The Christian Science Monitor Weekly

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

– MARY BAKER EDDY

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CONTENTS

Illuminating humanity's connections

Here in the Monitor newsroom, we talk a lot about what we put on the cover of our magazine. Editors choose stories we hope will expand readers' understanding of places and people, illuminate shifts in thought, and highlight moments of joy and love and humanity that are happening every day, around the world.

We also hope to give you really great stories to read.

So, when Africa editor Ryan Lenora Brown reached out about a piece that reporters Colette Davidson and Essouly Diedhiou had brought back from West Africa, we saw a chance to hit all these goals. Colette and Essouly traveled to Senegal and to part of the Canary Islands off the western coast of Africa. In this week's cover story, they tell the wrenching story of young people deciding whether to leave their home country in search of a better life – and of the Senegalese elders trying to convince them to stay.

BY STEPHANIE HANES
PRINT EDITOR

This question of staying or going, and the forces underneath that decision, run through other stories in the magazine this week. From the United States, writers Sarah Matusek and Victoria Hoffmann explore the question of what constitutes a nation's border in their story about the U.S. Border Patrol expanding to inland American cities. Pieces from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland show how residents are grappling with what "home" should mean. And reporter Patrik Jonsson looks at the timber industry in Georgia and examines what happens when local identity and economy are whipsawed by large, external economic forces. It's a situation that, if one peels back the layers, doesn't appear too foreign from the one facing young Senegalese fishers half a world away.

I love how Monitor reporting illuminates these sorts of connections. We hope you, too, will read and feel closer to the other humans who share this beautiful world. ▪

MEXICO CITY

Boat strikes off Venezuela mark shift in 54-year US war on drugs

By Whitney Eulich / Special correspondent

On a June day in 1971, President Richard Nixon stood behind a podium by an American flag and declared drug abuse to be the United States' "public enemy No. 1."

"In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new all-out offensive," Mr. Nixon announced. "This will be a worldwide offensive dealing with the problems of sources of supply."

The U.S. war on drugs, launched during that speech, has endured through Republican and Democratic administrations for more than five decades.

President Donald Trump has opened the most recent chapter in that war, ordering military strikes against boats suspected of smuggling drugs from South America, and positioning the USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier near the Venezuelan coast.

But one traditional element of U.S. drug policy has been missing from Mr. Trump's actions: international cooperation.

Historically, Washington has carried out almost all its drug-war operations in Latin America with buy-in from regional governments. Whether they involved Colombian or Mexican forces tracking down a kingpin with an assist from U.S. intelligence and training, or U.S. aid to pay for local government action, a long line of American officials have considered this war possible only with foreign governments' involvement.

"Most of the time, throughout the history of the drug war, the U.S. has sought to cooperate with Latin American governments to get them to reduce production or reduce trafficking through their national territories," says Renata Keller, an expert on drug and security policies in Latin America at the University of Nevada, Reno.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Richard Nixon's "war on drugs" entailed a degree of U.S. pressure on foreign allies. But the Trump administration's strikes on suspected drug-smuggling boats off Venezuela charts a new course of noncooperation.

"Some of it has been somewhat coercive," she adds, "but it always has been under the guise of a cooperative effort."

Last month, both Britain, which has a handful of territories in the Caribbean, and Colombia announced that they had suspended some intelligence-sharing with Washington because of U.S. strikes against small boats thought to be smuggling drugs.

If the U.S. were to resort to military action within Venezuela's borders, Dr. Keller says it would be clear that "we're not seeking to cooperate anymore in the war on drugs, and it would almost certainly provoke a backlash" in the region.

A new rupture

In Colombia, cooperation is already unraveling. For the first time since 1997, the U.S. administration declared in September that Colombia was falling short in the war on drugs, and started the process to decertify Bogotá as a drug-control partner. That move will deny Colombia more than $100 million per year in funds used to fight drug trafficking and insecurity, according to calculations by Michael Weintraub, director of the Center for the Study of Security and Drugs at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá.

"If you're the United States, you definitely want Colombian cooperation" in fighting drug trafficking, says Dr. Weintraub, because Colombia produces about 70% of the world's cocaine.

