, but *Girls State* has its hopeful elements as well. One participant questions whether rah-rah female empowerment slogans help or hurt young women. Some girls find their voices through failure, rather than success. And people with polar-opposite political views learn that honest and open conversations can build respect, allowing us to see each other as fellow human beings.

TELEVISION

A Gentleman in Moscow

by BEKAH MCCALLUM



► Rated TV-14

► Paramount+

SHORTLY AFTER the fall of the Romanov dynasty, Bolshevik revolutionaries sentence Russian aristocrat Count Alexander Rostov to house arrest at the luxurious Metropol hotel. Amor Towles' delightful book *A Gentleman in Moscow* doesn't hurry through the Count's 32-year house arrest, but in the new eight-episode TV adaptation, the story loses its quiet wisdom.

When the count (Ewan McGregor) settles into his quarters in the hotel's attic, he quickly realizes the gravity of his predicament. He's a man of leisure who finds himself with nothing but leisure at his disposal. Before long, he meets a spunky 9-year-old named Nina Kulikova (Alexa Goodall), and the two become fast friends. With her special pass-key, Nina and the count spy on the inner workings of the Metropol. Though he can't go outside, the count watches his beloved country change from within the hotel.

In between his adventures with Nina, the count meets Anna Urbanova (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), a sultry actress who's willing to do almost anything to stay in the right people's good graces. As in the novel, Anna is ahead of her time (though I doubt the character in the book would have worn some of the revealing outfits she sports in the show). Despite the differences in their backgrounds, the count and Anna develop a covert affair.

For the most part, the show treats scenes of intimacy with the same delicacy as Towles' novel. The book didn't include much swearing and the show doesn't either. Much of the dialogue was taken from the book, but several additions to the script include an unnecessary narrator and a random nod to a gay character, which is more likely a nod to Hollywood's diversity police.

In the book, the count reminded me of a shrewd P.G. Wodehouse character. He's a man of conviction who never loses his cool. But McGregor portrays a man who doesn't really know what he wants and who seems blindsided by the revolution. In the five episodes that were made available for reviewers, the series glosses over how communism devastated Russia and replaced the old regime with a new one, something that wasn't lost on the count in the novel.

The series largely blames the changing political atmosphere on the former ruling class, made up of people like the count who simply refused to let go of their old way of life. Amor Towles' original version of the count undergoes character development when he learns self-sacrifice, and not, as in the show, when he recognizes the silliness of the aristocracy. I'm hopeful the final episodes will deal more honestly with the fallout of the Russian Revolution, but I already know the book was much better. ■

BOX OFFICE TOP 10

For the weekend of March 15-17, according to Box Office Mojo

- 1 **Kung Fu Panda 4***
PG • S0 / V3 / L2†
- 2 **Dune: Part Two***
PG-13 • S2 / V6 / L5
- 3 **Arthur the King**
PG-13 • S1 / V3 / L5
- 4 **Imaginary**
PG-13 • S2 / V6 / L5
- 5 **Cabrini***
PG-13 • not rated
- 6 **Love Lies Bleeding**
R • S7 / V8 / L10
- 7 **Bob Marley: One Love***
PG-13 • S2 / V5 / L5
- 8 **One Life***
PG • S1 / V4 / L3
- 9 **The American Society of Magical Negroes**
PG-13 • S2 / V2 / L5
- 10 **Ordinary Angels***
PG • S1 / V3 / L2

*Reviewed by WORLD

†Ratings from kids-in-mind.com, with quantity of sexual (S), violent (V), and foul-language (L) content on a 0-10 scale, with 10 high

TV ADAPTATIONS OF LITERATURE

- *I, Claudius* / 1976
- *All Creatures Great and Small* / 1978 and 2020
- *Shōgun* / 1980 and 2024
- *The Barchester Chronicles* / 1982
- *Lonesome Dove* / 1989
- *Pride and Prejudice* / 1995
- *Sense and Sensibility* / 2008
- *The Underground Railroad* / 2021



MOVIE

Damsel

by BOB BROWN

► Rated PG-13

► Netflix

WHO SHOULD come riding to the rescue of the new Netflix fantasy-thriller *Damsel* but the film's distressed damsel herself? Millie Bobby Brown's compelling turn as a betrayed princess gives this trope-heavy film gravity that keeps it from becoming just another fairy *stale*.

The dutiful Elodie (Brown, also one of the film's producers) obeys her father's command to marry the prince of Aurea. The girl-for-gold swap is supposed to benefit her impoverished country, but Aurea's royal family has a dirty secret: The marriage ceremony will end with a dragon rather than a dance. The prince throws Elodie as a sacrifice into a cavernous pit with a scaly fire-breather (voiced by Shohreh Aghdashloo) as he's done before to other duped and doomed

brides. Aurea's coolly scheming Queen Isabelle (Robin Wright) masterminds the subterfuge.

But this is one jilted princess, bruised as she is from her fall into the dragon's lair, who won't go down without a fight. Elodie uses her wits—and pieces of her elaborate wedding dress—to fight for her freedom. She's also fighting for freedom from patriarchy, as all the men in her life are, of course, either weak or conniving.

Damsel has impressive special effects, a nice twist, and no bad language, but Brown winds up in some revealing outfits. A few frightening and gory scenes will be too much for younger viewers.

In the end, Brown, who earned multiple Emmy nominations for playing the mysterious Eleven in *Stranger Things*, does take the cake. Her *Damsel* performance establishes her as a thriller heroine on par with *Hunger Games* star Jennifer Lawrence.

Earnest, humble Jamaican

An unconventional “mixtape” of gospel recordings

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



THE FLOW OF worthwhile unconventional or semi-conventional devotional-

Christian-gospel-tagged albums on Bandcamp shows no signs of abating.

Foremost in the unconventional category this time is *Heaven Is Better Than This: A Jamaican Gospel Mixtape* assembled by the London-based record label (and NTS Radio show) Death Is Not the End. Actually, it's two mixtapes, “Side A” and “Side B,” each 41 minutes long and each drawn from what the official description calls a “dusty heap” of Jamaican 45s from the 1960s and early '70s. (Yes, you can hear the stylus crackling through well-worn grooves.)

Like the production (such as it is), the almost completely drumless musicianship veers from simple to primitive. But the singing (predominantly female) covereth a multitude of technical defi-



**Heaven Is Better
Than This**

DEATH IS NOT THE END

ciencies. While it never approaches the distinctiveness, the fervor, or the abandon of American black-gospel vocalizing, there's more than enough of the earnest, humble sincerity valued by field recorders to delight them and their fellow seekers of authenticity.

Many of the 30 selections are obscure. Some of the ones that aren't (“Angels From the Realms of Glory,” “The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow,” “Just a Little While To Stay Here”) get enough of a rhythmic or a melodic makeover to catch listeners off guard. And although no performer credits accompany the playlists, at least one number, Astley Dixon's “Put No Blame on the Master,” has been compiled before (on Social Music Records' 2012 *Put No Blame on the Master, Jamaican Gospel Vol. 2*).

Other highlights: a spontaneous group prayer that includes a recitation of Psalm 27 intoned atop Hawaiian-sounding steel guitars and a version of the Eddie Noack country song “These Hands” sung by a killer Bob Dylan-circa-Nashville Skyline impersonator.

The mostly cross-faded cuts aren't split, so you have to enjoy both sides uninterrupted. But while such formatting prohibits skipping from one track to another, it has the benefit of providing what the culture critic Ted Gioia calls an “immersive” musical experience—i.e., one that lasts 10 minutes or longer (a lot longer in this case) and that therefore counters the destabilizing effects of dopamine-driven swiping and scrolling.

The existence of so much Jamaican gospel may surprise listeners who've assumed, based on the popularity of reggae in general and Bob Marley in particular, that the majority of Jamaicans are Rastafarians. According to recent census numbers, however, Rastafarians account for only 1 percent of the island's population while Christians account for 70.

So perhaps the real surprise isn't that the curators at Death Is Not the End have found 82 minutes of vintage Jamaican gospel to string together but that they haven't found more. ■

New and noteworthy

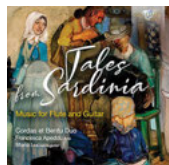
by ARSENIO ORTEZA



The Flutefancier's Delight

ACANTHUS BAROQUE, MAGDALENA SPIELMANN

With the exception of Handel, whose “Ah! mio cor!” and Sonata in F account for just under a third of the 66 minutes, and possibly “Anonymous,” none of this program’s Baroque-era composers are overrepresented in the current repertoire. And only one, James (aka Jacques) Paisible, is especially known for works featuring the instrument that Magdalena Spielmann, as accompanied by the top-billed violin-cello-harpsichord trio, makes sing: the recorder. Light, elegant, crisp, precise—and, for all 4:06 of Anonymous’ ineffably sorrowful “The Lost Heart,” moving in the extreme.



Tales From Sardinia: Music for Flute and Guitar

CORDAS ET BENTU DUO

How do the flutist Francesca Appedu and the guitarist Maria Luciani love Sardinia? Let us count the ways. First, all six of this album’s pieces have Sardinian themes (such as the uniquely Sardinian fairies known as the janas). Second, each piece is dedicated by its Sardinian or Sardinian-by-association composer to the duo. Third, “Cordas et Bentu Duo” means “strings and wind duo” in Sardinian. None of which would matter if the playing weren’t supernally lovely, yearning, and haunting by turns. It is.



