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*"The object of the Monitor is to injure no man, but to bless all mankind."*

– MARY BAKER EDDY

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# Creatures of unconditional love

Full disclosure: I'm pretty passionate about dogs.

I have five. Luna and Pixie are 5-pound Yorkies who grew up in New York City. Phoenix, a mini Aussie, arrived just before the pandemic lockdown and grew up a bit constrained. They are all good girls. When I moved to a rural community upstate three years ago, my wife and I eventually added two rambunctious border collies, Jax and Skylark, who are good boys.

Don't get me started. I'm "one of those people." When dogs come up in conversation, I tend to nerd out with adulating factoids, gesturing my arms with enthusiasm.

Did you know that dogs have learned to read our faces, as we do with each other? Compared with apes, dogs are able to better use social and communication cues from people to find food, according to research. They can learn words, and show signs of humanlike empathy and understanding. New research shows that dog-human relationships carry many of the same upsides as best friends and parent-child bonds.

BY HARRY BRUINIUS
*COVER STORY EDITOR*

Dogs learned to understand us long before we learned to understand them.

The special relationship between people and their pets elicits strong reactions, and in this week's cover story, our contributor Michael Benanav explores a controversy that erupted in Santa Fe, New Mexico, earlier this year. Many concerned residents felt the dogs of homeless people weren't getting the care they needed, and thought they should be taken away. But for homeless people, their canine companions are a cherished and comforting part of their lives.

The controversy highlighted those who were seeking solutions for everyone concerned. All agree that dogs are sources of stability in lives in which little else is secure – creatures that offer warmth, protection, and faithful companionship when people – those with houses and those without – are confronted with life's vicissitudes.

Speaking of, have you read the touching ancient Greek and Roman elegies composed for canine companions? There's this one for a pup named Myia … ■



BEIT JINN AND QUNEITRA, SYRIA

# Israel's heavy-handed raids, arrests in Syria dim hopes for new era

**By Dominique Soguel** / Special correspondent

At 2 a.m. on June 12, the women and children of Beit Jinn were jolted awake by banging doors, explosions, and orders blaring from Israeli loudspeakers. It was clear who the soldiers wanted. Loudspeakers barked the full names and nicknames of seven men from this village that lies on Syrian soil in the shadow of an Israeli observation post on Mount Hermon.

"I heard the sound of shooting and came out," recounts 12-year-old Shahed, daughter of Ali Hammadi, one of the seven named, who had recently returned from an agricultural job in Lebanon. "I saw my cousin had been shot. I was scared. They told my father to come out."

Israel calls such arrests operational necessities. But to Syrian villagers and international law experts, they are abductions on foreign soil, and a stark illustration of the challenges the new government in Damascus faces as it tries to recalibrate relations with Syria's longtime adversary next door.

The Israeli raid in the foothills of the Golan Heights, south of Damascus, seemed well planned. The soldiers had apparently anticipated resistance along the area's winding smuggling routes and ridgelines, which are strewn with the ruins of Syrian army bases destroyed by Israel.

Khalida Dable, Mr. Hammadi's wife, says soldiers handcuffed her husband and fired flash-bangs, shouting for his nephew to come out from next door.

Israelis had surrounded the house, "above and below. Maybe two or three hundred in all. They took both in handcuffs and then left. We know nothing since."

**WHY WE WROTE THIS**

The ouster last year of President Bashar al-Assad raised hopes of a diplomatic reset with Israel, which many on Syria's Golan Heights see as a pragmatic neighbor. So, they're bewildered by Israeli raids and underlying distrust.

In the span of an hour, Israeli forces stormed seven homes located on the Syrian side of a U.N.-monitored buffer zone dating from two previous Israel-Syria wars in 1973 and 1967, when Israel captured the Golan. Israel Defense Forces says it was targeting Hamas operatives and that its soldiers had recovered weapons.

Regardless of who the men were or the grounds on which they were seized, Israel's actions violated international law, says Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, a human rights and counterterrorism expert. "This is a clear breach of sovereignty and, under international law, amounts to kidnapping," she says.

## Few locals see Israel as an enemy

That the IDF has detailed intelligence on Beit Jinn is unsurprising. During the Syrian civil war, Israel backed local rebels, and the village lies within sight of Israeli and U.N. observation posts. Local residents say they don't understand why the soldiers targeted the seven men. Many here view Israel as a pragmatic neighbor, remembering that during the civil war against the autocratic leader Bashar al-Assad, Israeli hospitals treated injured rebels, even those belonging to Al Qaeda offshoot Jabhat al-Nusra. That goodwill endures.

Few criticize Israel, while surveillance is accepted as a fact of life.

"When they entered our house, it was a massive, terrifying shock," says Kawther Abdullah, sister of Maamoun Abdullah, another of the seven detained. "We would never expect them to come into our homes because we are not against them. We are against Hezbollah, Hamas, and Bashar al-Assad, first and foremost. Why would we be against Israel? They helped us and treated our wounded."

The ouster last year of Mr. Assad, an ally of Iran who received crucial military support from Hezbollah, raised hopes of a diplomatic reset between Israel and Syria. But since the regime change in Damascus, Israel has continued to pound Syrian targets.

The government of President Ahmed al-Sharaa – once designated by Washington as a terrorist but welcomed to the White House Nov. 10 – says it has no appetite for war with Israel and has taken part in U.S.-brokered talks seeking a security arrangement.

But the plight of villages such as Beit Jinn is being ignored, say relatives of the men detained in June. The Beit Jinn incident is one of many that local leader Mohammed Mazen Mraywid says he has raised with Israeli officers. As mukhtar of Joubata al-Khashab, a Golan Heights village in Syria's Quneitra governorate, he is the man villagers call when relatives are taken, and the man whom the Israelis use to pass messages.

He recalls a July meeting at his home, attended by an Arabic-speaking Israeli intelligence officer who introduced himself as Abu Ibrahim, members of the Syrian security forces, and a United Nations peacekeeper. The Israelis arrived with maps and escorts. They said they were searching for weapons and suspects linked to Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran, and Palestinian groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas. "These are the accusations," Mr. Mraywid says.

Efforts to reassure Israel of its security fell on deaf ears, he says. "I told them 'we guarantee no violations by residents and no action against your army.' They said: 'After Oct. 7 in Gaza, we trust no one.'"

The fall of the Assad regime changed local dynamics, Mr. Mraywid says. Since December 2024, the IDF has built new military posts, fenced by barbed wire, on the Syrian side of the buffer zone. IDF soldiers uprooted trees to construct one of them. "Whoever takes my land, prevents me from entering and cultivating it, and sets up military posts is an occupier," insists the mukhtar.

### U.N. monitors for violations

The Israeli army currently maintains 10 positions on the Syrian side of the buffer, says Major Donnacha Reilly, a member of the U.N. Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which has monitored the ceasefire area between Israeli and Syrian forces for the past 50 years. UNDOF has reported Israel's expanded presence to the U.N. Security Council, protesting Israel's construction of obstacles along the ceasefire line and IDF restrictions on U.N. patrol movements. Both are breaches of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement, UNDOF complains.

Residents of Quneitra and southern Damascus say arrests began as isolated incidents in fields, then escalated into night raids with dogs, drones, and convoys of vehicles. Israeli forces also set up temporary checkpoints that led to further arrests.

UNDOF tracks local residents' complaints but has no tally of how many Syrians have been detained. "Some of the civilians were released following interrogation by the Israel Defense Forces while others remain in detention in Israel," Major Reilly says.

Palestinian human rights lawyer Khaled Quzmar says families of 13 Syrians detained this year have sought his help. Syrian counts suggest 40 people have been disappeared, seven from southern Damascus and the rest from Quneitra. There are similar cases in Daraa, a smuggling hub and launchpad for the 2011 Syrian uprising.

The Israeli human rights group HaMoked, which tracks Palestinian detainees, says it received 26 tracing requests from Syria in 2025. Seven people are confirmed held in Ofer Prison in the West Bank and two in a nearby military camp. But the International Committee of the Red Cross, which conducts prison visits, has been denied access to Israeli detention sites since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack. "The ICRC must be notified of and granted access to Syrian detainees in Israeli custody," says spokesperson Suhair Zakkout.

The IDF says that its operations in southern Syria are driven by the "necessity to thwart terrorist activities, infrastructure, and stockpiles of arms." It acknowledges establishing mobile posts "in the security area" to prevent smuggling and attacks.

Responding to questions about the seven men detained in June, an IDF spokesman cited an operation to "apprehend Hamas terrorists operating in the Beit Jinn area of Syria" and said they had been transferred to Israel for interrogation.

Their relatives deny the men have anything to do with Hamas. They have received no notice of their status or condition. ▪

BUCHA, UKRAINE

# To 'Defending Ukraine' curriculum, high schools add 'How to fly a drone'

**By Scott Peterson** / Staff writer

The Ukrainian drone pilot wears a set of white goggles as he works his magic over an obstacle course – in a school gymnasium in Bucha.

Illia might be a 14-year-old student with limited training, but he becomes a drone-flying hero when his nimble fingers zoom a small drone around posts and under arches, creating the same unnerving drone buzz that is today ubiquitous on Ukraine's front line with Russia.

When Illia loops the drone repeatedly in tight circles through a small ring, just 2 feet wide, applause erupts from fellow students who have come to watch the after-school drone club at work.

Illia says he relishes the "joy of flying" and is "fascinated by these very precise moves" with his dexterous fingers. It's his third time flying at the club, but he was so inspired after his first visit that he got hold of a computer simulation drone-flying app to hone his skills at home.

**WHY WE WROTE THIS**

Before Russia brought war into the lives of Ukrainians, the "Defending Ukraine" course featured marching and sometimes carrying wooden guns. The new reality-based curriculum includes hands-on work with first aid, radios, and drones.

Now, Illia's drone-piloting prowess is part of a broader effort by Ukrainians to better prepare students to cope with – and survive – a Russian invasion that has burned for 3 1/2 years with no end in sight.

Drone warfare now defines this conflict – along the front lines; with nightly bombardments of hundreds of Russian drones against Ukrainian urban centers and energy infrastructure; and with Ukrainian retaliatory deep-strike attacks on Russian fuel and refinery capacity.

So, as Ukraine mounts a nationwide revamp of its "Defending Ukraine" course curriculum, learning to fly drones is a key priority. The course, which is mandatory for all 10th and 11th graders, also focuses on lifesaving tactical first aid and weapons handling and shooting.

This Bucha after-school program was ahead of the national curve. It's the pet project of Oleh Azarov, a Defending Ukraine and physical education teacher who took an advanced course on drone use and, last year, set up the "Bucha Aces" club with his own resources.

The national Defending Ukraine program is in its beta phase, with 70% of Ukrainian students testing a curriculum designed – during wartime – to be far more practical than in the past.

### Students motivated by reality

"I see a huge difference already. Children are much more involved when they have things to work with," says Mr. Azarov, who wears a NASA hat from a prewar visit to the Museum of Flight in Seattle.

He notes that the new curriculum includes hands-on work with tourniquets, radios, drones, and weapons safety. But perhaps the most motivating factor is the context of full-blown war in which Ukrainian students are learning these skills.

"I tell them: 'This is real life, and in your life you may be able to be in a position to save someone's life – so better you learn it here, so the more chances you will be able to save a life,'" says Mr. Azarov.

"I see in their eyes that it interests them and motivates them," he says.

"I tell them: 'You have to understand that you are living in one of the most dangerous countries in the world now. ... I am not talking you into serving in the army, or you yourself fighting in this war. But we are talking about this new reality that you have to open your eyes up to.'"

That includes asking students, for example: Who has tourniquets at home? Perhaps 4 out of 30 students raise their hands, but almost none of those four have one tourniquet for each family member.

"I say, 'OK, but do you realize that every night there are [Russian] Shahed drones flying over our heads?'" Mr. Azarov recounts. "'And there is a possibility that a Shahed will strike, and what will you do? Will you be able to save someone? Will you be able to be saved?'"

The new Defending Ukraine curriculum is a far cry from the prewar course, with its roots in Soviet-era Defending the Motherland classes.

Those lessons are widely remembered for students being forced to march "Red Square-style," for learning by rote the structure of the military, for using wooden guns as props, and even for using stones as pretend hand grenades.

### Investment in education for wartime

When the Monitor first met Mr. Azarov in early 2022, invading Russian troops had only recently withdrawn from Bucha, a district northwest of Kyiv where more than 400 Ukrainians were killed and which became synonymous with Russian atrocities. Bodies had been left lying in the streets – often with hands tied behind their backs and shot execution-style.