Successive Colombian governments have been in "lockstep" with U.S. administrations for the past 40 years, says Dr. Weintraub. Now, the Trump administration has changed the rulebook. "The uncertainty over international cooperation has increased dramatically," he says.

One of the few examples of the U.S. going it alone in the drug war was its 1989 operation in Panama to remove then-President Manuel Noriega, a known drug trafficker. But, despite his surrender to U.S. forces, dozens of people were killed and it made little difference in drug-trafficking operations into the United States. It also served as something of a turning point for direct U.S. meddling in the region.

For decades, U.S. officials have intercepted suspected drug-trafficking boats in Latin American and Caribbean waters, seizing drugs, detaining suspects, and frequently prosecuting them. But never before have they blown them out of the water as military targets. From Sept. 2 through mid-November, U.S. forces conducted an estimated 21 boat strikes in international waters, killing more than 80 people. Officials in Washington said the boats were carrying drugs and posed a direct threat to national security, but they have provided no evidence to support these claims.

Latin American views of the Trump administration's actions are mixed.

In Ecuador, voters in a referendum in November turned down a government proposal to base foreign troops in the country – troops who could help combat the rise of transnational organized crime there. The referendum result was seen as a sign of public mistrust for U.S. intentions in the region.

Others have backed the Trump administration's boat strikes and its hostile statements seemingly aimed at weakening Venezuela's authoritarian leader, Nicolás Maduro. The Venezuelan opposition leader and recent Nobel Peace Prize winner, María Corina Machado, told Bloomberg in October that any deaths from boat strikes should be blamed on Mr. Maduro.

The U.S. and Venezuela have been at odds for decades, says Dr. Keller. "But, I think a respect for nonintervention and self-determination has restrained other recent U.S. leaders from directly attacking Venezuela or its people."

The State Department is expected to soon designate a Venezuelan drug operation, the "Cartel de los Soles," which Washington claims is led by Mr. Maduro, as a foreign terrorist organization. That would mark the 12th Latin American drug cartel so designated since Mr. Trump took office; some analysts believe it could pave the way for direct U.S. strikes against illegal organizations outside U.S. territory.

Closer to home

So far, more than half of the cartels categorized as terrorist groups in the region are based in Mexico.

"A lot of people are extremely worried that direct, armed attacks against cartels inside Mexico could be the next step," says David Saucedo, a Mexican security analyst.

Between 2008 and 2021, the U.S. funneled some $3 billion through the Mérida Initiative into Mexico and Central America, to fund cooperative counternarcotics and border security programs. The plan did not reduce drug trafficking from Mexico or arms trafficking from the U.S., but, as former U.S. ambassador to Mexico Roberta Jacobson said in 2021, it created "a culture of security cooperation."

Washington has threatened economic sanctions in a bid to encourage the Mexican government to adopt a stricter approach to fentanyl production and trafficking. Last December, one week after Mr. Trump threatened 25% tariffs on the country's exports, Mexican authorities discovered more than a ton of fentanyl pills, a record seizure.

Mr. Saucedo does not expect U.S. military action on Mexican territory, in large part because "Mr. Trump's strategy in Mexico is working for him." ▪

Why is Border Patrol leading immigration raids far inside the US?

By Sarah Matusek and Victoria Hoffmann Staff writers

"Every state is now a border state."

President Donald Trump and Republican allies have offered that metaphor for how unauthorized immigrants span communities across the United States. Increasingly, immigration enforcement is expanding, too. Personnel from a range of law enforcement agencies, most noticeably the Border Patrol, are moving deeper inside the U.S., where they're contributing to controversial tactics.

The Department of Homeland Security has launched a series of immigration enforcement campaigns this year, including "Operation Patriot" in Massachusetts, "Operation Midway Blitz" in Chicago, and "Operation Charlotte's Web" in Charlotte, North Carolina. These efforts surge federal officials from multiple offices – including Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Border Patrol, as well as drug and firearms agencies – to increase detentions and deportations of people living in the U.S. without authorization.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

The U.S. Border Patrol is playing a leading role in immigration enforcement activities far from U.S. borders. Critics say the agents' borderland ethos results in overly aggressive tactics in urban centers – while the agency proclaims it is protecting Americans.