Rhapsody in Blue BÉLA FLECK

Rhapsody in Blue turns 100 this year. So, yes, prepare for more new recordings of Gershwin’s magnum opus than you’ll know what to do with, and, no, do not consign this one to the heap. If you do, you’ll miss the world’s preeminent (only?) progressive banjo player,

Béla Fleck, coming at the piece from three different angles: bluegrass (with Justin Moses, Michael Cleveland, Brian Sutton, and Sierra Hull), banjo with 74-piece orchestra (the Virginia Symphony Orchestra to be precise), and blues (with Jerry Douglas, Sam Bush, and Victor Wooten). You could say that the other two Gershwin compositions totaling seven minutes break up the monotony. Only there isn’t any monotony to break up.



Sea Songs BRYN TERFEL

Operatic baritones singing pop tunes we don’t need, but with pop as old as these folk songs and shanties—well, that’s a different matter, particularly with fiddle, bagpipes, accordion, and whistle augmenting the acoustic guitar and double bass. And although the heartily joyful predominates (“Drunken Sailor,” “The Wellerman,” “Whisky, Johnny!”), the heartbreakingly elegiac makes itself known and, more importantly, felt (“Bold Riley,” “Leave Her, Johnny”).



ENCORE

An intellectual, goes an old joke, is someone who can hear Rossini’s *William Tell* Overture without thinking of the Lone Ranger. Nowadays, it’s also anyone who can hear *Rhapsody in Blue* without thinking of United Airlines. And if you haven’t yet reached that level of sophistication but would like to, consider immersing yourself in the classical pianist **Lara Downes’** new digital-only *Rhapsody in Blue Reimagined* (Pentatone).

Featuring creative new interpolations by the Puerto Rican composer Edmar Colón as well as the playing of the percussionist John Santos and one orchestra apiece from San Francisco and China, the reimagining doubles the length of Arthur Fiedler’s original unabridged recording of 1935 en route to reflecting and putting a positive musical spin on America’s changing cultural landscape circa 2024. One caveat for the intellectuals: Downes’ accompanying commentary track, in which she uses the terms “melting pot” and “kaleidoscope” interchangeably, includes pro-open-borders dog whistles. —A.O.



VOICES **JANIE B. CHEANEY**

A bloody holiness

The Bible's sacrifices make sense if we consider the gap between the human and the divine

AT A BOOK CONFERENCE years ago, I found myself within hearing of the kind of conversation Christian evangelists dream of. To my right at dinner sat an older gentleman, the headmaster of a local Episcopal school. Across the table, an author whose star was rising in the young-adult book world. While doubtless enjoying the adulation, this young man didn't let it go to his head. He was outgoing and generous in his praise of others, and his dinner companion was likewise gregarious and kind. I had been listening to another conversation when I switched on to theirs: an animated critique of the bloodiness and torture inherent in Christianity.

My ears tingled; my heart beat faster—should I barge in? How do I put this? What do I say?

The moment passed without me saying anything, which I will always regret.

I remembered that conversation while reading Leviticus, with its detailed instructions for various bloody offerings. Blood sacrifice was common in the ancient world, but those prescribed by God's law were different in two ways. For one, they worked. Again and again, God reassured His people that their sins would be forgiven and their guilt removed by substituting an innocent sin-bearer.

For the other, they underscored holiness. In every detail, from the outfitting of the priest to the disposal of ashes, all was holy. So was ordinary life, governed by laws that make our eyes glaze over when trying to read

straight through. What the people ate and how they ate it, the clothing they wore and the houses they lived in, all were to be sanctified and set apart. Distinctions between clean and unclean were to control daily interactions, whether handling corpses, dealing with bodily discharges, or burying their waste.

But the Tabernacle, "which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness" (Leviticus 16:16), represented a sharp contrast between the people and their God. On the very day of its dedication the oldest sons of Aaron were apparently drunk when they offered the strange fire that consumed them (Leviticus 10:8). Some of the Levites who earned their place in Tabernacle service by slaughtering calf-worshippers (Exodus 32:29) were later buried alive when they challenged Moses' authority. Could such a complaining, vacillating crowd ever conform to God's standard of holiness?

That was the point. They never could. They never did. Neither do vacillators and complainers like us.

But reading Leviticus alongside Matthew this year struck me with how unexpected Jesus was. The Holy One of God appeared to overturn God's laws of holiness: He touched corpses and lepers, He invited the blind and lame into Temple courtyards and called the most scrupulous law-keepers blind guides and whitewashed tombs. He was dragged outside the camp like a miscreant and hanged on a tree like a curse. He never sinned but became sin.

How to explain this in a pop-up dinner conversation? The ancients, even the pagans, had a better grasp of holiness than moderns do. They understood the gap between human and divine, and that blood was the holiest thing they could offer—their own, or a substitute's.

Jesus came to fulfill the law and bridge that gap, but how to explain His breaking so many Levitical rules? I'm struggling to come up with the right word. Not overturning holiness, surely—holiness is a constant.

But might He have invaded it, penetrated it as a man, in order to open it up to all? The torn curtain in the Temple had its parallel in heaven, when Jesus entered the throne room of God bearing His own blood (Hebrews 9:23-28). I like to picture this literally: the great doors thrown open and a radiant Christ entering to the joyful shouts of angels, His bloody footprints marking a path. The same feet that stumbled outside the camp, dragging a cross, now lead upward to glory.

I can't rewind to that long-ago conversation; His steps lead forward, not back. I can only follow, with renewed love and awe. ■

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MORE CRIME, LESS PUNISH- MENT

Bankrolled by activist billionaires,
progressive prosecutors
upend the justice system and
unravel the rule of law

BY KIM HENDERSON



GLE IT!
ge Soros
U.S. DAS



People protest outside a courthouse in New York City.
MICHAEL NIGRO/SIPA USA VIA AP

ON THE AFTERNOON of March 21, 2022, Linda Frickey left her office and walked the few yards to where her late model Nissan Kicks was parked on the street. Sliding into the driver's seat, she automatically reached for the seat belt. *Click.* Frickey had her sights set on using the half day still left to visit a customer. Without that preoccupation—and spring scenting the New Orleans air like a foreign elixir—she might have noticed the kids on the corner. Or maybe she did. Either way, the longtime insurance agent didn't move to lock her door.

Instead, a lithe figure in a white hoodie made his move. He played point man as three females from the corner fanned out, two strolling past Frickey and one hanging back as a lookout. They were smooth, these teenagers, barely craning their necks as they darted here and gestured there, casing the car. Traffic, meanwhile, continued as usual. A father and child skirted past the lookout and crossed the street.

But at some command, the three young women went for the Nissan's passenger doors while the point man went for Frickey. He maced her, kicked her, and punched her, then jumped in and hit the accelerator. As the car took off, 73-year-old Frickey hung by her seatbelt out the driver's side door, her body pounding against the pavement, her screams reaching through walls to residents inside their homes. Pedestrians, meanwhile, watched the unbelievable scene in horror. Frickey's boss, who'd heard a

commotion and got up to look through the agency's window, darted outside and ran after the car in vain. It took a swerve into a guy-wire and the severing of Frickey's right arm to finally free her.

Technically, Frickey died on a side street as frantic onlookers covered her body—dragged to the point of nakedness—with a borrowed sheet and the words of the Lord's Prayer. But a block of oak-lined Bienville Avenue, that's where the main damage was done. In the broad daylight of a common Monday.

Standing beside the guy-wire two years later, Frickey's sister Jinnylynn Griffin calls this spot the “point of dislocation.” She's a practiced teller of her sister's story, one that includes more than her murder. Frickey was a vibrant wife, mother, and grandmother. She loved shopping at Burke's Outlet, and on Thursday nights she drank coffee with four, sometimes five, of her sisters.

“Linda had a brawler that cooked the best turkeys,” Griffin remembers, her Louisiana accent swaying the syllables. Ah, a broiler.

New Orleans police quickly arrested the four teenagers involved in Frickey's violent carjacking death. The oldest, at 17, had at least seven prior arrests on 25 charges. Such numbers—the teen's age, not his record—are sticking points in the era of “progressive” prosecution. In

Surveillance cameras capture the moment when carjackers attacked Linda Frickey (right) in her car.





New Orleans District Attorney Jason Williams (center) speaks outside Orleans Parish Criminal District Court.

short, that's a legal approach that seeks to end mass incarceration and bring fairness to the legal system. What's not to like? A lot, actually.

In Orleans Parish, where Frickey's murder took place, Jason Williams is the district attorney—and part of an exclusive American club. He's one of some 70 sitting prosecutors with campaign coffers bankrolled by left-wing billionaire George Soros.

Williams rode into office at the start of 2021 on a magic carpet of proposed reforms, including a pledge not to prosecute juveniles as adults. Juveniles like the ones responsible for Frickey's death.

That's a common push among the Soros set. Nearly a decade has passed since the first Soros-backed candidates took office, and statistics show their radical policies indeed generate less punishment, but also more crime, all while leaving a

nagging question: Can the rule of law survive without DAs who'll enforce it?

PROSECUTORS HOLD a lot of power. They determine criminal charges, recommend bail and sentences, accept or reject plea deals. Their actions, or inaction, affect millions of Americans each year.

But until fairly recently, elections for the more than 2,300 DA offices across the country were low-profile, down-ballot affairs. Candidates worked the radio circuit and hammered signs on street corners. They ran ads and shook hands. But campaigns started to change in 2015 when outside money poured into the Red River bottom lands of Caddo Parish, La., the spot George Soros selected for a test run of his new philanthropic plan. Soros' beneficiary? Democrat James Stewart, a former judge running for district attorney. On the surface, Soros' decision to funnel more than \$400,000 into Stewart's campaign, a contest with no statewide significance, seemed



Steve Descano speaks at a 2019 event at the Center for American Progress about Virginia's newly elected progressive prosecutors.

strange, but it was really quite strategic. Caddo Parish is known for a high number of death penalty convictions. Soros wanted to get an anti-death penalty DA into office. Prosecutors, after all, decide what charges to pursue and broker plea deals.