The prewar Defending Ukraine course did little to prepare students for the full-scale Russian invasion. Mr. Azarov – exhausted and stressed from weeks of brutal Russian occupation – predicted then that Ukraine's visceral shared experience would one day be converted into a dramatically revamped curriculum that would impart "why you would need to love and defend your country."

That is happening now, with upgrading the Defending Ukraine course a top priority for Kyiv. The government invested more than $35 million this year, and earmarked another $24 million next year to provide quality materials and purpose-built locations.

"Our aim was a complete rethinking of this program," says Mykhailo Alochin, the head of the Directorate of School Education at the Ministry of Education in Kyiv. The new curriculum began taking shape in 2024, and should be fully in place for every student by 2027.

"It's a fantastic amount of money for the Ukrainian education system," says Mr. Alochin of the long-term investment. But he has seen students take part in mock first-aid courses, where they evacuate battlefield casualties, and can see they "understand that this is something very real."

"In one sentence: Students need to have the ability to save their own lives, and those of their loved ones," he says. "Because we are living in Ukraine, a rocket can fall, or bombing can start any moment, anywhere. That knowledge is not just knowledge; it can really save someone's life."

"I think these children are very lucky to have this course because of the practical knowledge," says Mr. Alochin. "When I was taking the Defending Ukraine course, we were just rewriting copybooks for two years, and learned the rules of the army. I held a wooden model of a gun one time during those two years."

### Dominance of drones

The drone emphasis also reflects the technological trajectory of this conflict – and the likely direction of future wars, Mr. Alochin adds. "The children now in school see the news from the front line every day. They see that drones are flying to Ukraine from the Russian side," he says. "They run to shelters with their parents, understanding that drones are a threat."

Indeed, drones could not be more ubiquitous in this war. The U.N. Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine recently found that Russia had committed crimes against humanity by "systematically" targeting civilians with drones in the southern city of Kherson.

Ukraine's commander of unmanned forces, Maj. Robert Brovdi, a combat drone expert with the call sign "Madiar," has said that his units had 15,000 vacancies. Though they make up only 2% of Ukraine's armed forces, he said in a recruitment pitch, the drone teams account for 35% of all verified strikes against Russian targets.

"We have drones waiting for pilots, not the other way around," he said.

For Mr. Azarov, the overhauled Defending Ukraine course is a necessary and welcome evolution.

"It is happening," he says. "You had a whole generation unprepared for war. Now, we are catching up."

▪ *Oleksandr Naselenko supported reporting for this story.*

AURORA, COLO.; AND MEXICO CITY

# Should a war hero be deported? The complex dilemma around one convicted vet.

**By Anna Mulrine Grobe** / Staff writer
**and Whitney Eulich** / Special correspondent

Jose Barco was the youngest soldier in his unit, patrolling one of the most notoriously dangerous stretches of highway in Iraq in 2004, between Fallujah and Ramadi, when a car bomb exploded.

Mr. Barco, who enlisted in the Army when he was 17 years old, lifted the searing wreckage to free two U.S. troops trapped beneath. He saved their lives, witnesses say, sustaining third-degree burns and earning a Purple Heart.

Despite his wounds, Mr. Barco had the presence of mind to radio for help, says David Nash, a soldier who was there. "It's one of the most impressive things I've ever seen."

Born in Venezuela to Cuban exiles who immigrated to the United States when he was 4 years old, Mr. Barco then deployed for a second tour in Iraq, serving another 15 months in combat. But upon his return to the U.S., Mr. Barco made a decision that would change the course of his life: He fired his gun at a house party in Colorado

Springs, hitting a bystander – a pregnant teenager – in the leg.

His defense team says he suffers from post-traumatic stress and an untreated traumatic brain injury sustained during combat. His victim, whose child was born healthy, has said on the record she's "haunted every day" by the shooting.

Two decades after becoming a decorated American military member, and after 15 years behind bars paying for his crime, Mr. Barco is now in U.S. deportation proceedings.

Mr. Barco's story is taking place at a moment when the U.S. executive branch is laser-focused on deporting record numbers of immigrants – especially those with criminal records. His case raises questions about whether noncitizen veterans who have pledged their lives to protect the nation deserve mercy for reckless choices they make after their service ends, and whether deportation for their crimes amounts to double punishment.

"Even natural-born citizens who serve in the military are not exempt from the nation's laws," says Stephen Biddle, a professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University. "You can earn the Congressional Medal of Honor in combat as a natural-born citizen and still go to jail for a crime."

Typically, like any other citizen, American veterans convicted of crimes serve their sentences and then are set free. But those veterans without documented and legal U.S. citizenship face the additional threat of deportation.

## Who deserves citizenship

Non-U.S. citizens have been integral to military efforts since the nation's founding, and by the 1840s made up 50% of all military recruits. By World War II, Congress had fast-tracked the naturalization process for noncitizens who served honorably. About 3% of active-duty troops are noncitizens. But some veterans never become citizens – often because of paperwork errors, misunderstandings of the process, or, in some cases, false promises made by recruiters.

**WHY WE WROTE THIS**

Noncitizen U.S. military members have been essential to the United States since the country's founding. But if they commit a crime and serve time in prison following an honorable discharge, should they then face deportation as well?

After hearing that Mr. Barco, a permanent resident when he enlisted, had been picked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials, retired Sgt. Ryan Krebbs, a combat medic who treated Mr. Barco in Iraq, says his first reaction was, "How are you not a citizen yet?"

Through a WhatsApp group, he mobilized some two dozen fellow soldiers who had served with Mr. Barco to support him.

Diane Vega, a former board member in El Paso, Texas, for the nongovernmental organization Repatriate Our Patriots, which supports deported vets and those at risk of deportation, used to assume deported vets had committed serious crimes. But when she began meeting them across the border in Ciudad Juárez, she realized few had; many were caught in possession of drugs. Some crimes that aren't considered felonies under state law are considered "aggravated felonies" under federal immigration law, and can lead to deportation proceedings.

This case is an outlier. "Most of our clients have nonviolent crimes, and there isn't a specific victim," says Tran Dang, founder and executive director of The Rhizome Center for Migrants in Guadalajara, Mexico, which supports deportees from the U.S. and has consulted on Mr. Barco's case.

His case has received a lot of media attention, dividing public opinion. His critics say that a man who fired a shot into a crowd deserves no absolution, regardless of his prior service to the country.

One in 3 veterans report having been arrested, compared with 1 in 5 people among the nonveteran population, according to data cited in a 2023 report by the Council on Criminal Justice, an independent think tank. Serving in the armed forces on its own doesn't lead to criminal activity, the report emphasizes, but there are risk factors, like combat exposure, that can make veterans more susceptible. A traumatic brain injury increases the odds of getting involved with the justice system by 59% among veterans, according to the report.

According to his American wife, Tia Barco, Mr. Barco says he has no memory of shooting the gun at the party, where he'd been a guest but was kicked out with his friends after reportedly firing a gun into a ceiling. Under medication that clouded his decision-making, he says, he fired his gun again as they were driving past the front porch of the house, where a group of people was gathered. That's how his victim was shot.

## A model prisoner

In prison, Mr. Barco taught GED classes to those also behind bars, and, after serving 15 of his 50-year sentence at the Colorado State Penitentiary, he was paroled for good behavior.

As he stepped out of the prison gates Jan. 21, 2025, the day after President Donald Trump started his second term in office, Mr. Barco was picked up by ICE and put in detention. He never got his U.S. citizenship because the paperwork for his application, which he submitted after his second tour, was lost, says his legal team.

"Most people are deported after completing their sentences," says Ms. Dang. "It's sort of like triple jeopardy. You just keep getting punished for the same thing," she says of U.S. policy toward noncitizen vets.

Retired Lt. Col. Michael Hutchinson was a leader in Mr. Barco's battalion and says he is sensitive to the concerns of the victim and her family. She did not return several attempted phone calls requesting an interview.

"If I was in their shoes, I can't say that I would think differently" from the argument that he deserves to be deported, says Mr. Hutchinson. "There are enough bad people who have served in uniform – you can't give everyone a free pass just for serving."

At the same time, Mr. Barco's case feels different, he says, because his combat wounds may have contributed to his crime. "Basically, everyone thought of him as a hero. And he was just the nicest person – the opposite of the usual blustery infantry guy."

Mr. Barco's pro bono legal team argued that he will face harm amounting to torture should he be deported to Venezuela. It is one of three countries, along with Cuba and Mexico, that ICE named as likely destinations for him.

Mr. Barco was born and lived in Caracas for four years until his Cuban parents – his father, a dissident, was imprisoned for opposing Fidel Castro's communist regime – were granted political asylum in the U.S.

All of his family is now in the U.S., Mr. Barco says. He has no ties to Venezuela or Cuba.

With his military background and training, officials in Havana or Caracas "could think I'm a plant, or trying to infiltrate the government or assassinate the president," Mr. Barco told immigration Judge Tyler Wood.

These risks are compounded at a moment when Mr. Trump said he authorized CIA action in Venezuela, and that President Nicolás Maduro's days in power could be numbered.

After ICE detained Mr. Barco, he waived his right to fight deportation at his initial hearing Feb. 12 in immigration court, without counsel, says Ms. Barco. He was sent to Honduras, where immigration agents from Venezuela processed deportees from the U.S. But they rejected him. They questioned his accent, which they said was Cuban, and his birth certificate, which they said looked fake.

Mr. Barco was asked in immigration court why he originally waived his right to fight deportation.

"I guess you could say I was desperate," he said. "I just wanted to be free – as I still do."

### Bringing veteran deportees "home"

Veterans outside the U.S. cannot access their VA benefits, and some morbidly joke that the easiest way to gain citizenship is to die. Despite deportation, those who served honorably are entitled to a military burial in the U.S., and families can sometimes apply for posthumous citizenship on their behalf.

A Biden-era program called the Immigrant Military Members and Veterans Initiative (IMMVI), launched in 2021, succeeded in bringing more than 100 deported veterans or veteran spouses back to the U.S., mostly through humanitarian parole. However, many are still living in limbo, required to renew their parole typically every year.

In late September, the immigration court verdict arrived for Mr. Barco: He lost his case and was once again ordered deported.In his ruling, the judge did not specify where Mr. Barco is to go.

During the early morning hours of Nov. 14, government officials removed him from the Arizona detention center. An ICE spokesperson said they had deported Mr. Barco to Mexico. ▪

THE EXPLAINER

WASHINGTON

# How immigration court is changing under Trump

The U.S. immigration court system has shape-shifted under the Trump administration, through policy changes, widespread courthouse arrests, and the firing of immigration judges.

Immigration courts have always operated with unique features. The system is part of the executive branch – not the judicial branch – and housed under the Justice Department. The courts are run by judges who settle questions such as whether to order an immigrant deported or grant them asylum. Over the past decade, the courts' backlog of cases grew more than eightfold, hitting a high of 3.7 million at the end of fiscal year 2024, according to an analysis by TRAC, a data-gathering organization.

**WHY WE WROTE THIS**

Immigration courts play a significant role in deciding who stays in the United States. The system is being transformed to speed up removal proceedings.

The U.S. immigration court system is "in crisis" because of its high caseload, as well as a need for increased funding and a greater focus on high-priority cases, says a report published recently by the Migration Policy Institute.

Typically inconspicuous, immigration courts have drawn public attention this year.

In March, the government admitted that the deportation of Kilmar Abrego Garcia to El Salvador violated an immigration judge's earlier order banning his removal to that country. Federal law enforcement this spring began widespread detentions of people present for immigration court hearings. Faith leaders have organized to accompany immigrants to their hearings for moral support.

The Trump administration cites efficiency to justify some of its recent changes – including assigning military lawyers to serve as immigration judges – and touts a substantial reduction in pending cases. Critics, meanwhile, say the moves trample the due process rights of immigrants, such as having their case heard. As the administration seeks to expand its deportation campaign, immigration courts are likely to stay in the limelight.

**Q: How does immigration court work?**

There are 73 immigration courts nationwide, with hearings run by about 600 immigration judges appointed by the Justice Department. The government recently onboarded additional judges, some serving temporary terms.

Immigration court is a system of administrative law. Some observers call its proceedings "civil" – as in noncriminal. But these courts don't follow federal civil-procedure rules as district courts do.