Actions by federal agents during these campaigns have shocked critics. They accuse officials of deploying overly aggressive and possibly illegal methods around street arrests, and unnecessary force, such as prolific use of tear gas on protesters. The administration cites broad enforcement powers under the law, and says its agents are under attack.

As green-uniformed Border Patrol agents arrive in urban centers, agents are bringing their rugged borderland ethos with them, analysts say. To turbocharge arrests and deportations, Border Patrol officials are expected to take over top jobs at several ICE field offices, according to multiple news reports and an association of ICE officers. Gregory Bovino, a senior Border Patrol leader, left his post in California to lead operations in Chicago, and then Charlotte. These shifts could portend more aggressive, public campaigns to come, analysts say.

Whether the Border Patrol and ICE are breaking the law, stretching norms, or simply doing their job can be difficult to detangle, in part due to conflicting social media videos that complicate fact-finding. Historians who study immigration enforcement agencies say there's limited precedent.

Immigration experts say Border Patrol taking over ICE leadership would be a first. But use of border agents further into the interior has some historical context, such as during and after World War II.

The broad leveraging of the Border Patrol "certainly at this scale, and this scope, is unprecedented," says Jennifer Chacón, a law professor at Stanford Law School.

"We are probably on the cusp of seeing a lot of unprecedented enforcement interventions," particularly with the massive funding boost to immigration agencies, says Professor Chacón. ICE and the Border Patrol "will simply be present in more places, and have more

people who can be deployed for more purposes, within the interior."

As operations expand, what constitutes protection is under debate. Assistant Homeland Security Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said the law-enforcement surge to Charlotte was meant to "ensure Americans are safe and public safety threats are removed." Local officials countered that anticipating the operations was "causing unnecessary fear and uncertainty in our community."

Border Patrol in the last century

Both ICE and the Border Patrol sit within the Department of Homeland Security. It's not unusual for the century-old Border Patrol to work with ICE, which Congress created after 9/11. ICE detention centers often receive detainees first apprehended by the Border Patrol in the borderlands.

"From its origins, the understanding was that the Border Patrol would be in charge of controlling the nation's international boundaries, particularly for those persons who cross the boundaries without inspection," says S. Deborah Kang, history professor at the University of Virginia.

Throughout its history, she says, the Border Patrol "resorts to these highly aggressive, militaristic tactics to establish itself as a bona fide police force."

During World War II, certain detention camps for people of Japanese descent were guarded by Border Patrol agents, rather than military police, according to the National Park Service.

In the 1950s, a deportation campaign targeted unauthorized Mexicans as the Border Patrol pushed north of the southwest border. Besides checkpoints in California and Arizona, Border Patrol task forces came through Texas, Illinois, and the Mississippi Delta, "unleashing fast raids on farms, restaurants and Mexican majority communities," according to historian Kelly Lytle Hernández. The press covered the roundups extensively.

Government publicity was "intended primarily to warn employers in time to replace their illegal workers with legals, especially in areas where perishable fruit is being harvested," The Christian Science Monitor reported in 1954.

Today, Mr. Bovino posts glossy social media videos of agents and arrests that resemble action-movie trailers.

The law allowing arrests

All immigration officers draw their law enforcement powers from Title 8 of the U.S. Code. The law allows them, without a warrant, to interrogate and arrest anyone suspected of violating immigration laws in the U.S. Officials are also allowed to make arrests for "any offense against the United States," if committed in their presence. A warrant signed by a judge is generally needed to enter private spaces like homes.

The geography of immigration enforcement matters. Following World War II, the government defined "reasonable distance" from the border as within 100 air miles. Within that 100-mile enforcement zone, there are exceptions to Fourth Amendment "unreasonable searches and seizures" protections, and the agency may temporarily detain drivers at checkpoints to check immigration status.

A narrower 25-mile zone from the border helps the Border Patrol traverse lands that are privately owned, which is common in Texas. Agents can operate anywhere in the country, but without the expanded enforcement powers afforded closer to the border.

Defining what is "reasonable" has played a controversial role in not just where but how agents can act. In September, the Supreme Court in an unsigned opinion from its emergency docket upheld agents' rights to stop people based on assumptions of identity markers like race, as long as there are other factors involved. The standard that applies is called "reasonable suspicion." (Other legal rulings can curb agents' powers in certain jurisdictions. A 2022 court order by a federal judge in Illinois had further limited warrantless arrests in that region.)