The gamble paid off, and Stewart's win spawned a movement. Soros and other liberal backers realized a relatively small amount of money, in terms of campaign expenditures, could elevate cherry-picked candidates to the top of the heap. What began as a quest to unseat pro-death penalty prosecutors quickly morphed into a much larger objective: revolutionizing a justice system "progressives" maintain is warped by racism and needless imprisonment.

Back in 2019, author Zack Smith was scanning a local newspaper when he noticed an article about a new prosecutor in Northern Virginia named Steve Descano. Descano pledged not to seek the death

penalty for offenders and promised he wouldn't oppose release for most criminal offenders. Smith took note. "It wasn't long before I started hearing stories from victims' families who were very upset with his policies," the Heritage Foundation legal fellow remembers.

They were upset for good reason. Descano's campaign received \$659,000 from Soros-backed entities, and he was making good on their investment. Among the crimes Descano determined not to prosecute? Assaulting a school teacher, setting off a smoke bomb, committing prostitution, participating in a riot, resisting arrest, falsifying a police report, aiding in the escape of a prisoner, possessing and redistributing certain drugs, and stealing goods valued at up to \$1,000.

As Smith heard similar accounts coming out of cities like Chicago and St. Louis, he began connecting the dots. He found the progressive push spread nationwide, even though it had an under-the-radar, grassroots look. Smith traces its ideology to a 1970s-era prison abolition movement. "Most people don't

understand that connection, because the premise seems absurd, to actually think that no one should go to prison, regardless of what crime they commit,” Smith acknowledges. “But many of the goals the prison abolition movement supports have been accomplished through this current radical movement.”

According to the Law Enforcement Legal Defense Fund, at least 1 in 5 Americans is under the rule of what Smith calls “rogue prosecutors,” the title of a book he co-authored with Charles Stimson.

In an effort to lower incarceration rates, many rogue prosecutors refuse to prosecute entire classes of crime—things like trespassing, shoplifting, drug possession, and resisting arrest. Instead, they push for services and resources to help rehabilitate. They also aim to eliminate cash bail, which progressives say criminalizes poverty and disproportionately affects communities of color. But in New York, for example, attempts at bail reform had immediate fallout. Twenty percent of defendants busted for burglary or theft in 2021 committed a felony within 60 days of their release.

Progressive policies have had a similar effect across the country. Think San Francisco and District Attorney Chesa Boudin. Before a midterm recall, his city’s smash-and-grab crimes went viral.

In Los Angeles, it’s George Gascón, a white-haired former chief of police. Gang members like his policies so much one vowed to get “Gascón” tattooed on his face.

For Chicago, it was Kim Foxx, known for her mishandling of fraudster Jussie Smollett’s case. Less reported was the low morale in her office that led to the resignations of more than 235 staff members.

Violent crime was also a problem for Foxx’s Windy City. Ditto for Marilyn Mosby’s Baltimore. For Mosby, though, crime was an issue all around. In November, a jury convicted her on federal charges of perjury. She may never practice law again.

But perhaps Philadelphia’s Larry Krasner is the most recognizable progressive prosecutor. He starred in his own PBS documentary series. Pundits lauded *Philly D.A.* as one of the best shows of 2021, even though the homicide rate in Philadelphia hit a historic high of 562 killings—double prior years—after Krasner took office.

It’s estimated that George Soros alone has spent more than \$40 million getting rogue prosecutors elected all over the country, but he’s not the only such patron. Facebook co-founder Dustin Moskovitz and



Chesa Boudin
San Francisco



Kim Foxx
Chicago



George Gascón
Los Angeles



Marilyn Mosby
Baltimore



Larry Krasner
Philadelphia

his wife pour millions into races through their Open Philanthropy Project. Its website makes clear their philosophy: Better to spend money on individual players than working for specific reforms. “System actors are able to quickly adapt and push different policies that may have the same effort, and [this approach] avoids the danger of signaling too clearly to anti-change forces what the intended target is.”

In New Orleans, Soros forked over at least \$220,000 when Jason Williams’ campaign needed a final-hours television ad boost. It worked, and Williams got the job. But eight months into his tenure, the city’s nonpartisan, nonprofit Metropolitan Crime Commission crunched some numbers: Williams’ office was refusing more felony cases than it accepted. Only 17 percent ended with a felony conviction.

The headlines might have pleased Soros, but they spelled trouble for the defense attorney-turned-prosecutor. The commission called it a “particularly damning portrait of a DA’s office that lost or swept out nearly all of the city’s most experienced prosecutors after Williams took office.”

Staff purges are standard operating procedure for progressives.

IN ANY COUNTRY, the cornerstone of justice is the rule of law—the belief that all citizens are equally accountable to the same laws. It’s why we can sleep easy in the United States, while citizens in a despotic nation cannot. And though it’s not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, rule of law is a central tenet in our government, as American as apple pie, thanks to forefathers who knew a thing or two about life under monarchies. Even Thomas Paine’s Colonial *Common Sense* stressed “in America, law is king.”

Before Paine, Scottish Presbyterian minister Samuel Rutherford challenged the “Divine Right of Kings” in his book *Lex, Rex*. The Latin title simply means “The Law Is King.” When it was published in 1644, the idea that everyone, including the king, was subject to law was radical. *Lex, Rex* went on to provide heat at several book burnings, but Rutherford’s argument that rule of law is what’s best would not be extinguished.

Ancient thinkers also wrote of the principle of rule of law, if not the phrase itself. Here’s Aristotle on the subject: “It is more proper that law should govern than any one of the citizens: upon the same principle, if it is advantageous to place the supreme

“

It’s estimated that George Soros alone has spent more than \$40 million getting rogue prosecutors elected all over the country.

”

power in some particular persons, they should be appointed to be only guardians, and the servants of the laws.”

But Heritage’s Zack Smith says too many guardians have become saboteurs.

“Their job is to seek justice,” he says of rogue prosecutors. “Sometimes that means dismissing charges or pleading down the case. That’s prosecutorial discretion. But these DAs are engaging in something different—prosecutorial nullification. They’re saying, ‘There are certain laws we don’t like, and we’re not going to prosecute them. We think we know better than our state’s elected representatives.’”

The year of Linda Frickey’s murder, 75 percent of respondents in a survey of New Orleans residents said they viewed their city as unsafe, and police reports proved them right. Homicides had nearly doubled in three years. Carjackings had tripled. A city councilman even suggested it might be time to call in the National Guard.



That was the New Orleans Linda Frickey commuted to each workday. Her sister remembers a conversation they shared the month before she died. It was February, and Frickey had arrived for a crawfish boil. The talk turned to carjackings and how bad they were getting. “And I said, ‘Linda, if they want to carjack you, what are you going to do?’ She said they could have the car. She had insurance.”

Williams isn’t the only one of Soros’ prosecutors facing heat for soft-on-crime policies. Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey filed a lawsuit last February seeking St. Louis prosecutor Kim Gardner’s ouster. That came on the heels of public outcry over a tragic accident involving Janae Edmonson, a 17-year-old volleyball player from Tennessee. Edmonson lost both her legs when a speeding car struck her in downtown St. Louis. The driver, 21-year-old Daniel Riley, was out on bond on a robbery charge despite nearly 100 bond violations, including letting the battery of his GPS monitor die and breaking the

terms of his house arrest. Critics pointed fingers at dysfunction in Gardner’s office. They questioned why Riley was free.

Gardner resigned less than three months later, and she wasn’t walking alone. Twelve Soros-backed DAs left their posts in 2022, some by election defeats, but most by way of resignation or removal.

In 2017, tough-on-trafficking superstar Summer Stephan took the reins as San Diego DA by way of appointment. She had a 28-year career as deputy DA and experience trying more than 100 jury cases, but she still faced an uphill climb as she geared up for an election campaign the next year. Her opponent, a San Diego deputy public defender, was Soros-supported, with at least \$1.5 million in political action committee funds to spend on the race.

Stephan’s team knew they couldn’t outraise Soros, but they did secure enough money to broadcast the truth about the progressive prosecutor movement. Relentlessly. She finished the race with 64 percent of

the vote, becoming the only elected DA in a big city that's won against a Soros-backed opponent. Furthermore, she retained her seat for a second term unopposed. No wonder. San Diego County is one of the safest large jurisdictions in the nation.

SEVERAL OF SOROS' rogue prosecutors thought better of their campaign promises once in office. James Stewart of Caddo Parish turned out not to be progressive enough, at least when it comes to the death penalty. Once in office, Soros' initial sponsoree continued to defend predecessors' cases with capital punishment potential. Soros contributions were notably absent during Stewart's 2020 run for reelection.

Further south, Orleans Parish DA Jason Williams hasn't exactly toed the line, either. Last year, his office began employing Louisiana's habitual offender law, which can lead to stiffer sentences for defendants with prior felonies. Progressives say the law fuels mass incarceration, particularly of black men.

Williams also reneged on his vow never to try juveniles in adult court. In 2021, his office charged two 15-year-olds as adults for the murder of Anita Irvin-LeViege, a woman shot in her car while delivering food to family members. Williams' turnaround surprised not only his Soros backers but also his former opponents. During the campaign for DA, they said they would "rarely" try juveniles as adults. Williams' firm "never" had set him apart from the pack.