"Immigration court isn't really a court," at least not as outlined in Article III of the Constitution, says Alison Peck, author of "The Accidental History of the U.S. Immigration Courts." "It's not part of the independent judicial branch of government."

Immigration judges decide who gets deported and who gets relief, such as asylum – if the applicant seeks protection as a defense against deportation. These judges can order immigrants deported for a variety of reasons, such as entering the country illegally, overstaying a visa, or committing a crime unrelated to immigration. Immigrants don't need convictions from state or federal courts before they're ordered removed in this administrative setting.

A notice to appear starts the process in immigration court, known as removal proceedings. Noncitizens before this court – called respondents – are entitled to lawyers. But because these respondents aren't criminal defendants, they lack the right to legal counsel at the expense of the government. Children often appear in immigration court without representation.

Immigration judges don't always have the final say. Respondents whose cases were denied can appeal.

**Q: How backlogged is the court system?**

As of August, there were 3.4 million cases pending in immigration courts. The backlog often results in yearslong waits for hearings, which is a point of frustration for pro-enforcement and pro-immigrant advocates alike.

Last fiscal year, the number of pending cases shrunk by more than 700,000 cases, according to the Executive Office for Immigration Review, which oversees immigration courts. That office says there were more than 4.18 million pending cases at one point, a higher figure than TRAC has reported. Observers attribute the drop to a variety of factors, including fewer new cases as illegal entries plummet and more respondents placed in detention, where cases might move faster.

**Q: How have immigration courts changed under Trump?**

The administration has sought to speed up removal proceedings, detain more people in the process, and pursue more fast-track deportations that can bypass the courts.

"There's been a real focus on things being faster and more efficient – and a very, very black-and-white application of the law," says a member of the National Association of Immigration Judges, who asked not to be named due to retaliation fears and restrictive orders on speaking with the media.

Policy changes set by the administration have rolled back "previous safeguards" that were "almost to the level of law, because those policies were so ingrained in the immigration system," says the immigration judge, who is not speaking on behalf of the Executive Office for Immigration Review or the broader Justice Department overseeing immigration courts.

A shift toward more detention has had the greatest impact, says the judge. A decision this year from the Board of Immigration Appeals says immigration judges lack the authority to release certain immigrants from detention on bond.

In other cases, the Board of Immigration Appeals has empowered immigration judges to reject an asylum application if the form is incomplete, or if the immigrant doesn't establish eligibility on first impression of their case.

Media reports have also documented mounting arrests of im-

migrants at immigration courts – with and without dismissal of their cases. The government is often preparing those detained for fast-track deportations called "expedited removal," which can be carried out without a final order from an immigration judge.

**Q: Is the administration scaling back due process rights for immigrants?**

That's one of the biggest debates, including what process is "due" in each case. President Donald Trump, along with top officials, has lamented judicial processes and rulings that have curbed the White House's deportation push.

Many immigration lawyers disagree with his approach. "We are seeing the erosion of due process," says Jenine Saleh, a managing attorney at Human Rights First. "It's procedural suffocation masquerading as efficiency."

The immigration court system is being "undermined" and is "lacking impartiality," says Lory Rosenberg, a former appellate immigration judge who now mentors lawyers. For one, she says, the appellate board has adopted the Trump administration's view that more respondents should be held in custody during immigration proceedings. She also disagrees with the administration's narrowing of asylum eligibility in cases where a person says they're fleeing domestic violence.

Other critics of the system, including supporters of the administration, argue that immigration courts contain too much red tape. "Part of the reason why we have this massive backlog is because there is so much due process built into the system," says Andrew Arthur, a former immigration judge and resident fellow in law and policy at the Center for Immigration Studies.

**Q: What's happening with the firing of immigration judges?**

At the end of fiscal 2024, there were 735 immigration judges, according to the Justice Department. That number fell to 685 this past summer, the latest federal data available.

Now, the judges' union says some 600 judges hold hearings. Under this administration, the union says 141 judges have departed because of firings, deferred resignation, or reassignment. The Justice Department on Oct. 24 announced a hiring boost of 36 judges who include several military officers.

The administration is training judge advocates general – military lawyers – to serve at least temporarily as immigration judges. Some concerned Democratic lawmakers say the move appears to violate the Posse Comitatus Act, which generally prohibits use of the military for domestic law enforcement.

The service members are an appropriate stopgap, but "not a long-term solution," says Cully Stimson, a former top Navy judge and current senior legal fellow at the Heritage Foundation. The plan "takes away from our duties to the military," he says, adding that immigration judges need the same procedural tools that other federal judges wield to reduce their caseload.

**– Sarah Matusek and Caitlin Babcock** / Staff writers



BOSTON AND BERLIN

# Gen Zers have taken on their governments. From around the world, they tell us why.

**By Audrey Thibert** / Staff writer
**and Mark Sappenfield** / Senior global correspondent

Sambidhan Prasai was not sure he was wearing the right pants to a revolution.

Did orange Lululemon shorts say Che Guevara or casual jog?

But the human tide toward the centers of power in Kathmandu was inexorable, and he was swept into it with what he had on. Generation Z had taken to the streets in Nepal, and there was no chance of him being left behind.

"The air felt charged, like the whole country was holding its breath," he says, weeks after the youth-led protests that toppled the government.

And in the moment of that national breath, the protest became something more than a generation's grievances, larger than any of the 20-something organizers.

"The protest wasn't just a gathering; it was a heartbeat that was loud, insistent, and unstoppable," he adds. "People from every walk of life were there, chanting, waving flags, holding signs up with trembling hands. The slogans echoed off the old Kathmandu buildings."

**WHY WE WROTE THIS**

Gen Zers have brought down governments because they want good governance. From around the globe, they tell us how they're inspiring each other's activism in a hyperconnected world.

"I was exactly where I needed to be," says the 22-year-old.

From Nepal to Peru and from Madagascar to Morocco, Generation Z has awoken. Protests worldwide have rocked, even overthrown, governments. In the process, they have sent a clear message. Gen Zers feel their future is slipping away from them.

They are playing the game of academic achievement, but where are the well-paying jobs they were promised? Meanwhile, as they work two jobs or wake up at 3 a.m. simply to get a good seat in overcrowded university classes, social media offers a steady stream of Instagram-perfect lives – the privileged living in luxury. So Gen Z has used the internet to fight back.

The revolution has come with plentiful brushstrokes of youth, from the use of a gaming platform to organize to the ubiquitous symbol of the movement – a Jolly Roger flag taken from a popular Japanese comic. Some protesters needed their parents' permission to participate.

Yet what is perhaps most extraordinary about the Gen Z protests worldwide, experts say, is their unprecedented interconnection. A global generation has spawned a global movement.

David Clark of Binghamton University has studied protest movements for years. This is the first time he's seen so many protests refer to one another. With hashtags, movements are creating chain reactions.

"We're seeing more citation – protests referring to other pro-

tests," he says.

This is a different kind of revolution.

## From video games to the streets

Nepal was a kindling spark for Fadoua Badih and her Gen Z peers in Morocco.

The sense that she needed to do something came slowly. First, there was the 2023 earthquake and its underwhelming government response; some survivors are still living in tents without access to hospitals or schools. Then came the ramp-up to the 2030 soccer World Cup, on which Morocco – a co-host – has spent about $5 billion.

"Why can you spend money on those things that we don't need at the same moment people are living on the streets?" says the 24-year-old.

There were some small protests around the country, but nothing was gaining traction. Then Nepal happened.

"We just woke up one day and went onto TikTok and saw what was going on," she adds. "I was like, 'The Gen Z did it this time.'"

Ms. Badih had joined the gaming platform Discord years earlier. It allowed her to play games with her friends online. But after Nepal, the conversations in the chat boards changed. "People were like, 'We should do it, too! It's time. We should speak up. Have you seen what happened in Nepal?'"

Her story echoes those of others worldwide.

Youth protests in Indonesia have been on slow burn since the beginning of the year. Frustration has been aimed at various government policies, but it stems from the same root: a widespread sense of inequity across generational lines. For Nazla, a student organizer who asked that her last name not be published because of her political work, her anger grew after the government attempted to lower the age for vice president, so the son of the previous president could run. Nazla, like many others, viewed the move as an attempt to entrench a political dynasty.

She has not felt alone this year. Citing youth movements from the Philippines to Nepal, Nazla says, "Their resistance, youth resistance, gives me both a blueprint and a sense of solidarity that we are not alone demanding accountability from those in power. It's like a rippling effect."

The 21-year-old, who is studying political science at the University of Indonesia, has not taken to the streets, primarily because her mother will not let her due to concerns about her health. But that does not mean she is not involved. During the protests, she helped design posts and digital campaigns, including Instagram slides with data and infographics explaining what the protest was about.

"It felt like I was a part of the movement, just with a different front line," she says.

## Learning rights online

Youth have used their technological savvy to understand their rights, when it comes to limits of police force or lawful procedures around detention and identification, especially where violence has flared.

This has been the great value of social media – providing the connective tissue that keeps movements connected and informed. "The protests are very decentralized but heavily coordinated online," says Dr. Clark. "That makes it harder for governments to decapitate the movement."

The protesters themselves appear more interested in reform than in the overthrow of governments. In Nepal, they turned fiery, with hundreds of buildings burned down before the prime minister resigned and a new one was chosen (over Discord), but that wasn't in the demands, Mr. Prasai says. The demands were to stop corruption.

Corruption, incompetence, and inequality have left Gen Z without opportunity. That message is being conveyed with a particular Gen Z flair. Protesters in Nepal created the "nepo baby" social media meme, using the wealth displayed in online postings of privileged children to stoke outrage. And every Gen Z protest has adopted the "One Piece" flag as a central symbol. The long-running manga and anime series pits a band of misfit pirates against the hegemonic might of a rapacious "world government."

This "meme-ification" of protest "feels new" to Sam Nadel, director of the Social Change Lab, which studies social movements. On the other hand, "there has been a role across history of humor and satire," he adds. "It is most effective when it challenges the legitimacy of the state in creative ways."

The neighborhood where Rakotoseheno Fanilo Marc Adriano lives in Antananarivo, Madagascar, recently had no water all day. On a different day, it had only three hours of electricity. Now an entrepreneur with a small digital marketing company, the 20-something remembers his days as a student and says with understatement that the conditions were "not optimal." During his first year at university, he sometimes woke up at 3 a.m. to get a front-row seat because there were almost 1,000 people in his class.

He considers himself fortunate to have found a job. But he sees the future of a generation of his peers being squandered. "Young Malagasy are really talented, with a lot of skills and potential," he says. "One of the points of the protests was to get rid of some of the barriers that are stopping young Malagasy from evolving."

The protests point to the emergence of a new kind of class war.

"The rhetoric is class-based, but it's not the classic class struggle we saw during the proliferation of socialist ideology in the 1960s and '70s," says Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, an assistant professor at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand who studies social movements and digital activism. "They are demands regarding everyday things: jobs, health care, public services. All these combined point to a sense of dignity."

## Two Moroccos

To Moroccans, "Maghreb" – the Arabic word for Morocco – expresses the "real" country that most Moroccans live in and feel is left behind, while the government promotes megaprojects and tourism.

"Morocco starts working on the World Cup, and you can see there's a split between Morocco and Maghreb," says Ms. Badih. "There is no progress in Maghreb. [The government officials] don't care about it.

"And then in Morocco, you can see Casablanca, Rabat, and skyscrapers," she says. "So people are angry about it."

Her family has known about her involvement in social justice for years now. One of her two jobs is as a social media manager for nongovernment organizations. She has also started a business with friends to help with waste recycling across the country.

But protesting is a different prospect in authoritarian Morocco. "My family sometimes says to be careful or avoid certain things, but they have seen that no matter how much they tell me, I still have to do it," she says. "Yes, I am careful."

She brings her ID, a water bottle, and papers with the numbers of her family and lawyers who can help if she is arrested. She never brings signs, which are a sure way to get arrested. She knows her rights.

She says she was standing with one of her male friends when a police officer said they shouldn't be there because it was illegal.

"'What's illegal about it?'" she answered. "They start lying about the law because they think that we don't know much about it. But, I'm sorry, we do understand."

Still, she knows the risks. "It is scary, in a way, I'm not going to lie to you," she says. "You go out to protest, and you don't know if you're coming back."

But now is the time for a new generation to step up, says Kihuria Wa Ndorongo, who went to university but, like many in Kenya, is still looking for a job. For now, the 30-something is a "freelance social media blogger." He sees change in Kenya's youth protests.