Critics of the Supreme Court decision, which is in place temporarily while litigation proceeds, say it sanctions racial profiling. Assistant Secretary McLaughlin called the ruling a "win" for "the rule of law."

"Everyone's saying that we're detaining citizens. Well, that happens on the border as well," says Ammon Blair, a former Border Patrol agent and now senior fellow at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He contends those temporary detainments can be necessary to discern U.S. citizenship or lack of status. At times, however, U.S. citizens have been detained by immigration officials for longer than two days under this administration, ProPublica reports.

Immigrant advocates counter that just because identity-based arrest tactics are legal doesn't mean they are effective.

"Is it smart law enforcement? Does it actually help communities feel safer or be safer? And I think the answer to that is 'no,'" says Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, senior fellow at the American Immigration Council.

"I think it is actively making communities feel less safe, and is raising the temperature and endangering their own officers, rather than actually working together with the community to focus on security," he adds.

Trump officials counter that the lack of cooperation with Democratic "sanctuary" politicians forces federal agents to arrest people on the streets, as opposed to taking custody of people in local jails.

Out of some 600 people detained in recent months, the federal government deemed 16 as a "high public safety risk," notes a CBS News report based on court documents.

Meanwhile, the expected replacement of ICE field office directors with Border Patrol brass appears to be deepening a rift between the agencies.

"I'm hearing from rank-and-file, specifically from California, that they're not happy at all," says a representative of the National ICE Officers Association, who asked not to be named while the union seeks to formalize. "There are competent people within ICE who could step up to that job."

The two agencies are expanding their cooperation, Border Patrol Chief Mike Banks told the Washington Examiner.

There are "twenty-seven plus cities across this country where we are working on the interior," he said. "We have a long list of volunteers volunteering to go on those assignments." ▪

COOKSTOWN, NORTHERN IRELAND; AND ST. JOHNSTON, IRELAND

One Ireland? In the north, Protestants weigh a future in the republic. In the south, the tide turns toward reunification.

Rigorous public debate about reunification isn't yet taking place. But opinions in the north are now less predictable along a religious divide.

By Lorraine Mallinder / Contributor

The Protestant and Catholic residents of this town, in the geographical center of Northern Ireland, are united in an unusual claim: It has the longest and widest main street on the island of Ireland.

People from both sides of the sectarian divide frequent the same establishments.

Indeed, Nigel Lindsay, who owns a bicycle shop, says Cookstown is "one of the best towns in Northern Ireland for mixing." Known locally as "the bike man," Mr. Lindsay was raised as a Protestant in a unionist community traditionally attached to its British identity. But he lives next to the Ratheen housing project, inhabited by Catholics mostly tending toward Irish nationalism.

If Northern Ireland's political future were to come to a vote, Mr. Lindsay reckons he would vote not for the unionist position along sectarian lines, but for the republican one. "People would be better off, especially the younger generation," if Ireland were a united island, he says.

While the Good Friday Agreement, a multinational treaty signed in 1998, brought peace of a sort to Northern Ireland after three decades of sectarian conflict known as the Troubles, the debate over whether the territory's future lies with the United Kingdom or with the Republic of Ireland has never gone away.

Until now, the pro-British unionists have held sway. But recent political shifts in Northern Ireland and the republic have made the prospect of a reunited Ireland – that is, Northern Ireland rejoining the republic – appear more viable. And if it does one day come to pass, it will be because of voters such as Mr. Lindsay.

With around 1 in 5 children living in relative poverty, according to a Northern Ireland Audit Office report last year, many people feel the same way. The big question is whether there are enough of them to swing the vote toward a united Ireland.

"There is some sign that in the coming years, there may be a move in the direction of unity, but it's far from certain," says Alan Whysall, an honorary senior research associate at University College London's Constitution Unit.

The process leading to the possible reunification of Ireland was set by the Good Friday Agreement. Under its terms, a vote on unification (often referred to as a border poll) could be held in the north if the British secretary of state for Northern Ireland deemed a majority there would vote "yes."

Until recently, the Democratic Unionist Party has dominated the power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly in Belfast, making such a majority appear impossible. But last year, the nationalist party Sinn Féin edged out the DUP in elections, putting it into power for the first time in the Assembly.