That's why cameras were rolling when Williams told reporters the teens who dragged Linda Frickey to death would be charged as adults. "Four or five years is just not enough," Williams admitted. "The juvenile sentencing limits would be inadequate to ensure that these young people are appropriately held accountable for taking a life."

In November, the three girls accused in Frickey's carjacking pleaded guilty to manslaughter, a conviction that carries a sentence of 20 years in prison. The primary assailant, John Honore, chose to go to trial. A jury convicted the now-18-year-old of second-degree murder, which could mean life in prison for the young serial offender.

In an ironic twist, Williams and his 78-year-old mother recently became carjacking victims. They



A memorial marks the spot where Linda Frickey's body was found after she was carjacked and dragged to her death.

were in New Orleans' historic Lower Garden District when armed assailants ordered them out of Williams' SUV. Neither the DA nor his mother was hurt.

Two juveniles accused in that crime are expected to stand trial in the adult court system. If convicted, the cousins, both 16, could face decades in prison. A judge set bail at \$300,000 each. Not exactly the progressive *modus operandi*.

On a sidewalk back on Bienville Avenue, Linda Frickey's sister, Jinnylynn Griffin, shrugs her shoulders at the news. She's learned a lot in recent months about courts and pleas, and way too much about carjackings. "Maybe now he understands," she says of Williams. "Maybe now he gets why we fought so hard to get justice for Linda."

Why they fought so hard for—and believed in—the rule of law.

Even as Griffin stands there, quiet, someone comes out of a duplex and boldly steals a metal street sign. A few feet away, a pile of human waste pollutes an alley. No one seems to notice either. This is a safe part of the city, after all, with bike paths and a Mercedes coupe parked a stone's throw from where Frickey's carjacking started.

"It's not quite the same," Griffin finally admits, her words hanging as heavy as July humidity. She's referring to the Williams carjacking, not her surroundings. "He knows the feeling, but his mom didn't die. He and his mom walked away." ■



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DIRTY

An aerial photograph of the Back River sewage treatment plant in Baltimore, Maryland. The image shows a large industrial facility with numerous circular aeration tanks, some with white domes and others with blue roofs. A tall, slender blue water tower stands prominently in the center. In the foreground, two large, golden, dome-shaped structures are visible. The plant is surrounded by greenery and a body of water in the background.

Back River sewage treatment
plant in Baltimore, Md.

CAVAN IMAGES/ALAMY

An aerial photograph of a large-scale wastewater treatment plant. The facility features numerous large, circular aeration tanks arranged in a grid-like pattern. Several industrial buildings with red roofs are scattered throughout the site. In the background, a large body of water, likely a river or lake, stretches across the horizon under a clear sky. The foreground shows a mix of green grass, paved roads, and some construction areas.

POOLS

AMERICA'S AGING
WASTEWATER
TREATMENT PLANTS
NEED AN UPGRADE,
BUT NO ONE WANTS
TO FOOT THE BILL

by Emma Freire



The sun warmed Alice Volpitta's cheeks as she turned her face toward the clear April sky. She and a co-worker at Blue Water Baltimore, an environmental nonprofit Volpitta calls a “water watchdog,” had spent the morning collecting samples. It was their first outing since winter.

They steered their boat, the *Muckraker*, to one of their most important testing sites, right above the pipe spewing effluent—a technical term for wastewater—from the Patapsco Wastewater Treatment Plant. The sprawling facility occupies 69 acres in a riverfront industrial area and is one of two plants operated by the city of Baltimore. Everything it discharges into the river is supposed to be thoroughly cleaned.

Volpitta picked up a scientific instrument that looked like a big chunk of PVC tube and lowered it into the water. She poured the sample she collected into a little bottle and put it on ice for the trip back to shore.

Blue Water Baltimore's in-house lab tested the bacteria levels in the sample collected at the Patapsco site that morning in 2021. When the results came back 24 hours later, the bacteria levels were far too high. That surprised Volpitta but she was not overly alarmed. "One bacteria reading is not necessarily a huge red flag," she said, noting it could be an anomaly.

Two weeks later, Volpitta repeated the test with a new sample. But when the results came back similarly high, she contacted the Maryland Department of the Environment. That triggered emergency inspections of Patapsco and the nearby Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant. The results of the inspections led to lawsuits and a public scandal.

The problems at the Back River and Patapsco plants represented failures by state and local governments going back years. Due to consistent neglect, the plants had fallen into serious disrepair, creating pollution that could kill plants and wildlife and make people sick. The situations at Back River and Patapsco were particularly



FAR LEFT: Alice Volpitta collects a water sample from the Baltimore harbor.
ABOVE: Examples of water coming into the plant (left) versus leaving the plant at a water treatment facility in Colorado.

bad, but aging wastewater treatment infrastructure is a national problem. Most of America's 16,000 publicly owned treatment plants are nearing the end of their life spans and will require significant investment in the next few decades to keep them operating well.

Treatment plants operate like a series of giant filters. The raw sewage runs through various screens to first remove bigger solids like tree branches, followed by sand and grit. Then the liquids and solids are separated. Solids go through several phases of treatment to neutralize pathogens and thoroughly dry them out. At Patapsco and Back River, the solids are eventually pelletized and transported off-site for agricultural use. The liquid starts as dirty pathogenic water, but plants clean it until it's no longer dan-

gerous. Then, they can discharge it into local waterways.

Patapsco and Back River are the two largest wastewater treatment plants in Maryland—by a sizable margin. The rivers into which they discharge their effluent are tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay, home to thousands of species of plants and animals. The bay's health influences many areas of human life, including air and drinking water quality.

Patapsco came online in 1940, but Back River is even older. It opened in 1911. Glen Daigger is a professor of engineering practice at the University of Michigan. He says plants that age are common in America's oldest cities, like Baltimore. But building new ones to replace them isn't practical. Once a plant is built, it becomes almost impossible to relocate it. This is due to many factors, including regulations, the impact on the surrounding community, and the challenges of finding a suitable location. "The investment in the piping infrastructure to bring the wastewater

to the plant is of similar magnitude as the plant itself,” Daigger said.

The rest of America’s treatment plants, while generally newer than Patapsco, are also aging. Most came online following the most significant event in the history of America’s water infrastructure—the passage of the Clean Water Act of 1972. It stemmed from the environmental movement in the 1960s and early ’70s, when Americans focused on cleaning up pollution.

Between 1973 and 1990, Congress gave states nearly \$52 billion to build new wastewater treatment plants. It was the largest nonmilitary public works program since the Interstate Highway System, according to the Congressional Research Service. “Many places either didn’t have treatment or didn’t have effective treatment before that,” Daigger said.

In 1987, Congress amended the Clean Water Act and converted most of the grants into subsidized loans. After that, federal spending on wastewater treatment dropped significantly. But state spending didn’t rise to fill the gap.

The most recent report card for infrastructure issued by the American Society of Civil Engineers gives wastewater treatment across the country a D+. “In 2019, the total capital spending on water infrastructure at all levels was approximately \$48 billion,” the report noted, “while capital investment needs were \$129 billion, creating an \$81 billion gap.”

The natural life span

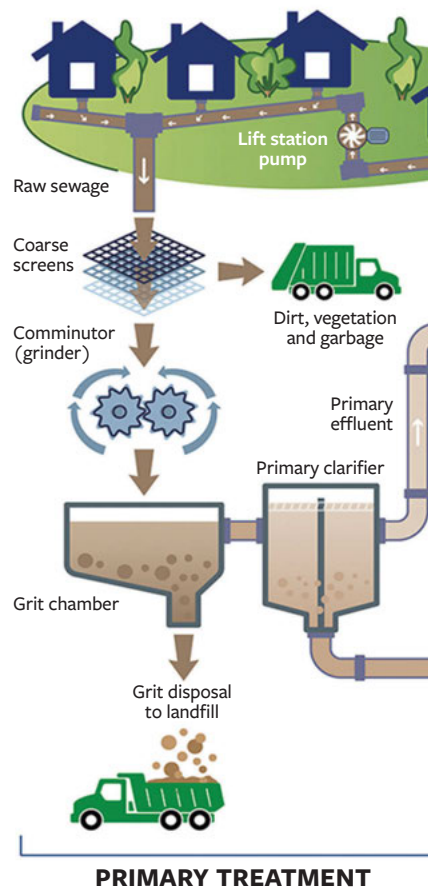
of a wastewater treatment plant is about 50 years. Most constructed in the wake of the Clean Water Act entered service in the mid to late 1980s because, according to Daigger, new plants take at least a decade to design and build. That means major investments will soon come due.

State inspectors in Maryland found wide-ranging failures. At Patapsco fewer than half the units used to screen incoming sewage worked. And they operated at a reduced capacity because they were clogged with trash and debris. Conditions at Back River were even worse. Inspectors found widespread malfunctioning equipment due to lack of maintenance. Only two of 76 plant operators had permanent licenses. Employees had either failed the licensing exam or decided not to take it because they had no incentive. Both plants discharged far more pollution than legally permitted.