"I feel proud of my country that finally the youth are taking charge

of affairs," says Mr. Ndorongo, who also brings a water bottle in his bag to each protest – and a Kenyan flag. "Because in the past, the older generation were the ones who were shaping the narrative, the political conversation, but now, the youth took up the issues in their own hands."

Worldwide, other Gen Zers have been watching, and feeling hopeful.

"Our generation got it good, in a way, because we are a part of a more global, digital world so we are focused and informed, and communicating with each other," says Ms. Badih. "We know how to get long-term systemic improvements rather than just emotional reactions. We want change." ▪

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

## 43

**Days,** the length of the longest United States government shutdown in history, surpassing the 2018-19 record of 35 days. It lasted from Oct. 1 to Nov. 12.

## 7

**Senate Democrats,** plus one independent, who voted with Republican colleagues. Five of the Democrats represent swing states, and two are not running for reelection.

## 2

**House Republicans** who voted with the majority of Democrats on Nov. 12 against the funding bill. Kentucky Rep. Thomas Massie dinged the bill for overspending, while Florida Rep. Greg Steube objected to a provision that lets senators sue the government for obtaining their data without notice.

## 670,000

**Government employees** who have returned to work after being furloughed.

## 47

**Percentage of Americans** who say they are worried about affording heath care in the coming year, according to a survey from Gallup and West Health.

## 24 MILLION

**Americans** receiving health insurance this year through the Affordable Care Act marketplace. Many Democrats said the shutdown was necessary to force their GOP colleagues to negotiate on health care subsidies, which expire at the end of the year. The shutdown ended without any agreement on health care subsidies.

**– Victoria Hoffmann and Audrey Thibert** / Staff writers

Sources: Brookings Institution, The Associated Press, ABC News, The Christian Science Monitor, Semafor, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

# Science Fuse lights a spark or Pakistan's 'invisible children'

**By Kanika Gupta** / Contributor

Twelve years ago, Lala Rukh led a science workshop for children in a slum area of Karachi, Pakistan's most populous city. The kids had fun making slime, bubbles, and tiny explosions in water.

But, at the end, a child posed a question that broke Ms. Rukh's heart. "They came up to me and said, 'When will you come back?'" she recalls.

Ms. Rukh had not planned to come back.

At the time, she was based in Norway, working for a social enterprise that aims to stoke young people's interest in science, technology, engineering, and math. But because Ms. Rukh's parents are Pakistanis, and she had spent much of her childhood in Lahore and Karachi, she retained a deep connection to Pakistan.

The Karachi girl's question moved Ms. Rukh. "That planted the seed in my heart that I should take this work to Pakistan," she says.

In 2017, she founded Science Fuse, a social enterprise that primarily teaches children in impoverished areas, including Machar Colony in Karachi. The sprawling slum area is home to immigrant families such as ethnic Bengalis, most of whom are denied Pakistani citizenship. Now based in the United Kingdom, Ms. Rukh logs on to her computer most days at 4 a.m. to connect with team members in three Pakistani cities who conduct in-person science workshops for children and teachers. She also facilitates the work of freelance educators across Pakistan who lead in-person or remote sessions. To date, Science Fuse has taught tens of thousands of marginalized children.

**WHY WE WROTE THIS**

By connecting science to kids' daily lives, a social enterprise is getting impoverished children excited about learning.

Kanika Gupta, a Monitor contributor based in New Delhi, interviewed Ms. Rukh via video in September. This transcript has been condensed and edited for clarity.

**Q: You have worked with the kids in Machar Colony, who are called Pakistan's invisible children. What kinds of challenges do the children face?**

Most of that community that is settled in Machar Colony, they are fishermen and they are fisherwomen. They catch the fishes and the shrimps, and they gut them. The children are mostly out of school, and they help and support their parents in catching the fish.

The settlement itself has very poor infrastructure, no drainage system. It's the most vulnerable community in [Karachi]. There are some schools, but these schools are either government schools or very low-income private schools. The quality of education is never to a standard where these children can engage in activities or learning that is inspiring, that will give them the skills to lead a better life.

**Q: Why do you think science education is important for this community?**

Because every child, irrespective of where they come from, has an inherent curiosity. You can't say that science is just made for people who have a lot of money or people who look a certain way or who come from a specific background. Everywhere, every child has the right to high-quality education that can allow them to fulfill their own potential. First, to build a life of dignity for themselves. And

then, secondly, as a tool to solve the problems of their communities.

Science, it gives you the tools to imagine solutions. It gives you problem-solving skills. It gives you critical-thinking abilities. It gives you grit and resilience. And it gives you an understanding of how the world operates. For a community like this, science education can be very powerful.

We teach science through play-based activities. That is even more important for a child who hasn't gone through mainstream school. If they're out of school, you can't really put them into a mainstream school and expect them to catch up like other children.

**Q: Tell me about the first science workshop you did in Machar Colony. What did you teach?**

We reached out to an organization, Imkaan. They have a space called Khel, which means "play" [in Urdu]. This is an informal learning center where children from Machar Colony who are out of school come, and they're given different educational experiences. We said to Imkaan that "We work in STEM education, we make science playful. How about we introduce this to your teachers?"

These teachers, they come from the very same community. If you empower them, and if you teach them something, it's going to stay with the community, and it will benefit many more children.

We selected four teachers. These four teachers, especially the female teachers, lacked a lot of confidence, and they were very shy. So, the first thing we did was that we went to Khel, we gathered the children around us, and we did something called a science show.

We literally take very low-cost materials – for example, eggs – and we put lots and lots of weight on the eggs. Then we ask the children, "Do you think the eggs are going to break?" And the eggs don't break, actually, because they have that arch shape.

We tell them that the arch shape actually distributes or spreads out the force. You're teaching them about structures, about weight, about forces. You also teach them about Newton's third law. Concepts that in a physics classroom or in a physics textbook may sound very complicated suddenly become very playful. They become very interesting.

Because these experiments use materials that are low-cost and easily available, the children will continue them at home.

**Q: What kind of participation did you see from the teachers and students?**

The teachers were very intrigued, very interested, very engaged. That's the whole idea – that we don't make it sound alien. We connect it to their everyday life.

We'll explain it in an easy way and then encourage them to use that same language when they're speaking to the children. And not use that jargon-heavy textbook language.

"You don't know anything, we know everything" – that's not our attitude.

Pakistan's teachers are the biggest workforce in the country. They're under-resourced, they're overworked. They don't often get the right kind of salaries. So, we always create this atmosphere where we empathize with them. We tell them that, "OK, we are going to work with you, sit with you, and teach you all of the things that we know. And also learn from you." ▪



# A HEART FOR ANIMALS, BUT NO HOME

Can people without housing care for their pets? Online, the debate turns negative. On the streets, people seek solutions.

**By Michael Benanav** / Special contributor

**SANTA FE, N.M.**

This past April, social media users shared a video that was said to show a homeless man brutally beating his dog in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Within days, the dog's owner, Chris McMurtry, began receiving threats from animal-lovers. Some commenters on the local Nextdoor platform suggested that someone should offer to buy the corgi mix, named Desi, while others proposed stealing her, in order to save her life. Within weeks, Desi went missing.

Mr. McMurtry immediately phoned the Street Homeless Animal Project, a nonprofit advocate for homeless people and their pets. "The worst has happened," he said.

As Santa Fe, like many cities across America, grapples with how to address homelessness, tensions are spiking over the welfare of homeless people's pets. And some residents, frustrated by what they perceive to be abusive and neglectful behavior by some homeless dog-owners, may have decided to take the law into their own hands, police believe.

**WHY WE WROTE THIS**

Human beings have long had special relationships with canine companions. But are the dogs of people without housing cared for? Our correspondent investigates.

But here's the thing: The person in the video is not Mr. McMurtry. And, while the man in the footage is evidently inebriated, making strange, contorted motions with his upper body, Desi is seen standing off to the side, wagging her tail, for most of the half-minute clip. According to the head of the Santa Fe Animal Services department, there is no indication in the video or otherwise that Desi was being abused. "The dog is just looking at him like, 'What's the deal?'" says Capt. Amanda Montaño.

When I caught up with Mr. McMurtry one day behind a Dollar Tree store, he was unequivocal: He was there, he says, just off camera, and the man in the video "was not hitting Desi."

The Santa Fe Police Department is investigating Desi's disappearance as an animal abduction, a misdemeanor theft, and suspects that vigilante dog "rescuers" were involved. Her whereabouts, six months later, remain unknown.

Mr. McMurtry is devastated by Desi's absence. He has owned Desi for over six years, he explains, adopting her when she was about 8 weeks old from another homeless person who couldn't take care of her. He hadn't been looking for a dog, but she quickly became the center of his world.

At one point during our conversation, he breaks down, crying. "I have a big heart, and I love my dog," Mr. McMurtry says. "This is the worst possible thing that could happen to me."

Mr. McMurtry takes pride in being "a really good dog-owner. I would do anything for my dog." But now, he feels, "the whole town

is looking at me as a dog abuser. It's insane what people were saying." Still devoted to Desi, he hasn't gotten a new dog. "I have to have closure," he says. "I'll never stop trying to find her."

But there's not much he can do on his own, and police say there are "no new leads" in the case.

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**SANTA FE IS HOME** to around 90,000 residents. Official estimates put its homeless population at some 375 individuals, though new data suggests there may be as many as 1,600.

On any given day, it's impossible to drive around town without spotting homeless people holding signs on median strips asking for help, approaching shoppers in grocery store parking lots, or hanging out in public spaces. A substantial, though uncounted, number of them have companion animals – mostly dogs.

As a lifelong dog-lover who lives near Santa Fe, I often wondered how these animals are doing. Do they have enough food and water? Are they too hot in summer, too cold in winter? Do they have shelter at night? At heart, I suppose, I questioned how well a person who is apparently struggling to meet their own needs could properly care for another living being.

I took an interest in local social media threads that painted the situation as dire. Some posters called for bans on homeless people owning pets, while others accused specific individuals of animal abuse, referring to them as "scum" and "evil," among other unflattering characterizations. I had no idea whether any of the allegations about the conditions of unhoused canine companions were true, and wanted to find out.

One woman whom I met at a coffee shop, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of local retribution, expressed deep concern for the welfare of the dogs. She described scenes of dogs abandoned for hours while their owners were off somewhere using fentanyl. She named certain homeless people as serial dog abusers. Speaking of many homeless folks, she says, "If they can't take care of themselves, they can't take care of an animal." The same sentiment is expressed by someone else, word for word, in one of the Nextdoor threads about Desi. On the face of it, this logic made sense.

But then I asked the Animal Services department and the Santa Fe Animal Shelter about a handful of the dogs that are most frequently mentioned in online forums as victims of cruelty. According to their records, which were corroborated by interviews I conducted on the streets, none of the dogs about which I inquired have shown any signs of being abused or malnourished.

One instance of neglect was confirmed by a dog's owner, Brad Wolleson, who says he was sick one cold winter night and left his dog in the care of a friend. That person abandoned the dog and tied her to a pole in a street median. The dog, Lily, was picked up by a passerby and taken to the animal shelter.

"It was a mistake," Mr. Wolleson says with remorse. "I don't let other people watch her anymore." He says he takes better care of Lily, who looks fit and healthy, than of himself. "She always has food and water, even if I don't."

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**SOME ANIMAL ADVOCATES** in Santa Fe believe the best way to help these pets is not to rehome them, but to give their owners the assistance they need to care for them. One of these advocates is Karen Cain, who runs the Street Homeless Animal Project.

The back of Ms. Cain's white pickup truck is stocked like a dog-centric outdoor specialty store: Most days find her driving around town passing out bags of kibble, harnesses, bowls, and blankets for the pets of homeless people, while also giving tarps, tents, sleeping bags, heaters, and $20 food cards to their humans. If one of these dogs is sick or injured, the project will pay its veterinary bills, also covering the costs of wellness checkups, heartworm prevention, and spaying and neutering. Ms. Cain's mission is to "provide support for companion animals of unhoused people."

"When we started back in 1998, it was just about the animals," she told me. "Now, it's about the 'family' – if a person is not OK, their dog is not OK."

Those who believe that dogs can live good lives with homeless owners often point out that having a roof over its head is no guarantee that a dog isn't suffering.

Taimie Bryant, a UCLA law professor who is deeply engaged with animal rights issues, says that people without housing are subject to a "visibility bias."

"We see dogs living on the street who clearly need more than they receive," Dr. Bryant says. "But we don't see what's going on behind closed doors in many homes where dogs are housed. We can't assume that housed dogs are treated well, just as we can't assume that unhoused dogs are treated badly."

Real-world experience shows how flawed such assumptions can be. One Santa Fe Animal Services officer, Mariah Anderson, says, "We encounter neglect more often in dogs that live in homes."

Mr. Wolleson tells me that he understands why people are concerned about the dogs they see with homeless people. But he says, "If someone on the street isn't taking care of their dog, you can talk to them and they'll fix it – and the ones who don't will usually give their dog away. Usually, people listen. It just depends on how you talk to them."

Still, that doesn't mean that cases of abuse or neglect don't exist on the streets. Some people without housing who own dogs struggle with serious addiction problems, or simply don't have the emotional bandwidth to consistently care for an animal.

Though Ms. Cain's goal is to keep homeless people and their pets together, when she becomes aware of a potentially problematic situation, she alerts Animal Services. "Not everyone should own a dog," she says, "whether they're housed or unhoused."

Decisions about whether to separate a dog from its owner are left to the discretion of Animal Services officers – and ultimately would be resolved by a court, if the case gets that far, since, legally, a dog is the property of its owner and can't be taken away without due process. While many places have anti-cruelty statutes, Dr. Bryant says that these are "values expressed in law" that do not grant dogs any actual rights.

She and other experts working on animal rights issues say the legal terrain is fraught with complexities. Laura Ireland, associate director of the Animal Law and Policy Institute at Vermont Law and Graduate School, points out that conferring rights on animals could have wide-ranging implications, from food production to decisions about veterinary care.

One key question she raises is, "Who gets to speak for the animals? If someone lives in Alaska and owns a husky, great. But what if that person decides to move to a small apartment in southern Arizona? Should that dog be taken away," since it might be miserable there? she asks.

It's possible, Ms. Ireland suggests, that the lives of dogs who belong to people without housing "are actually better than those who are stuck inside alone all day.

"If you're looking at the emotional well-being of an animal, the pet who is with their person all the time may be happier," she says.

Critics of Santa Fe's Animal Services division say that, when it comes to the homeless community, animal ordinances are not enforced as vigorously as they should be.

In response, Deputy Police Chief Ben Valdez says, "It'd be cruel to have black-and-white enforcement to seize dogs. Some of these pets are the only family people have. And it's not good for the animals to be in the shelter – it's heartbreaking.

"Our staff looks at the overall welfare of the dog and what's going to be in the best interest of getting the situation addressed,"

he continues. Actual instances of people without housing abusing their dogs are "very rare."

Deputy Chief Valdez notes that when a wellness check was performed on Desi after the video was posted, the dog showed no signs of abuse or neglect. "That guy cared for Desi – those two were tight." As for the allegations she was beaten, he says, "Someone made an assumption."

Another homeless man about whom assumptions have been made on social media is Brandon Tadlock, a U.S. Army veteran who served in Afghanistan.

When photos of Mr. Tadlock's dog Annie were posted online showing some marks on her face, some people leaped to the conclusion that he had deliberately burned her. "But they were just nibble marks from when she was playing with a puppy," he explains to me.

After a veterinarian assessed the dog, she confirmed Mr. Tadlock's account in a written report, adding, "Annie is in great shape and I have met her guardian who loves her and takes wonderful care of her."

Some didn't want to believe it. "They called the vet a liar," Mr. Tadlock says. "I would never hurt her [Annie]. I love her, and she loves me."

Homeless people who have pets are well aware that some in Santa Fe wish they didn't. Ciprianna Roybal, who was born here and has been living on and off the streets for a couple of years, owns Little Fatty – who is stocky, but not little.

When I met her, Ms. Roybal was also fostering Amor, a 17-week-old puppy who belongs to a homeless friend of hers who "has a lot on his plate," she says.

"I guess a lot of people think that homeless people shouldn't have pets," Ms. Roybal says. "But Fatty keeps me safe. There are a lot of creeps out there."

"It's none of their business whether we have dogs or not," she continues. "It would be like us saying, 'You shouldn't have kids.' Who are you to say we shouldn't have dogs? My dog is as fit as a horse. He eats before I do. I wouldn't trade him for anything in the world. He's like my kid."

It's not unusual for homeless people to step in and care for dogs that are in tough circumstances, as Ms. Roybal did with Amor and Mr. McMurtry did with Desi.

One man who was camped in an arroyo near a shopping mall and goes by the street name Red Beard says, "We save dogs." His dog, Dazy Duke, whom he adores, "would've died from mange and malnourishment if I didn't rescue her. She's been the best six years of my life."

Red Beard's friend Matthew, who was wearing torn tan overalls and two pairs of glasses taped together, diagnoses the root of the animosity toward homeless pet owners. With his dog, Guido, by his side, Matthew, who along with Red Beard did not want to share their full names, says, "People treat other people like garbage because we don't get to know each other."

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**MANY DOGS BELONGING** to homeless people spend time, at one point or another, in the Santa Fe Animal Shelter. Most commonly, they're taken in when their owners are incarcerated, typically for trespassing or for failure to appear in court.

Since they are their owners' property, the shelter must return them, unless Animal Services or the courts intervene. If a person without housing can't afford to pay the shelter fees, the Street Homeless Animal Project, known as SHAP, will cover them. This raises the ire of detractors, who think the dogs would be better off if they were adopted out to owners with homes.

The senior director of operations at the Santa Fe Animal Shelter, Dylan Moore, believes that, in most cases, it is in the best interest of dogs to be reunited with their owners, even if they don't have a home.

"Not all dogs can adapt to a new routine after being on the streets for some time," says Mr. Moore. "Can someone adopt them and then leave them in the house and go to work?" Many of these dogs, he adds, respond poorly to being in the shelter, and behave in ways that make them less likely to be adopted.

"These dogs stay in the kennel longer. They decompensate, and can spiral down into a welfare concern," Mr. Moore says. "A lot of them face a much higher percentage of euthanasia. If my choice is to expose a dog to more shelter time or euthanasia, I don't know why I wouldn't give the dog back to an unhoused person, especially if there is support for them like SHAP provides."

Mr. Moore also speaks of the "vacuum effect." If you take a dog away from a person without housing who wants a companion, "they'll just get another one. And it'll probably be unvaccinated, and then I'm concerned about it having puppies. But our ability to help them is diminished, because they won't trust us anymore." He has concluded that if you want to help homeless people's dogs, "taking them away is not the answer."

Of course, this is precisely what authorities believe rogue actors decided to do with Desi.

Mr. McMurtry is hoping that whoever has her will learn the truth about him and return her. "I have to get her back," he says. "Thinking that she thinks I abandoned her is crushing." ▪

**PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD**

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

# The Golden Rule and a life of meaning

In his last official Thanksgiving letter to shareholders in early November, business titan and retiring Berkshire Hathaway CEO Warren Buffett announced that he's "going quiet."

In fact, this "quiet" farewell from one of the world's wealthiest individuals will likely echo through the halls of American business and philanthropy for some time to come.

For investors, there is keen interest in how Greg Abel, Mr. Buffet's handpicked successor, will perform as chief executive of one of the United States' 10 largest firms.

But it is at the intersection of affluence and altruism, of gaining and giving, that Mr. Buffett's words and actions carry outsize implications. He has donated $60 billion over the last 20 years, and recently gifted $1.3 billion from sales of stock to four family foundations. That still leaves $150 billion of his personal fortune to be given away.

"The most enduring part of the letter wasn't financial," wrote executive coach Marcel Schwantes in Inc. "Buffett didn't talk about markets, mergers, or money."

Instead, he shared a "roadmap" on how to "build lives of meaning."

The letter was issued the same week that the longest U.S. government shutdown ended. The 43-day period underscored the economic precariousness of hundreds of thousands of Americans. Neighbors and nonprofits stepped up to meet basic needs amid furloughs, paused paychecks, and frozen benefits. Such generosity embodies a sentiment in Mr. Buffett's missive.

"When you help someone in any of thousands of ways, you help the world," he stated, adding that "greatness" comes through such acts, not money, publicity, or power.

The multibillionaire has long viewed his wealth as the fruit of opportunities and support from trusted colleagues more than as a

personal achievement. "It is beyond arrogance for American businesses or individuals to boast that they have 'done it alone,'" he said in 2019. Rather, it's because there is "no incubator for unleashing human potential like America."

This year, Mr. Buffett happily shared that Berkshire Hathaway paid $26.8 billion in corporate taxes for 2024, the highest such payment made to the U.S. government.

This sense of obligation to the country is accompanied by a down-home humility, frugality, and folksiness. In that spirit, two simple sentences in Mr. Buffett's letter offer food for thought – not just during the end-of-year holiday season, but yearlong:

"Kindness is costless but also priceless. Whether you are religious or not, it's hard to beat The Golden Rule as a guide to behavior." ▪

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

# What Mexicans want – and deserve

Coordinated protests in Mexico last month were organized through social media tools popular among youth around the world. But labeling them "Gen Z protests" would miss the significance of this movement for all Mexicans.

In fact, the estimated 17,000 people who marched in Mexico City on Nov. 15 represented a cross section of Mexican society. The multigenerational march was sparked by outrage over the recent killings of a popular, tough-on-crime mayor and the head of a citrus growers' association.

"This reaction, organic and honest ... is something new," an analyst told CNN.

It hints at a groundswell in public demand for a better democracy, honest government, and basic safety. As cartel-linked collusion and violence have infiltrated institutions over decades, political leaders have alternated between crackdowns and being hands-off. Meanwhile, ordinary Mexicans just want less corruption and more responsiveness.

President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, in office just over a year, has made some headway. This year, Mexico has imprisoned or extradited numerous drug kingpins, partly in response to pressure from the United States. At the same time, it is rebuilding a civilian police force, tracing dirty money, and coordinating local and national crime data and responses.

The government recently claimed a 32% decrease in the national murder rate; other analyses put it at a more modest 14% decline. Either way, this statistic is moving in the right direction – though some experts estimate there will still be approximately 24,000 murders this year.

Another factor that might support Mexico's progress on violent crime is newfound cooperation from the U.S. Data shows that up to 75% of weapons seized in Mexico flow in from the U.S. In September, the two countries announced Mission Firewall, an initiative to improve interdiction of firearms.

Such coordination and sustained efforts, rather than high-profile drug busts or political pronouncements, can effectively chip away at the economic and cultural pillars that support cartels and narco violence.

According to respected historian and author Enrique Krauze, Mexicans deserve more than populist or authoritarian promises of change. Instead, as he told the National Review a few years ago, "They deserve the slow, difficult building of a democracy." ▪

ANALYSIS

LONDON

# Trump sees a 'con' in climate change. Xi sees cash.

More than 40,000 delegates from nearly 200 countries gathered in Brazil, on the edge of the Amazon rainforest, in mid-November for the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference, commonly known as COP30. This latest gathering comes amid a dramatic shift – along with an improbable glimmer of hope – in the politics of climate change.

No two nations matter more in whether, and how, the world adopts clean energy technology than two superpowers with increasingly divergent approaches: the United States and China.

U.S. President Donald Trump recently branded climate change "the greatest con job ever." He has doubled down on America's world-leading production of oil and gas, and he is ignoring the COP30 conference.

GLOBAL PATTERNS
**BY NED TEMKO**
*Connecting key themes in the world's news.*

Chinese leader Xi Jinping is making a very different economic bet. And that is the source of the "improbable glimmer of hope" among some delegates.

For while China remains by far the largest emitter of fossil-fuel gases, Mr. Xi's government has been investing hundreds of billions of dollars in solar and wind energy, storage batteries, and electric vehicles.

That technology is not just for domestic use. It is also for export.

That has begun giving less-developed countries something almost unimaginable a few years ago: a path to growth that need not rely totally on fossil fuels.

Pakistan has begun importing large numbers of solar panels. Nearly three-quarters of car buyers in Nepal now choose Chinese electric vehicles. Ethiopia has banned the import of gas-powered cars altogether. The sheer pace and scale of the increase in solar- and wind-energy output, with China staking out near-monopoly dominance, and a steep decrease in costs, has been leading major developing economies such as India, Nigeria, and the oil-rich Gulf emirate of Abu Dhabi to embark on solar energy initiatives.

And it has been making a measurable difference. Worldwide industrial use of fossil fuels has begun to fall, mainly because most of China's smaller manufacturing plants are shifting to green energy.

China's total emissions are also on course to fall this year. Yet only by around 1% – in a country that accounts for one-third of global coal consumption.