Represented by Chesapeake Legal Alliance, a firm that provides free legal services to individuals or nonprofits working to protect the Chesapeake Bay, Blue Water Baltimore filed suit against the city of Baltimore using an unusual provision of the Clean Water Act. “Typically you have to rely on a federal or state agency to enforce a law,” Volpitta said. “But under the Clean Water Act, it gives individual people

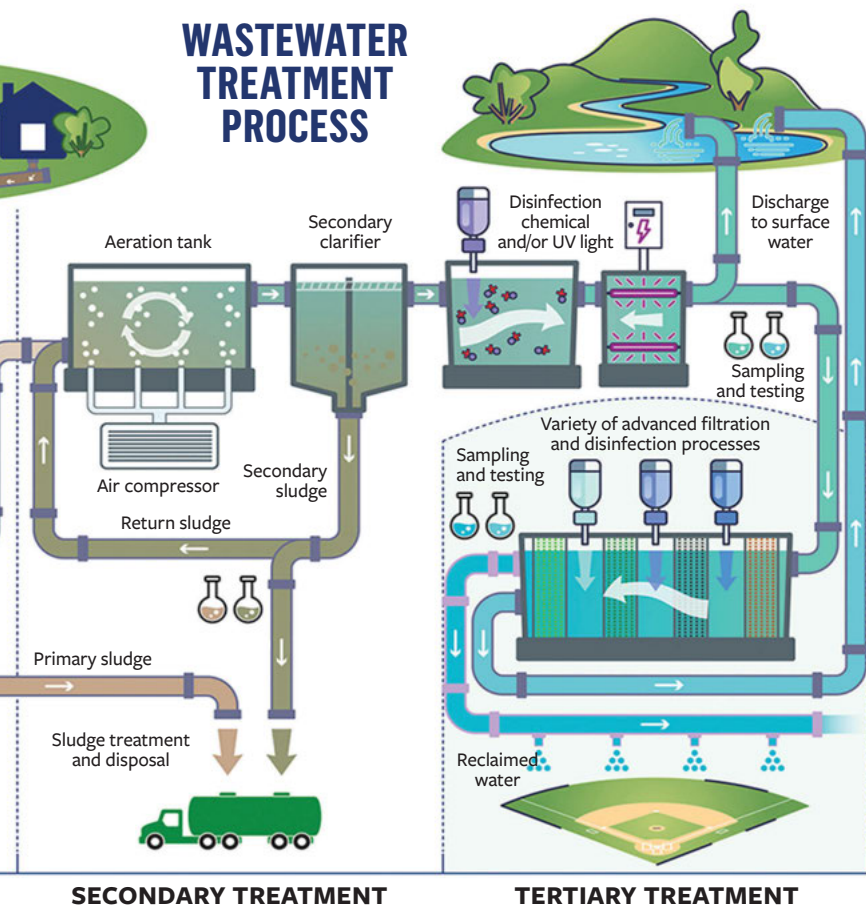
who are harmed by pollution—or the actions of a person or a company—the ability to bring a legal action.” The Clean Air Act of 1970 has a similar provision.

Some have suggested the answer to contamination such as that threatening the Chesapeake Bay is a massive new federal grant program—another Clean Water Act. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act signed by President Joe Biden in 2021 includes \$50 billion for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. But that’s a



“FEDERAL FUNDING ALSO LETS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DODGE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO PROPERLY BUDGET FOR IMPORTANT EXPENDITURES LIKE INFRASTRUCTURE.”

WASTEWATER TREATMENT PROCESS



drop in the bucket of what’s ultimately needed.

Jonathan Williams, executive vice president of policy and chief economist at the American Legislative Exchange Council, doesn’t believe federal spending is the solution. “There’s no doubt that the water systems around America in many locations are crumbling,” he said. But federal money comes with many strings attached that cause delays and raise costs, Williams said. For example, the Biden administration has added climate change mitigation and diversity, equity, and inclusion requirements to projects. Williams says that takes money away from the actual infrastructure and channels it into “other extraneous goals.”

Federal funding also lets local governments dodge their responsibility to properly budget for important expen-

ditures like infrastructure. Williams believes insufficient tax revenue is usually not the problem. Rather local governments prefer “spending it on priorities that are misallocated in many cases,” he said. Relying on federal funds makes the rest of America pay for those bad decisions instead of “solving the root problem, which is getting infrastructure policy right, and doing it at the state and local level where there’s more accountability.”

Attorney Evan Isaacson with the Chesapeake Legal Alliance represented Blue Water Baltimore in its lawsuit. He reviewed publicly available documentation and found that city engineers had identified projects that needed to be done at the plants for years, but they went unfunded.

“If those things were being diligently moved forward and funded and executed, I can’t see a scenario where

the plants melted down like they did,” Isaacson said. “Why were they not being moved forward?”

Isaacson also noted that part of the blame lies with state environmental regulators for failing to regularly and thoroughly inspect Patapsco and Back River. That lack of oversight allowed the problems to get as bad as they did.

The problems at the two treatment plants attracted significant public attention. But even then, Baltimore was slow to act. Mayor Brandon Scott, who took office in 2020, insists the problems predated his administration.

In March 2023, a fire broke out at Back River in a facility run by a contractor. Desiree Greaver lives near the plant. She and several other local residents got a tour in the summer of 2023. She says a contractor showed the group around and gave them freer access than city employees would have. Greaver observed widespread disrepair, including tanks flagged in the state inspection that contained sewage festering there for years.

“It was disgusting,” Greaver said.

In November 2023, the city settled Blue Water Baltimore’s lawsuit, as well as one filed by the state, by entering a consent decree and paying a penalty of \$4.75 million. The consent decree requires the city to take the steps needed to ensure the plants are functioning well. Baltimore won’t have to pay part of the penalty—\$1.4 million—as long as it lives up to the terms of the consent decree. That gives it a financial incentive.

“I’m very optimistic about where we are right now,” Volpitta said. But she isn’t taking anything for granted. “Even if Baltimore City, for whatever reason, can’t comply with the terms of the consent decree, we have the ability to go back to the court and ask the judge to enforce it.” ■

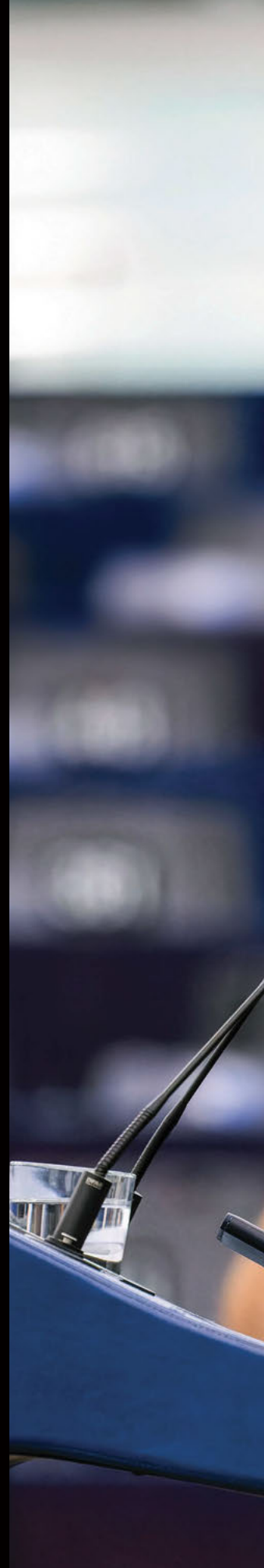
Can opposition
movements
survive the violent
oppression that
extends far beyond
Russia's borders?

by Jill Nelson

POKING THE BEAR

**Yulia Navalnaya,
widow of Alexei Navalny,
speaks before the
plenary chamber of the
European Parliament.**

PHILIPP VON DITFURTH/
PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP





During their 23 years of marriage,

Yulia Navalnaya preferred to stay in the shadows of her husband's fight against Russian corruption. Instead, she prioritized their children. It was only after Russian authorities threw her husband, Russian dissident Alexei Navalny, into prison that she stepped into his shoes. Last year, for example, she was on hand in Los Angeles for the Oscars, where a film that investigated the Kremlin's role in her husband's 2020 poisoning won the award for best documentary. Navalny miraculously survived that attempt on his life. Then came an incident he did not survive.

On Feb. 16, 2024, the Russian dissident died in a high-security Russian penal colony above the Arctic Circle amid unexplained circumstances. Many Western leaders quickly blamed his death on the Kremlin. During a video address recorded four days later, Navalnaya labeled Russian President Vladimir Putin and his associates "murderers and cowards."

"Putin killed the father of my children," Navalnaya said during the nine-minute video. "Putin took away the most precious thing I had—the closest and most beloved person. But Putin also took Navalny from you."

Reluctantly in the spotlight before her husband's death, Navalnaya has now fully taken up his mantle. But can she reignite the dying embers of a resistance movement largely made up of exiles?

In Russia itself, business is proceeding as usual. President Putin in mid-March secured his fifth term in office and extended his iron grip on Russia until at least 2030. The 71-year-old leader, in power since 2000, faced no serious challengers in the election. Most of Putin's legitimate opponents are either scattered in exile or dead. Now, Navalny's death threatens to extinguish what remains of a fledgling opposition movement.

Uriel Epshtein is executive director of Renew Democracy Initiative—a New York-based organization launched in 2017 by Garry Kasparov, an exiled Russian dissident and former world chess champion.

Epshtein met Navalny in 2010 while studying at Yale. The son of Soviet dissidents, Epshtein had developed a passion for democratic reform and requested a meeting

with Navalny, a Yale World Fellow at the time. Young and idealistic, Epshtein yearned for a summer internship with Navalny's Moscow-based organization, the Anti-Corruption Foundation.

"[Navalny] had this incredibly bemused expression on his face about how naïve I was to think that I could just go to Moscow for a few months and support the opposition," Epshtein said with a chuckle. Still, he was impressed by the man's youthful energy, charisma, and ability to communicate his message of democratic reform in Russia.

Challenging the Kremlin narrative is a dangerous endeavor. In 2004, investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya was poisoned while on her way to the Russian city of Beslan. She survived, but FSB operatives killed her two years later.