That helps explain the greatest concern voiced at COP30: that the world might be losing the race to head off the most serious effects of global warming.

Concentrations of carbon gas in the atmosphere increased last year, by the largest amount on record. The temperature of the oceans is at a record high. The planet's temperature over the past three years has been the highest ever recorded.

And even with China's recalibration, a wholesale, worldwide shift away from fossil fuels still seems a distant prospect.

So, too, seems the likelihood of meeting the goal set by the landmark Paris accord 10 years ago – to keep the planet's temperature no higher than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.

The Paris accord was made possible by the coordinated ef-

forts of the U.S. and China. Now, the future of climate change policy could hinge on the countries' rivalry, which has intensified since 2015.

Polling has shown that fewer and fewer people worldwide share Mr. Trump's belief that climate change is a "fabrication." The growing frequency and intensity of storms and flooding, heat waves and wildfires, has reinforced concern.

But Mr. Trump's argument that other issues, such as economic questions around jobs and immigration, should take precedence does strike a chord in Europe. There, political leaders have been facing new headwinds as they seek to promote green policies.

And it is in the field of potential economic benefits that the climate-change rivalry between the U.S. and China might well be decided. For Mr. Xi's investments in clean-energy technology is not driven mainly by climate science.

His is an economic calculation. For China, "going green" is not a cost. It is an opportunity. ▪

## GLOBAL NEWSSTAND

JAMAICA OBSERVER / KINGSTON, JAMAICA

### After Hurricane Melissa, the world rushed to help

"In the wake of Hurricane Melissa's devastating onslaught, Jamaica stands at a crossroads – one marked by destruction, but also by compassion and hope," states an editorial. "... Amid the grief and uncertainty, there has emerged a powerful reminder of the world's enduring solidarity. From near and far, nations, organisations, and individuals have rushed to Jamaica's aid, offering supplies, expertise, and funds to help our people recover and rebuild. ... In an age often defined by division and self-interest, this outpouring of empathy reminds us that humanity's best qualities – kindness, compassion, and cooperation – still prevail. ... Our Government must ensure that the administration of aid – both material and financial – is ... equitable. ... This is a moment for moral leadership and transparency."

AL JAZEERA / DOHA, QATAR

### Young people want schools and health care

"A wave of youth-led 'Gen Z' protests is sweeping the world," writes Amitabh Behar, executive director of Oxfam International. "... If governments do not respond ... with improvement in public services and stronger social protection, ... they risk further resistance and protests. ... The good news is that none of this is inevitable. There are many examples of countries that have bucked the trend. Take, for example, Thailand with its world-class public healthcare system available to all citizens. Or the hundreds of millions of children who have benefited from primary education being made free across Africa. Good public services are within the reach of every government. ... They must respond [to these protests] not with bullets and batons, but with classrooms and clinics."

THE JAKARTA POST / JAKARTA, INDONESIA

### Governments can help people build happy societies

"Finland has been chosen for the eighth time in a row as the happiest country in the world," writes Elina Valtonen, minister of foreign affairs in Finland. "... We invested in what we believed in: people, education and ensuring that every child has equal opportunities. ... It is through skilled people and full engagement in the global market economy that a country can punch far above its weight. ... The Finnish model is built on equal participation. ... Finland was built into a strong democracy that, as the first country in Europe, granted women full suffrage. We created a society in which individual freedom and the opportunity to succeed are real."

THE GUARDIAN / LONDON

### Reformists: Tell stories to change minds

"How can we convince people to change their minds about political and social issues?" writes Talia Woodin, an environmental activist. "... The most effective strategy is storytelling. ... Terrifyingly, the far right often does this most effectively. Its straightforward and digestible narrative cuts through because it speaks directly to feelings of ... disenfranchisement. ... Meanwhile, the left gets tangled up in internal debates and abstract theories of change. ... Reimagining what it means to be British could be a starting point for challenging the divisive and persecutory language of ... the hard right. A video released by the Trades Union Congress [in November] that highlighted a workplace friendship between third-generation Irish and first-generation Pakistani colleagues was an effective example of this. By telling these sorts of stories, we can begin to replace fear and exclusion with empathy, connection and a shared sense of belonging."

THE NEW TIMES / KIGALI, RWANDA

### History – and who owns it – matters

"Over 90 percent of Rwanda's historical artifacts ... remain kept in European museums," states an editorial. "... These materials are not mere objects. They are vessels of memory, knowledge, and pride, the threads that connect generations of Rwandans to their heritage. ... Rwanda, like many African nations, has made strides in preserving and digitizing its cultural heritage, but these efforts cannot be complete without restitution. The return of artifacts is not just about possession; it is about restoring dignity ... and ensuring that future generations grow up with authentic access to their past."

**– Compiled by Victoria Hoffmann** / Staff writer

# The good fortune of being Goodluck

## From indifference to proud ownership, how I came to cherish my name.

I've grown used to the pause. That moment when someone hears my name – Goodluck – and looks at me with confusion, curiosity, or hesitation. "Wait, is that really your name?" "Thank you!" "How do you spell it?" It's something I didn't think would require a lot of explanation.

Back in Nigeria, it didn't. Names like Precious, Beauty, Grace, or my siblings' Prince and Princess were common – one of the former presidents of Nigeria was named Goodluck Jonathan. Mine was just another name in the system. I was rarely called by my first name throughout high school. My teachers called me by my last name. Friends did the same. My dad used a native nickname, Nkem (which means "mine"), at home. Whenever he uses my first name, it means I'm in trouble.

I didn't realize how different my name was until I traveled to the United States to continue my education when I was 19 years old. That was the first time "Goodluck" stopped blending in. I thought it would be easy for people to hear and remember – after all, it's something people say to each other. But instead of recognition, it was met with repetition and disbelief. I had to spell it out. Repeat it, countless times. Explain that I was not joking.

When it came to my middle name, I had the perfect explanation. "Have you seen 'Avatar: The Last Airbender'?" I would ask. "Remember Zuko's sister, Azula? My middle name is Azuka. You just replace the letter 'l' with a 'k.'" This took a little bit of time, but it worked.

However, when it came to my first name, I thought it was straightforward. I couldn't understand why something normal back home needed so much clarification in the U.S.

But I also felt a quiet sense of gratitude. I never had to change my name to fit in. I didn't need to shorten, tweak, or replace it with something that won't be "butchered" when pronounced. I've met people who did – who dropped the names their families gave them just to make things easier. To avoid the 15-minute pronunciation lesson. While I understood their reasons, it made me all the more proud that I didn't have to compromise my name.

In Nigerian culture, names are more than words – they're messages. Some reflect the circumstances of birth, while others are blessings, affirmations, or even prayers for the child's future. Mine remains a mystery. I don't know why my parents chose it; I've never asked.

To some, it means I carry good fortune with me. To others, it means I bring it. But to me, the meaning isn't something I need answered immediately. I believe the mystery is part of the journey – something I'm meant to grow into and discover for myself.

What started as just a name – one I barely used and others rarely said – has become a part of me I now lead with. It's the first thing people learn about me, and sometimes the first thing they question. But it's also one of the few things I've carried unchanged. In a new country, surrounded by new people, cultures, and places, my name has become a thread that connects me to where I'm from. It's a reminder that home isn't something I left behind – it's something I carry with me.

**– Goodluck Ajeh**



**WHEN THE WORLD PAUSED**

*The power went out last night,*
*and for the first time in weeks,*
*the house breathed with me.*
*No hum from the fridge,*
*no flicker from screens,*
*just the soft creak of settling walls,*
*the whisper of trees tapping glass.*
*I lit a candle,*
*watched shadows stretch like old friends,*
*and listened to the rain begin.*
*It wasn't loud.*
*Just enough to hush the thoughts*
*that usually run ahead of me.*
*Somewhere in that quiet,*
*I smiled without meaning to.*
*Funny,*
*how stillness can feel like home.*

**– Jason Chrisman**



# Life-changing answers

"I think you're depressed," a friend told me. She was a clinical nurse.

I had so much going for me at the time, it didn't seem to make sense, but much of what I'd shared with her pointed to depression. In addition, I regularly thought about death throughout the day. While I was still able to laugh and enjoy others' company, it felt like an uneasy static was playing at a dull roar in the background of my life.

This went on for years, until a life-changing two weeks broke me free of it. I had signed up for a unique course offered by authorized teachers of Christian Science for those wanting to take a deep dive into what Christian Science is and how it heals. In addition to the Bible, this class looked closely at a chapter from the book "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy, who discovered the Science behind Jesus' healings.

Each day of class brought answers – not by looking at death, but by getting to know Life, another name for God. Divine Life can only include what lives forever, which is the spiritual. Death, in fact, is Life's opposite. Because God is eternal, Life can't include anything fleeting.

As I began to see Life as spiritual – not subject to the ups and downs of a transient physical world – I found a steady resolve that couldn't be shaken.

The Bible says we are made by God. As the spiritual offspring of God, Christian Science explains, we live in Life and can't be separated from it. That is the reality of being. "Being" can only ever "be."

Steadily gaining a more spiritual view of life, I was able to leave daily thoughts of death behind. I could feel something of what the Revelator recorded in the Bible: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). That mental "static" had passed away and was nowhere to be found. Even a decade later, I feel an impenetrable joy.

Primary class instruction in Christian Science wasn't the end of the journey, though. I still continue to learn more about Life.

Annual Christian Science students' association meetings have brought ongoing enrichment that contributes to my spiritual growth. And every week, the Bible Lesson from the Christian Science Quarterly brings inspiration from the Bible and Science and Health. A recent lesson on the subject "Probation After Death" shared this message about the spiritual reality of life here and now:

"Take heart, dear sufferer, for this reality of being will surely appear sometime and in some way. There will be no more pain, and all tears will be wiped away. When you read this, remember Jesus' words, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' This spiritual consciousness is therefore a present possibility" (Science and Health, pp. 573-574).

In difficult situations, it's not death or material systems that bring us answers, but Life and the spiritual – the "kingdom of God," as Jesus put it. Learning more about God, Life, brings hope. And placing our hope in Life brings a healing, spiritual joy that can't ever be taken.

**– Tessa Parmenter**



WASHINGTON

# Americans are buying more Bibles. What does that mean for US Christianity?

**By Sophie Hills** / Staff writer

Since Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, the top-selling book in the world has been the Bible. That's by a couple of billion copies, according to some sales trackers. Lately, it's having another moment. Bible sales in the United States last year were up by 20% over 2023, according to Circana, a publishing industry tracker. This year, they've increased by another 14%.

That amounts to 18.4 million Bibles sold in the U.S. in 2025 so far.

Publishers say they're noticing more discussion of religion, partially led by political officials who are open about their faith. They also say anxiety and stress from being constantly inundated with news and online content drives people to look for comfort and deeper answers.

"[The spike in sales] is a true increase over at least recent history. And one of the things that makes it compelling is it seems to be sustaining itself," says Amy Simpson, publisher of the Bible division of Tyndale House Publishers. "What we're seeing here looks really real."

**WHY WE WROTE THIS**

Bible sales in the United States last year were up by 20% over 2023. This year, they've increased by another 14%. Many faith leaders and communities hope this could be a sign of a religious revival.

"There's another interesting thing that we see happening around us, just in the public square, about people's openness to spiritual answers and to the Bible specifically," she adds.

"We are seeing an increase in spiritual curiosity," writes a spokesperson for HarperCollins Christian Publishing, "as well as spiritual deepening." They are seeing "new or first-time buyers driven by concern about current events who are seeking answers to questions they have about life and death, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future."

Some of the bestselling Bibles are "specialty Bibles," with study guides or pages and prompts for journaling, as opposed to "text Bibles," which include only the translation. Videos on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube walk viewers through Bible study. Editions feature colored highlighter sets and sticky notes. Other Bibles, like a new one from Lifeway Christian Resources, are created for children or for dyslexic readers. There's also a "God Bless the USA Bible" (not published by Lifeway), endorsed by President Donald Trump, which includes copies of some of America's founding documents.

Specialty Bibles are "outperforming text Bibles," says Andy McLean, publisher of Bibles and reference at Lifeway, which publishes the Christian Standard Bible.

The interest in specialty Bibles may indirectly indicate that religion is becoming more of a market economy, says Christian Smith, a professor at the University of Notre Dame, as different denominations "compete" for the faithful.

It's not entirely clear who's driving the sales, or whether they are coming from people who already count themselves as Christian. But "we're seeing some first-time buyers," especially from younger generations, says Mr. McLean.

Tyndale, which owns the New Living Translation, believes Generation Z is driving some of its sales, too, says Ms. Simpson. Sales are fairly evenly distributed across categories, including purchases by individuals and institutions.

## Podcasts to pews?

Many faith leaders and communities hope Bible sales are a sign of a religious revival. And the growth comes as Spotify streams of Christian music and downloads of Christian apps are both at high points. (Those formats were less prolific or were unavailable until fairly recently.) Christian podcasts, too, are growing in number.

But interest in various forms of media doesn't necessarily mean more people in pews. And most studies still show consistency in some key areas: Religious affiliation in the U.S. continues to decline, and Gen Z is the least religious generation, full stop.

About 43% of Gen Zers in 2024 identified as "nones" – no religious affiliation – according to the General Social Survey, which many researchers consider the gold standard for religion data. That's a higher share of "nones" than any other generation.

"The zeitgeist is in the direction of the revival right now," says Ryan Burge, a political scientist and author of the Substack "Graphs About Religion." "The data is not."

Still, many people of faith see indicators that give them hope. In some cases, it may be a desire among the already religious to go all in. A significant number – some 63% of American adults – identifies as Christian, and many individuals, clergy, and institutions are vocal about seeking to deepen their faith.

"The idea that we're becoming less religious – I want to say, but what do you mean by that? Because the people who are left are actually more religious," says Dr. Burge.

"Some people, in many ways, are drawn to strict religion because they like the rules, like the structure, like the community, like all those things. And because they stand so far apart from the mainstream culture," says Dr. Burge. It is, he thinks, one reason evangelical affiliation is on the rise (now 19.5% of Americans), after hitting a low in 2021. That compares with mainline Protestant denominations, which continue to steadily decline.

## Rising membership in faith-based groups

Various faith-based groups report rising membership, including Students for Life, which has a Christian statement of faith. The group saw a spike in membership after conservative activist Charlie Kirk was fatally shot in September. "People's passion is on the rise, and engagement is on the rise," says Kristi Hamrick, vice president of media and policy.

Young people are trying to live out their values, says Ms. Hamrick,

pointing to research showing they value purpose-driven work. And campus revivals continue to occur, sometimes on a large scale – like a large-scale gathering at Asbury University in Kentucky in 2023 that lasted for two weeks.

Among those who join Students for Life, she sees a desire to serve others in practical ways.

"I would argue that [religion] is rising. I do think you have to dig for it as an undercurrent," she says.

Dr. Smith thinks there needs to be more data before declaring a revival.

"I've heard a lot of rumors and a little bit of evidence of alleged, possibly religious revival, or interest in religion," says Dr. Smith, who is also director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Notre Dame.

"I'm pretty skeptical," he says. "Before we really start to make a point of it, there needs to be a lot more solid data."

There isn't yet enough data on Gen Z, he points out, to draw solid conclusions about the younger generation's trends over time.

Still, it makes sense that those who have stuck with religion are more devout. "The quality of the more hardcore is going to be more committed, more serious, in some quarters, more sectarian," he says. "It's a leftover effect. It's not an increase in commitment."

### "It hints at something"

Like Students for Life, American Heritage Girls, a Christian leadership program, has also seen "remarkable growth" in recent years, wrote Rachael Culpepper, the executive director, in an email to the Monitor. "Families are seeking authentic community that reflects their Christian values."

While there are growing churches and faith-based programs, those signs, along with Bible sales, haven't been borne out in data yet. Dr. Burge is cautious about what the rise in Bible sales suggests.

He wonders about the specifics of who is buying Bibles and whether they have other religious habits.

"It's an interesting top number, and it hints at something," he says. ■

BERLIN

# 'Now, it's getting huge.' The NFL is making (lots of) global fans.

Some 78 countries now have U.S. football federations, up from 20 in 1998.

**By Mark Sappenfield**
Senior global correspondent

On a crisp autumn evening in Berlin, you can just about see the National Football League's wildest dream coming true. The Indianapolis Colts have taken over Potsdam Square, with a deejay, a fan shop, and all manner of football-themed games. The event is perhaps not as crowded as the team might have wished, and fans at the field-goal-kicking station are noticeably more confident than those at the pass-catching station. But there is no shortage of jackets and scarves decorated with the Colts' horseshoe, and excitement is in the air.

The Nov. 9 game against the Atlanta Falcons in Olympic Stadium will be the sixth played abroad this season.

The festivities in Berlin show how far the sport has come internationally – and how far it still has to go. For the world's wealthiest sports league, with revenue of more than $20 billion annually, that looks a lot like opportunity. If the NFL expands its regular-season schedule from 17 to 18 games, Commissioner Roger Goodell would like an international game every week.

"They'll push the envelope as far as they can," says Rick Ridall, a professor at Temple University's School of Sport, Tourism, and Hospitality management who previously worked for the Philadelphia Eagles. "That's why they're being so aggressive, They don't see a wall they're hitting yet."

Instead, they see fans such as Lucas Coppi. He is wearing a camouflage Colts shirt and team scarf, and he has just flown in from Brazil to watch the game.

This is the hope – that international games make the sport "sticky." New fans become attached to the sport, and superfans are drawn from around the world. In Potsdam Square, the Fan Zone has the feeling of a reunion, with Colts fans from across the globe hailing one another as old friends.

Mr. Coppi is in conversation with the Colts' "International Fan of the Year" from 2023, as well as the one from 2024. They are both German. Christoph Mörchel (Mr. 2023) set up watch parties, helped arrange travel to games in the United States, and supported the Colts' game in Frankfurt.

He also spent five weeks in Indiana watching Colts games. The woman who hosted him, who he now calls his "American mom," will be arriving in Berlin to watch Sunday's game. Mr. Mörchel smiles at the prospect of them watching the Colts in his home country.

The backstories are all different. Mr. Mörchel turned on the TV in 2008 to witness the brilliance of then-Colts quarterback Peyton Manning. That was enough. Conni Stier says her son tried every sport but was always too big – until he found football.

"I like football because every child has a chance to play," she says. "In football, you need everyone."

She is now a board member for the Potsdam Royals, who last month were crowned champions of the German Football League in front of 22,000 spectators in Dresden.

Germany is "one of the most robust environments for football in the world," says Andy Fuller, managing director of the International Federation of American Football. "There's a really special place for Germany at the heart of the European football community."

It began with U.S. service members stationed in Germany during the Cold War, such as Gerry "Boss" Hogg. He had offers to play at colleges in Texas but came to Berlin in 1978 – first as a soldier, then a football missionary. He's been here ever since.

The player turned coach helped build Berlin Adler into one of Germany's most storied football teams.

"I'm proud of what Germans have done," says Mr. Hogg. "The German Football League is the foundation of American football here."

To Christoph Sonka, president of Adler, the Nov. 9 game feels like football coming home. "For us, it's a huge thing."

But the arrow is pointing up beyond Germany. When the International Federation of American Football was founded in 1998, it included about 20 countries. Now, 78 nations have U.S. football federations.

Flag football is the game changer. No longer do players need expensive equipment or a penchant for violence. For the first time, flag football will feature at the 2028 Summer Olympics.

Not long before two Colts legends take the stage at the Berlin Fan Zone, up come the boys and girls of the Wolves, a local flag football team that won a regional championship. Decked out in full gear, they are advertisements as much as honorees.

Flag football creates new openings for the sport worldwide, and the NFL is barreling through them like a running back scenting the end zone.

But the games are the showpiece. Mr. Coppi says that when

he first became an NFL fan, "no one knew about it" in Brazil. His YouTube channel for discussing all things football had about 1,000 subscribers. Then, the NFL played its first game in Brazil in 2024. He has 20,000 subscribers.

This year, the NFL played its second game in Brazil. Says Mr. Coppi: "Now, it's getting huge." ▪

ON FILM

# 'Train Dreams' review: A powerful, spare look at a vanishing way of life

## The carefully observed movie asks what makes life worth living.

"Train Dreams," set mostly in the early 20th century in the Pacific Northwest, is a beautiful tone poem of a movie. I hesitate to say that only because it implies something woozy and precious. "Train Dreams" is anything but.

It's about Robert Grainier (Joel Edgerton), a logger who lived as an itinerant laborer until he met Gladys (Felicity Jones), got married, and fathered a baby girl. Having a family gives a measure of meaning to his existence. He builds a cabin by a river in their rural Idaho town but is away much of the time on logging jobs. He worries that his baby daughter doesn't know who he is.

Much of the film's complicated power comes from the realization that, as much as he cherishes his family, Robert is also spiritually sustained by the forests he glories in. He finds meaning there, too, and he shares with many of the other loggers an almost pantheistic appreciation for the living things they topple. "Train Dreams" – gracefully directed by Clint Bentley, who co-wrote the script with his frequent collaborator Greg Kwedar – is based on a 2011 Denis Johnson novella that is almost cinematic in its sensual depictions of the natural world. But Johnson also provided an overlay of magical realism that the film for the most part wisely avoids. The focus is on how Robert reconciles his dual existences, and how he somehow survives when tragedy hits.

ON FILM

BY PETER RAINER

Robert is in the strong-silent tradition usually intended to convey hidden depths. It's a dubious tradition that often equates muteness with wisdom, and "Train Dreams" doesn't entirely escape that trap. Perhaps recognizing the problem, the filmmakers periodically provide a voice-over narrator (Will Patton) to fill us in on what Robert is experiencing. But Edgerton is the rare actor who can fully communicate a character using the sparest of means. He doesn't simplify Robert or turn him into a loamy "man of the earth" stereotype. What is so poignant about Robert is that he is a man of great feeling who is not really in touch with how he feels. He is bewildered by what life throws at him. When despair hits, his sorrow may be the only thing that sustains him.

He also understands that his agrarian way of life is fading away in a newly industrialized era. He sees himself, however faintly, as a relic. The film includes sequences that carry Robert many years into the future, when he flies in an airplane and looks down on the land he once worked. But the heart of the story takes place decades before.

Most resonant are the scenes with the other loggers, many of whom are itinerants without families. The filmmakers don't sentimentalize these men – in an early scene, they fatally attack a Chinese laborer on the crew. But the film's degree of observation is so acute that we are never made to feel we are watching a "period" drama with actors made up to look the part. And it helps that many of the men are as loquacious as Robert is silent. Their jawboning punctuates the stillnesses in the forest. Best is William H. Macy as Arn Peeples, a veteran dynamiter. (Macy clearly relishes playing someone named Arn Peeples.) He perfectly embodies how Johnson describes him in the novella – "a frail and shrunken gadabout, always yammering, staying out of the way of hard work, the oldest man in the woods."

The paradox of "Train Dreams" is that we are looking at a vanishing way of life that, at the same time, has a startling immediacy. That immediacy is more than a matter of careful observation. In its widest sense, the movie is asking what makes life worth living. When Robert encounters Claire, a woman from the U.S. Forest Service with her own hardship to bear – beautifully played in a cameo by Kerry Condon – she tells him that a dead tree is just as important as a living one. All are part of a sublime order. Robert yearns to find ways to move on from sorrow. The great revelation he half expects never comes. But in a way, it does. He lives out a long life that indeed was worth living.

▪ *Peter Rainer is the Monitor's film critic. "Train Dreams" is rated PG-13 for some violence and sexuality.*

BOOKS FOR GLOBAL READERS

# Tracing a forgotten young resistance fighter

**By Colette Davidson** / Special correspondent

When French author Hervé Le Tellier went in search of a new country house, he told his real estate agent that he wanted neither a fixer-upper nor a fancy villa. Instead, he dreamed of a "childhood home," a place where he could plant roots, something he had been unable to do growing up with an unstable mother, an absent father, and no siblings.

Le Tellier ended up with not only a house but also a historical mystery. Underneath one of the ceramic plaques on the outside wall of his home in Montjoux, in the Drôme region of France, a name was etched: André Chaix.

At first glance, the last name Chaix meant very little to Le Tellier. It wasn't until he was roaming around Montjoux that the puzzle started to click together. There, on a monument dedicated "to the memory of the children of Montjoux who died for France" was the same name: CHAIX ANDRÉ (May 1924-August 1944).

FICTION

**THE NAME ON THE WALL**
By Hervé Le Tellier
Translated by Adriana Hunter
Other Press
176 pp.

Chaix had been a French resistance fighter, sparring against Nazi Germany and France's collaborationist Vichy regime during World War II. He died at age 20.