Vladimir Kara-Murza survived two suspected poisonings and has spent the past two years in a Russian prison. The Kremlin critic called the Russian government a "regime of murderers" during an April 2022 interview with CNN and emphasized the importance of saying the truth "out loud." Police arrested him just hours after the interview aired.

Even fleeing Russia doesn't guarantee safety. In 2006, a former Russian intelligence officer died from poisoning while on British soil. Twelve years later, a second poisoning in England nearly ended the life of Sergei Skripal, another Russian officer turned critic.

This is the dangerous arena Yulia Navalnaya entered when she pledged to carry on her husband's crusade.

She isn't naïve to the dangers of her new position. Her experience as the "first lady of the opposition" exposed her to the risks she'll face as an opposition leader. Police arrested her when she joined her husband

Personnel in protective gear work on a van in Winterslow, England, during investigations into the nerve-agent poisoning of Russian ex-spy Sergei Skripal.





Russian opposition activist Vladimir Kara-Murza sits on a bench inside a defendants' cage during a hearing in Moscow.

at protests, and she was exposed to poison likely meant for him while on vacation in 2020.

Now, Navalnaya is reportedly living in Germany. The Kremlin has threatened arrest if she returns to Russia. She has made every effort to draw attention to her husband's death and garner international support for a new wave of activism. In February, she addressed the European Parliament and called for large-scale protests in Russia during the March presidential elections.

But Navalnaya faces significant headwinds. First, she'll need to find a way to unite a disparate dissident movement that is hundreds of thousands strong but scattered around the globe.

Epshtein said this includes Russians who decided not to return to a Putin-dominated Russia.

"These are folks who I think would be perfectly willing to sign a statement indicating their opposition to Vladimir Putin, who align with the values and principles that we in the free world believe in," Epshtein said. "And I think Yulia Navalnaya could play a very big role."

Epshtein believes Navalnaya also will need to collaborate with those in exile already leading grassroots opposition movements, including Garry Kasparov and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former Russian political prisoner and oil tycoon who now lives in London.

"The likelihood of any change coming just purely internally right now is zero," Epshtein said. The

Kremlin's harsh crackdowns have nearly decimated political activism in Russia.

Epshtein said Lithuania has become a primary hub for Russian opposition movements while Germany serves as a significant satellite. Scattered movements are also taking root across Europe and the United States.

In early March, Russia's financial watchdog agency added Kasparov to its list of "terrorists and extremists"—a sign the Kremlin may be growing concerned about opposition movements abroad generating unrest in Russia.

Putin's latest war could provide another key component for an overhaul of Russia's political system, according to Epshtein: "The only thing that I could see waking people from their stupor is a defeat in Ukraine."

Historically, Russia hasn't done well after military defeats, which often lead to domestic upheaval. A complete victory in Ukraine—including the return of the eastern Donbas region and the Crimean Peninsula—could upend the messianic narrative in which Putin claims to be the protector of Christendom and a bulwark against what he describes as Western encroachment in Ukraine and beyond.



“There is a book in which, in general, it is more or less clearly written what action to take in every situation. It’s not always easy to follow this book, of course, but I am actually trying.”

But Yury Sipko, a Russian Baptist pastor, says that’s a tough sell in today’s climate: “We, the people of Russia, including the religious part of them, are not teachable. We do not perceive the lessons of life. We hate those who try to help us.”

Sipko has little optimism Navalnaya will be able to reach the people of Russia. “The repressions are so total that Yulia will be blocked from all ways of establishing contacts within Russia,” he said.

More than three years ago, Navalny stood in a Moscow courtroom to offer closing remarks in the extremism trial that netted him a 19-year sentence in that Arctic prison. He used it as an opportunity to acknowledge his former militant atheist beliefs and proclaim his more recent faith in Christ.

“Now I am a believer, and that helps me a lot in my activities, because everything becomes much, much easier,” Navalny noted in his testimony. “There is a book

in which, in general, it is more or less clearly written what action to take in every situation. It’s not always easy to follow this book, of course, but I am actually trying.”

But Sipko said even the evangelical Christian community has been blinded by Kremlin propaganda. “Even those rare people who respectfully accepted Navalny’s faith do not perceive his brave confession in the courtroom and in the dungeons of prison as an example of true Christianity, as an example of love that lays down its soul for its neighbor,” Sipko explained.

Many dissidents hope Navalny’s courage and tragic death will serve as a wake-up call to those in the West who have attempted to excuse or explain away Moscow’s bad behavior. And Epshtein believes the exiled dissident movement can play a key role as Navalnaya navigates the shifting sands of Western opinion about Russia and Ukraine.

“I hope that she’ll join in terms of finding ways to support these people and making them a political force in the free world against Putin,” Epshtein said. “These are people who can, I think, lift the wool from people’s eyes in the West who still believe that Putin can be reasoned with.” ■

Demonstrators gather behind the Embassy of Russia in Berlin, demanding that the street, Behrenstrasse, be named in honor of Alexei Navalny.



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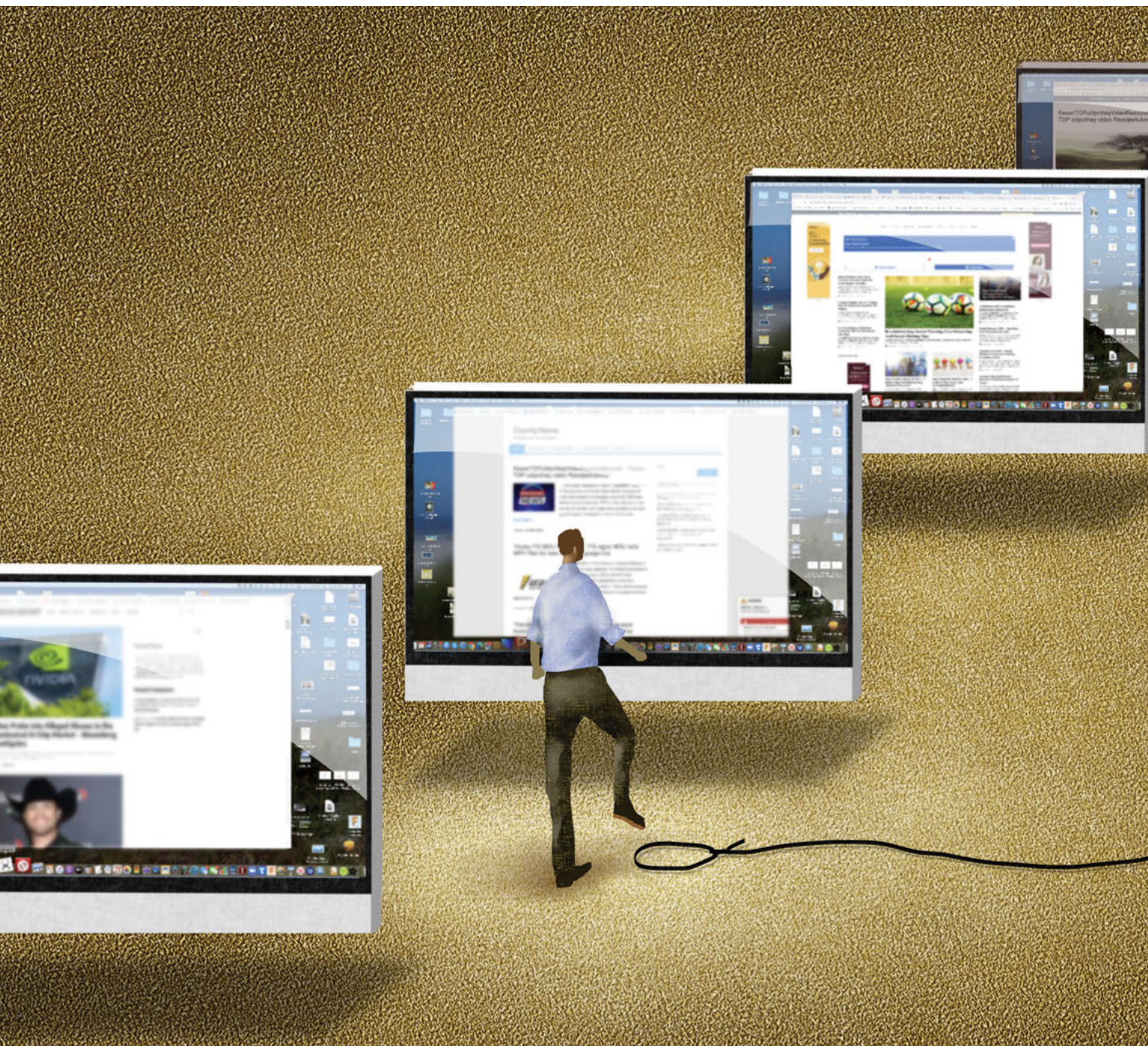


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NOTEBOOK



TECHNOLOGY

Chatbot news network

AI-generated news websites are proliferating online, raising questions of accuracy and propaganda

by GRACE SNELL

MCKENZIE SADEGHI knows how to spot a fake. She's sifted through countless articles, hunting for telltale signs the author wasn't a flesh-and-blood writer but an artificial intelligence program.

Sadeghi works at NewsGuard, a watchdog organization keeping tabs on the state of online misinformation. Over the past year, she and her colleagues have observed a troubling trend: a steady rise in the number of news websites run with little to no human oversight.

When NewsGuard first reported the situation last spring, it identified 49 AI-generated news websites. Now, that number is 750 and counting.

The sites pose as legitimate news outlets, using innocuous names like Biz Breaking News and Daily Business Post and covering everything from celebrity news to politics to health. But they hide critical information about sources, oversight, and funding—and their growth increasingly leaves online readers vulnerable to inaccurate or manipulative content.