That was enough to spark Le Tellier's interest, setting him on a quest to learn about, and tell, Chaix's story in "The Name on the Wall." Le Tellier dug into archives and questioned townspeople. He learned that Chaix was one of the 13,679 members of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) killed during the war. His father was a baker, and he had a brother who was four years

his junior. Simone, his fiancée, was the center of his universe, to whom he wrote epic love letters on the backs of black-and-white photographs.

But Le Tellier does not exploit Chaix's personal details in a glib attempt to help readers connect with his story, or the war. Instead, he draws from the myriad ways history has been influenced by unknown foot soldiers like Chaix – and ways in which it risks repeating itself.

"A point to remember," he writes. "Fascist regimes operate faster than any democracy."

At a time when Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally – formerly called the National Front – is making gains in France, Le Tellier reminds us that several of the party's founders were supporters of the Nazi regime.

Pierre Bousquet was a former section leader of the Waffen-SS Charlemagne Division. The party's first secretary, Victor Barthélemy, backed up police during the roundup of Jews at the Vél d'Hiv in Paris in July 1942.

Le Tellier also explores the notion that Nazism is a state of mind that is easier to slip into than any of us might like to think.

He recounts the story of a history teacher in Palo Alto, California, in April 1967, who re-created Nazi Germany in his classroom to teach students about the Third Reich. Similarly to American teacher Jane Elliott's "Blue eyes/Brown eyes" experiment in 1968 to teach about discrimination, Ron Jones incited some of his students to join an invented "Third Wave" movement, while others were segregated and excluded. In the space of just one week, Jones managed to get "Third Wave" adherents to rat out others, with students coming close "to exchanging blows."

Le Tellier issues a dire warning: There are dangers and risks for societies seduced by extremism, he says. "There is no debating such ideas, there can be no polite war of words. ... Because democracy is a conversation between civilized people; tolerance comes to an end with intolerance."

"The Name on the Wall" is a tidy, unassuming read, showing no signs of the self-importance that one could expect from an author whose "Anomaly" won France's prestigious Goncourt Prize in 2020. Instead, the new book manages to straddle both historical nonfiction and personal narrative, without being preachy or predictable.

At times, readers may tire of Le Tellier's frequent cultural references and name-dropping, which are sprinkled throughout the short chapters. Readers who are not French (and many who are) may not understand the reference to "Pantagruel," a ribald, satirical novel published by French writer François Rabelais in 1532.

But the best moments come when Le Tellier draws parallels between Chaix's life and his own. In one poignant chapter, Le Tellier describes the loss of his ex-fiancée, Piette, to suicide when she was 20 years old – the same age Chaix was when he died, leaving behind his beloved Simone.

Le Tellier's earnest look at Chaix – an otherwise unremarked-upon and forgotten character – allows readers to connect with a moment in history that continues to shape us all, whether or not we are aware of it.

"Without André Chaix as my plumb line, I wouldn't have known how to explore an age when generosity and courage lived so unusually side by side with selfishness and despicable behavior," writes Le Tellier. ▪

# Q&A with Jim Clyburn, congressman and author of 'The First Eight: A Personal History of the Pioneering Black Congressmen Who Shaped a Nation'

**George Washington Murray** served as South Carolina's eighth Black congressman. Jim Clyburn serves as the state's ninth. The time between their elections? Just about a century. In "The First Eight: A Personal History of the Pioneering Black Congressmen Who Shaped a Nation," Representative Clyburn gives voice to the ambivalence surrounding the almost-century in between.

"The First Eight" tells the story of Reconstruction – how Africans in America gained political power despite inconceivable odds and atrocities. Representative Clyburn homes in on the stories of men such as Joseph Rainey, the first Black politician to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives; Robert Smalls, who stole a Confederate ship to escape slavery; and Richard Cain, the newspaper publisher with ties to the famed Emanuel AME Church in Charleston.

The book also explores what's happened in the years following – the rise of Jim Crow; the Civil Rights Movement, known as the Second Reconstruction; and how we've come to define our tenuous democracy over the past 60 years.

Monitor cultural commentator Ken Makin spoke with Representative Clyburn by phone. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**Q: What event or events inspired the book?**

There were three significant moments. The first occurred after I published my memoir ["Blessed Experiences" in 2014]. I entertained a meeting in my conference room, and on the wall were eight portraits of the Black congressmen from South Carolina who served before me. One of the people in the group asked me who they were; she was under the impression that I was the first African American to serve in Congress from South Carolina. I said to my staff that it might be a good idea for my next book to be about those eight congressmen, and I knew a significant amount about their history.

The second big moment occurred Jan. 6, 2021. Because of my familiarity with the history of Reconstruction, I knew immediately what was taking place on the floor that day. It's the same thing that happened in 1876, when three states, South Carolina among them, set up these alternative slates of electors and brought the whole election into question.

And then a third thing happened, which I call "Jim Crow 2.0." That was "Project 2025," [a set of policy recommendations from the Heritage Foundation] and when you read it, you know that it is a blueprint for undercutting the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, fair housing laws – all of those things that had come to pass as a result of our civil rights activities of the 1960s. I said to myself that it looks like this is an attempt to bring the Second Reconstruction to an end as well.

What is more significant than anything else in this book is the fact that there are 95 years between [the election] of George Washington Murray and myself. This book is all about the fight to stem the tide of retrogression.

**Q: Fighting political disenfranchisement came to define the legacy of "The First Eight." Where does that type of disenfranchisement come from?**

You don't have to be a real student of history to see what's going on right now and what took place in 1876. I mentioned Jim Crow 2.0. Jim Crow 1.0 was Confederate Gen. Matthew Witherspoon Gary, who wrote the edict that became the blueprint in 1876 to undercut the elections that were taking place. Look at the Hamburg Massacre [in which a group of armed white men killed six Black men]. The massacre was provoked and well-planned.

**Q: What do you believe will be the legacy of this book and these men?**

Remember, anything that's happened before can happen again. When I was teaching history, my students used to tell me how boring history was, and asked, "Why are we spending so much time talking about the things that happened way back when?" I think it was Thomas Jefferson who was given credit for saying: "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." I just think that along the way, we started rejoicing in victories, and we did not maintain vigilance.

Also, look at the power of one vote. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people argue that they're dropping out of the system because they voted and things did not change the next morning. These people are reaping the benefits of Supreme Court decisions, back when the Court voted in favor of the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act. Those things were built upon decisions made by a [unanimous] Supreme Court. But the current powers that be went to work, and now have changed those 9-0 decisions in our favor to 6-3 against us.

We must learn the power of one vote, because the vote to end Reconstruction was a committee vote of 8-7 [in the U.S. House of Representatives]. That's why I spent so much time talking about the end of Reconstruction, the beginning of Jim Crow, and that 95-year gap between Congressman Murray and myself. ▪

SUDOKU

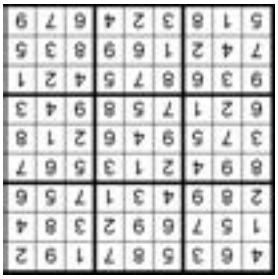
# Sudoku difficulty: ★★★☆

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 7 | | | 2 |
| | 5 | 7 | | | | 3 | 8 | 4 |
| | 8 | | | | 1 | | | |
| | | 4 | | | 3 | 5 | 6 | |
| | | | 9 | | | | | |
| | | | | 5 | | 9 | | 3 |
| 9 | 3 | | | | | 4 | | 1 |
| | 4 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | 2 | | | 7 | |

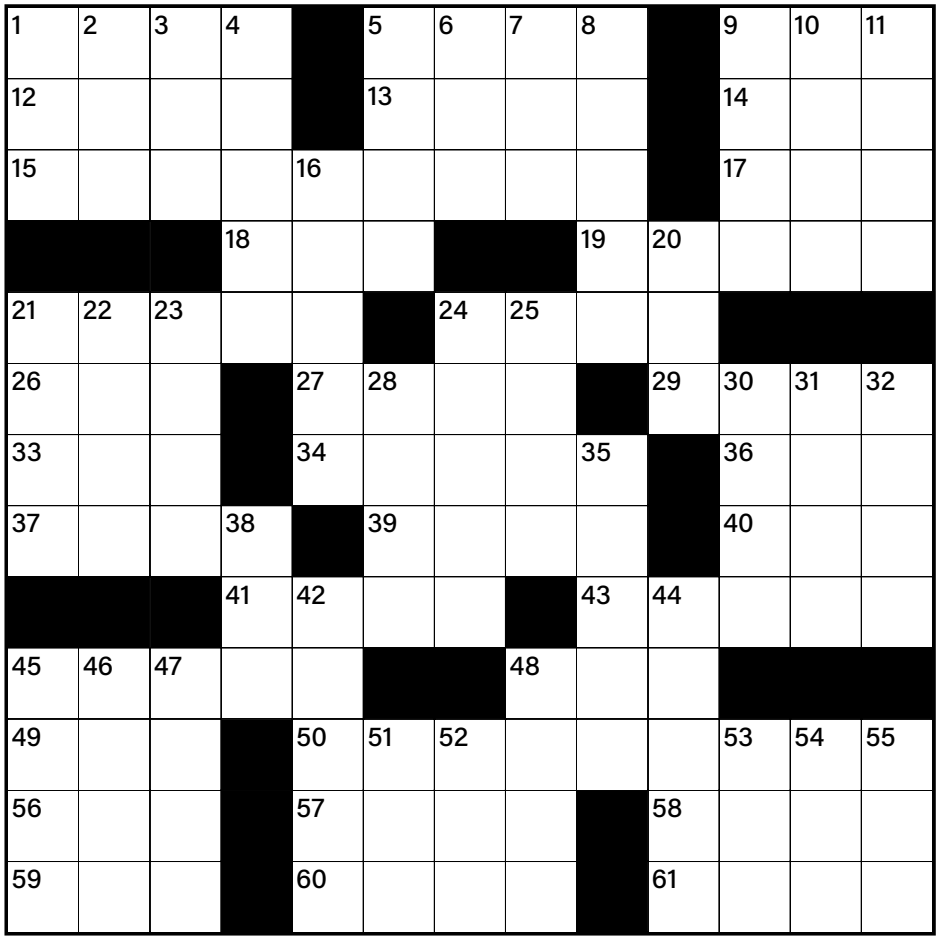
**How to do Sudoku**

Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once ineach column, row, and three-by-three block.

## Crossword and Sudoku solutions



# Crossword





## Across

**1.** Walk, as through water
**5.** Proofreader's worry
**9.** To-do list item
**12.** Fe, on the periodic table
**13.** Time can do it
**14.** Oct or prop ending
**15.** Inner city sights
**17.** Wintry coating
**18.** Bat or Spider follower
**19.** Oscar-winner Burstyn
**21.** Cafeteria supply
**24.** Practice, so to speak
**26.** Candied side dish
**27.** Like an eagle's eye
**29.** Instigate
**33.** Tree-to-be
**34.** Capital nicknamed the Cherry City
**36.** Sleuth Ventura
**37.** It may follow something
**39.** Lackluster
**40.** Haggard novel
**41.** Light bulb measurement
**43.** Ring leader?
**45.** Hills' partners
**48.** Heavy locks
**49.** Historically-speaking
**50.** Acorn-gathering mammals
**56.** Pickup weight
**57.** Mine and thine
**58.** Not absorb
**59.** Cadbury confection
**60.** Reasons against
**61.** Chop ___ (Chinese menu item)

## Down

**1.** Gift for repartee
**2.** Have a life
**3.** Adams who was Smart
**4.** The opposite camp
**5.** "___ He Kissed Me" (1963 hit)
**6.** Nikkei currency
**7.** Dollop
**8.** Jimmy ___, Clark Kent's pal
**9.** One corner on a Monopoly board
**10.** Not to be repeated
**11.** ___ there, done that
**16.** False faces
**20.** Cow country
**21.** Enter into a computer
**22.** Stairway part
**23.** Hi-fi components
**24.** Serf of ancient Sparta
**25.** Units
**28.** Dawnward
**30.** Game fish
**31.** Radar principle
**32.** Over 12 and under 20
**35.** Automobile need
**38.** One of the flock
**42.** Part of YMCA: Abbr.
**44.** Town in western Belgium
**45.** Fruit found on a calendar?
**46.** Real excited
**47.** Extensive
**48.** Be unsuccessful
**51.** Maintain the status ___
**52.** Large java dispenser
**53.** Big flightless bird
**54.** Be horizontal
**55.** Nearly uninhabitable room