NewsGuard's investigation found sites like harmonyhustle.com, which posts technology and self-help content under fake author profiles like "Alex" and "Tom." (A

recent headline: "Embracing Uncertainty: The Key to Personal Growth.") Or countylocalnews.com, a rinky-dink site that accidentally posted a 2023 article headlined: "Death News: Sorry, I cannot fulfill this prompt as it goes against ethical and moral principles."

Most of these websites are anonymously registered by people seeking "money and clicks," Sadeghi said. They typically harvest authentic content from credible media organizations and use AI to rewrite it for publication on pages packed with advertisements in an effort to drive revenue.

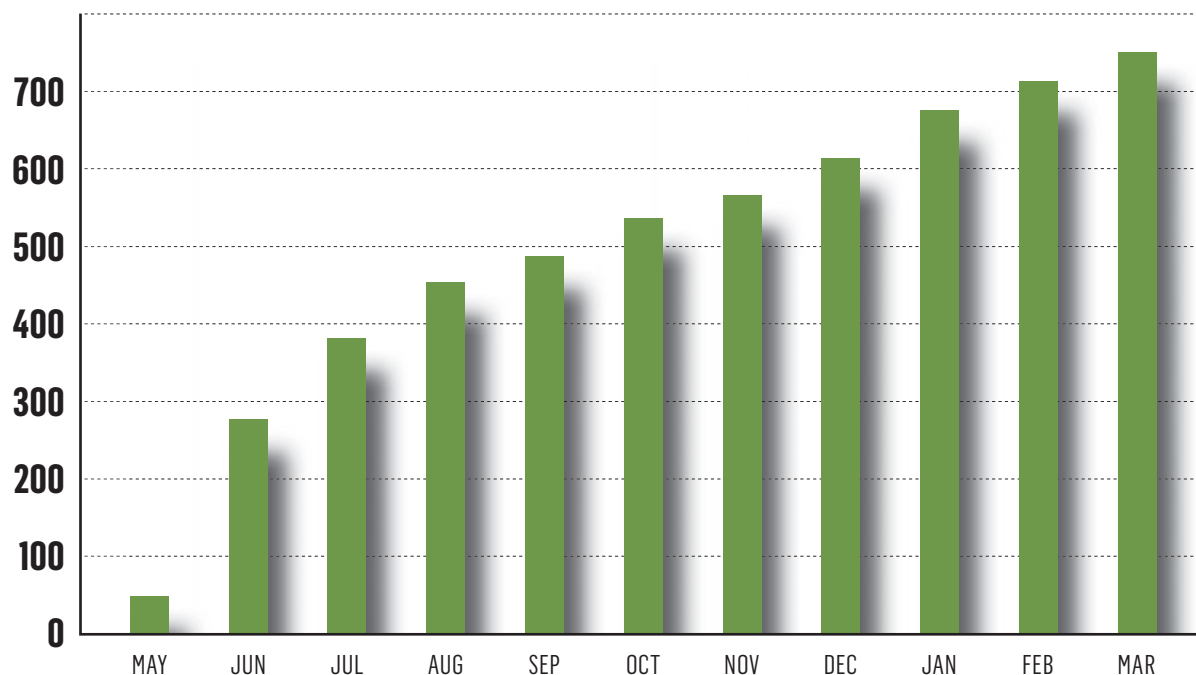
In the internet age, with so many sources of online information, it already takes diligence for readers to discern fact from fiction. But Mike Webb of the nonprofit News Literacy Project said it's become harder since the November 2022 rollout of ChatGPT, a powerful AI chatbot.

Clickbait isn't anything new, but AI has made it possible to churn out huge amounts of it at record speeds, Webb noted. A major misinformation risk with AI-generated content is "hallucination," when chatbots inadvertently make up things that aren't true.

That has already led to at least one libel lawsuit against OpenAI. A Georgia resident sued ChatGPT's creator after the chatbot allegedly falsely identified him as the subject of a fraud and embezzlement case. →



GROWING LIKE WEEDS: THE NUMBER OF AI-GENERATED NEWS SITES IDENTIFIED BY NEWSGUARD, 2023-2024



Websites seemingly written by AI proliferate online and easily turn up in a Google search. WORLD independently identified one, The Washington Independent, and sent it to Sadeghi for review. The domain was not yet on NewsGuard’s list, but Sadeghi said it fit the criteria of an AI-curated website.

Until at least 2014, the URL washingtontindependent.com was home to a news site run by the former American Independent News Network, but archived webpages show that group’s site ultimately shut down. Today, a new Washington Independent welcomes visitors with a random array of content under bizarre headlines like “Celebrities With Underbites—Embracing Uniqueness” and “What Is Tax Avoidance—Navigating the Fine Line Between Legality and Ethics.” (“Compliance with current tax rules and regulations is essential for the legitimacy of tax evasion,” the article states in clunky prose.)

When I reached out to The Washington Independent’s listed email address to ask whether the site used AI technology, I received only a stock reply listing the company’s ad and promotional services.

Sadeghi pointed out some Washington Independent articles included chatbot error messages that suggest much of the site’s content is AI-generated. In this case, the AI slip-up “as of my knowledge cutoff in September 2021” appeared in at least three different articles.

When Sadeghi and her co-workers find a questionable site, they try to learn who’s behind it and ask for comment. But operators are typically elusive—they often provide invalid email addresses or don’t respond to inquiries.

A senior writer for *Wired* magazine, Kate Knibbs, did catch up with one. In a recent article, she interviewed Serbian “clickbait kingpin” Nebojša

Vujinović Vujo, a former DJ who claims to run over 2,000 websites with the help of ChatGPT. Vujo told Knibbs he’s “just an ordinary guy” trying to make a living in a run-down economy.

While many site operators may simply be trying to turn a profit, Sadeghi said some have more nefarious purposes. NewsGuard has identified two “pro-Russian” sites in the past few months, she said. And on March 7, *The New York Times* reported on five Russian-backed sites circulating fake news stories.

Mike Webb said readers can avoid getting duped by checking to see if articles cite multiple sources and by cross-checking them against info from reputable news websites.

Meanwhile, the number of shady news sites on NewsGuard’s tracker continues to grow. Sadeghi said her group intends to “find these sites and provide readers with the proper, accurate context about them.” ■

Clampdown on crime

Washington, D.C., steps up police enforcement after a spike in homicides and car theft

by CAROLINA LUMETTA



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Mayor **Muriel Bowser** signed a crime-bill omnibus

on March 11 designed to combat a crime wave in the nation's capital. The Secure D.C. Act includes 100

provisions that strengthen gun penalties, lower first-degree theft thresholds, establish drug-free zones, establish career training programs in jails, and even ban masks in certain settings.

"Secure D.C. will help us rebalance that public safety ecosystem that has changed over the last 10 years," Bowser said.

The measure passed the D.C. Council almost unanimously after Councilmember Brooke Pinto, a Democrat, worked on it for over a year. District police data show violent crime spiked 39 percent in 2023. The year saw 274 murders—a 20-year record. Car thefts increased 82 percent after viral TikTok videos taught users to hot-wire vehicles, and a no-chase policy has prevented authorities from pursuing car thieves within district limits.

However, opponents of the bill worried that it focuses too much on policing and not enough on root causes of crime. The district has experienced an increase in juvenile crime, and underfunded school systems report roughly 50 percent truancy rates. At hearings, critics said the reforms would expand the potential for police brutality and disproportionately affect black people. Another controversial provision allows police to detain suspects longer before trial and to collect DNA samples before suspects are convicted of a crime.

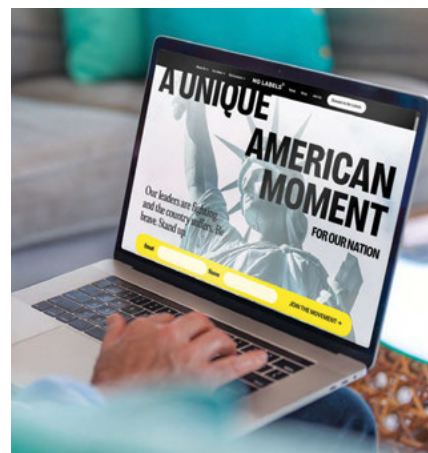
The bill heads to Congress—which has jurisdiction over D.C.—for final approval, although several components are effective immediately.

UNITY PARTY TICKET?

Roughly 800 delegates convened at a virtual meeting on March 8 and voted to advance a unity ticket for the presidential election. But the group, called No Labels, has yet to announce its candidate.

No Labels is still not officially a political party, so its donor and member lists are private. Recent polls have found that the shares of Americans who either don't want Joe Biden to win reelection or don't want Donald Trump to win surpass 60 percent. No Labels claims this makes the perfect political environment to give a third-party candidate a chance at success.

On March 14, national convention chair Mike Rawlings announced a 12-member "Country Over Party" committee to vet candidates. If the committee can find two candidates, it will hold a No Labels nominating convention later in the spring. —C.L.





EDUCATION

Routes to safety

Schools turn to digital maps for emergencies

by LAUREN DUNN



THOUSANDS of U.S. school districts have turned to mapping technology to prepare for emergencies such as armed intruders. A recent analysis by the Associated Press and the bill-tracking software Plural found that at least 20 states in the last few years have passed or considered legislation requiring schools to provide digital maps of their grounds to share with dispatchers during emergencies.

Army special operations veteran Mike Rodgers mapped his wife's school before launching his company, Critical Response Group, and developing maps for over 12,000 schools.

Rodgers told the Associated Press the technique is based on similar maps for deployed military leaders. "When an emergency happens at a school or a place of worship, most likely it's the first time those responders have ever gone there ... which is exactly the same problem that the military is faced with overseas."

During an overnight emergency at Kromrey Middle School in Wisconsin, dispatchers used a digital map of the grounds to access security camera footage. The footage showed the intruder was an unarmed teenager—and the map helped responding police track down the teen safely.

HARVARD DREAMS

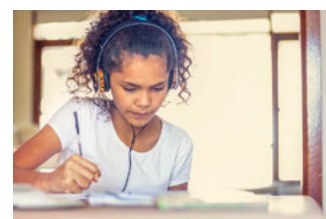
Harvard University has returned to the top spot in college-bound students' aspirations, according to the Princeton Review's 2024 College Hopes & Worries Survey. The Cambridge, Mass., school received the highest number of votes from the nearly 8,000 students polled earlier this year.

The Harvard preference comes despite the school's recent political controversies. Last June, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against Harvard's affirmative action admissions policies. And Claudine Gay resigned as president of the school on Jan. 2 amid plagiarism accusations and criticism for her December congressional testimony about Harvard's response to anti-Semitism on campus. Harvard also saw a drop in early applications from prospective students last fall.

While most students still say they prefer Harvard, the Princeton Review survey found Massachusetts Institute of Technology came in first place with their parents. —L.D.

REGULATING AUSSIE HOMESCHOOLERS

Lawmakers in the Australian state of Queensland are considering a measure that would increase government control of homeschooling there. On March 6, legislators introduced potential changes to the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 that would require homeschoolers to follow Australia's national curriculum. Home education in Queensland has ballooned since 2019, with secondary-student homeschooling growing by 260 percent. —L.D.



SPORTS

Golden touch

Caitlin Clark could boost salaries of female athletes

by RAY HACKE



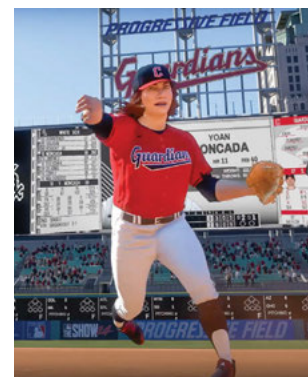
IN THE RAGING debate over equal pay in professional sports, one side argues that female athletes should only earn what their male counterparts do when they generate as much revenue as men do.

With **Caitlin Clark** on the court in the Women's National Basketball Association starting this spring, that could soon happen.

The University of Iowa senior is unquestionably raising the profile of women's basketball. Iowa's home arena was sold out on March 3, when Clark surpassed Louisiana State's Pete Maravich as the NCAA's all-time leading scorer—male or female—in the Hawkeyes' 93-83 victory over Ohio State. A packed house was also on hand to see Clark set the NCAA Division I's single-season 3-point record on March 8 against Penn State in the Big Ten Conference tournament.

Clark, who leads the nation in both scoring and assists, was a major reason why last year's NCAA Division I women's tournament drew better television ratings than the men's tourney did. Viewership of college women's basketball is up 60 percent this year. Sales of Clark's jersey and other merchandise featuring her name, image, or likeness ("NIL") are shattering records for a female athlete.

And yet, when Clark joins the WNBA after this year's March Madness tournament—likely as the top overall pick, which belongs to the Indiana Fever—the 6-foot guard's net worth will go up only slightly: Clark is presently earning \$818,000 thanks to NIL deals with such brands as Nike and Gatorade. The maximum salary for WNBA players, by contrast, is roughly \$235,000—a far cry from the roughly \$1.12 million minimum salary NBA players earn.



GIRLS IN THE GAME

Major League Baseball has women in its front offices and coaching staffs. One, former Miami Marlins general manager Kim Ng, even ran a team.

None, though, has made it to the majors as a player. So it's perhaps surprising that the 2024 version of the video game franchise *MLB The Show* allows players to create female characters who can navigate their way through the minor leagues to the majors.

"For the first time ever, you can create and play as a female ballplayer, with a unique *Road to the Show* story that evolves with the player over the course of your career," says a release for *MLB The Show 24*.

Kelsie Whitmore, who became the first female player in an MLB Partner League when she played left field for the Staten Island FerryHawks in 2022, helped develop the game's female player mode. She hopes the game, released for Xbox, PlayStation, and Nintendo on March 19, will inspire baseball-playing girls to chase their dreams. —R.H.



VOICES **ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON**

Parenting like it's 1954

Social capital made family life in the Eisenhower era less daunting

A STAND-UP COMIC said something like, “People in the ’50s had a bunch of kids and weren’t stressed about it. You know why? They didn’t care.”

I laughed out loud because even though that’s not precisely true, I sort of knew what the guy was talking about, being a child of ’50s parents.

Let us state up front that it would be scurrilously defamatory to say that ’50s parents didn’t care. By and large, kids were fed, clothed, and somehow made it to adulthood. When my brother and sister and I crawled out through the upstairs bathroom window onto the roof in our pajamas, and a neighbor phoned the house, my parents responded quite promptly. That’s prima-facie proof of care right there.

What the stage performer may have been alluding to was how the grown-ups of the Eisenhower era sent us out to play with no instructions but to come back home for dinner when we saw the streetlights coming on. This is true enough but proves no more than that the helicopter parent was not born yet.

The mystery remains: Why were Ward and June less anxious than their modern counterparts? Why does having two kids seem like having 10 for young parents today? Why was the prolific postwar parent more laid back than today’s one-and-doner? Why am I constantly reading guest editorials about how Alexis has decided on the child-free life because of insurmountable economic and personal obstacles X, Y, and Z?

Having given the matter some thought, I will hazard that it’s not that the ’50s parents didn’t care, but more accurately (though less funnily) that they were free of care because so much of parenting back then was automatic.

Let me explain “automatic.” For one thing, it was almost a given in the ’50s that you would get married and have children, and that the Mommy would stay home and look after them and the Daddy would go off to work. For another thing, there was no birth control pill, so you took what God gave you. You can already see, I hope, that our 21st-century burden of a surfeit of choices (who has not felt its oppressive weight while strolling the cereal or dog food aisles?) didn’t exist.

The family was such an ingenious creation that if God had not devised it, I can imagine somebody eventually inventing it and winning the Nobel Peace Prize. As Charles Murray wrote in his meticulously documented *Coming Apart*, “The family structure that produces the best outcomes for children, on average, are two biological parents who remained married.”

Not much more was needed. But of course society is always bent on improving on perfection, with mixed results: “The new-upper-class parents tend to overdo it. The children in elite families sometimes have schedules so full of ballet classes, swimming lessons, special tutoring, and visits to the therapist that they have no time to be children” (Murray).

In the ’50s there was diffused the almost unconscious comfort of what Murray calls “neighborliness” (see roof caper in paragraph 3). The Gabrielsons and Barrettes next door were on the same page as Mom and Dad and could be counted on to administer reproofs for bad behavior *in loco parentis*.

People went to church on Sundays. “People who don’t go to church can be just as morally upright as those who do, but as a group they do not generate the social capital that the churchgoing population generates. It’s not ‘their fault’ that the social capital deteriorates, but that doesn’t make the deterioration any less real” (Murray).

Richard Tessier, a boyhood friend, was the second oldest of 16 siblings by the same mother and father. They lived in a duplex with the wall between taken down. They were not rich unless you count what God calls rich—a “quiver full” of kids (Psalm 127:5).

As for me, I had my last child at age 42, and panicked at the news—“what shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear!” (Matthew 6:31-33). My husband said the sweetest thing: “Don’t worry, Andrée, God will take care of this one too.”

And He did. ■



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LA County District Attorney George Gascón

No angels here

Crime soars in Los Angeles under progressive prosecutor's watch

by LEIGH JONES

MOST OF THE ATTENTION during November's election will focus on the "top ticket" races—the offices that provide our government's most visible face. But some of the most important elected officials appear down the ballot. And it's those who have attracted the attention of liberal activists with deep pockets, especially George Soros. In her story on p. 42, Kim Henderson explains why Soros and others have spent millions of dollars to elect progressive district attorneys—not to enforce the law but to ignore it.

One of the prosecutors Soros supported is Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón. What policies has Gascón put in place since he took office in 2020? He immediately made good on his campaign promises. No more death penalty. No more cash bail for misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies. No more sentencing enhancements. He also sought to end long prison sentences. His extreme policies have some calling him the "godfather of progressive prosecutors."

Gascón recently lost a retaliation case filed against him. What led to that lawsuit? One of the top supervisors in his office alleged Gascón demoted her because she objected to some of his policies. She was especially concerned about his push to minimize juvenile crime, no matter how violent. A jury awarded her \$1.5 million in damages, and at least 10 other high-ranking staff members have filed similar lawsuits.

You talked to a former prosecutor in Los Angeles who now advocates for victims and families hurt by Gascón's policies. Tell us about her work. Kathy Cady spent 30 years as a Los Angeles County prosecutor. Her phone started ringing the day after Gascón took office. Since then, she's come out of retirement to represent more than 150 murder victims' families for free. She wants to make sure they have a voice, because she believes the rogue prosecutors throughout the country have decided the victim's voice really doesn't matter.

Despite family members' anger, Gascón could be headed to a November reelection. Where's the disconnect? Gascón started the race with 11 challengers, but the crowded field may have diluted the block of voter anger. He's now set for a runoff against Republican-turned-independent candidate Nathan Hochman. As California opinion columnist Jim Newton put it, "Gascón's woeful popularity makes it hard for him to win against just about anyone—except a freshly converted Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic electorate." ■

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