That shift, combined with the election of pro-reunification Catherine Connolly to the presidency of the Irish republic in late October, has built momentum for reunification.

If a border poll were held in the north today, it would still likely be defeated. A February poll by LucidTalk for the Belfast Telegraph showed 41% backing a united Ireland, compared with 48% who would prefer to stay in the union with Britain.

But polling over recent years shows support for a united Ireland growing steadily. The seven-point gap in the 2025 LucidTalk poll was narrower than the 10-point margin recorded last year.

Unresolved questions

Reunification would bring with it a lot of questions that have yet to be seriously addressed, notes Mr. Whysall of University College London. "We have not debated many of the serious issues that would arise from unity," he says. "There could be some hesitation, for example, about the integration of health systems and whatever else. That sort of thing is capable of provoking a great deal of caution."

Bryan Ferraty, a young welder from a Catholic background, appears to agree. Hanging out with friends from both communities at the Cartwheel Bar in Cookstown, he says he "feels more Irish." But he worries about losing access to Britain's National Health Service, with its free lifetime membership. While wages are higher in the republic, he worries that he would pay more for treatment in Ireland's public-private health-care system.

His friend, Michael Conlan, a musician who is also Catholic, is tempted by the promise of a better quality of life in a united Ireland within the embrace of the European Union. But he questions whether the north would be welcomed. "They [the republic] think that if there's a united Ireland, the north will bring the violence with us. There will be another 2 million people to look after, mouths to feed, more people to educate," he says.

Elsewhere in the Cartwheel, best friends Gracie Mae Hunter and Erin Greer, both 18, come from opposite sides of the sectarian divide: Ms. Hunter is Catholic, Ms. Greer a Protestant. But the two women share a preference for quitting post-Brexit Britain because of British policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Ms. Greer criticizes Westminster for continuing to approve arms exports to Israel. "I would never want to be affiliated with a government that did that," she says.

Ms. Greer is keen to know what position the Alliance Party will take on reunification. The Belfast Assembly's third-largest bloc has gained in popularity in recent years, attracting voters who are not wedded to either side of the old ideological divide. But it has yet to stake a position on reunification.

Alliance has pushed for more access to integrated schools teaching children from a mix of backgrounds. Ms. Greer and Ms. Hunter attended Sperrin College, one of around 70 integrated schools in Northern Ireland, where they learned the history of Ireland, including brutal episodes of British colonial rule, such as the mid-19th century famine.

"I can see very clearly that partition never should have happened," says Ms. Greer. Unionist members of her family would not necessarily approve of her views, she acknowledges. "But at the end of the day, it's my vote and my decision."

Entrenched positions

Below the surface, some residents still cling to their entrenched identities. In the predominantly unionist Monrush housing development, a few Union Jacks and red and white Ulster Banners representing Northern Ireland's six counties flutter in the wind.

Standing in his garden with two yapping chihuahuas, Gary Young is adamant that he would take up arms if reunification happened. His allegiance, he says, is to the British crown. "It goes that deep." He agrees that Cookstown is a place where people can mix freely, alluding to his Catholic colleagues and friends. But he thinks Northern Ireland is doing fine where it is.

"When I was growing up, if you dated a Catholic, you would have your window smashed," Mr. Young says. But now, things have changed, and people are accepting initiatives like integrated schooling, he points out. "Why keep pushing for a united Ireland when we're integrating here?"

On the other side of Monrush, a teenager out to buy milk confesses that he sees the republic as a "better option." Speaking on condition of anonymity, he does not identify with the brand of British pride espoused by the Reform UK party, which is polling well on the mainland. But he says he could never share his views on the estate.

He reckons people will "assume that it's the end of the world and start to attack each other," if a border poll were held now. "Give it 50 years and a lot of the sectarianism will have gone," he says. "It's just a pity I'll be 70 by then." ▪

With the election of President Catherine Connolly, the cause of a unified Ireland has more political momentum in the Irish Republic than it has had in years.But how realistic is reunification for the republic, both politically and practically?

By Lorraine Mallinder / Special contributor
Dominique Soguel / Special correspondent

At a roadside diner in this small village in the far northwest of the Republic of Ireland, Kieran Harrigan contemplates a border that once loomed large but now seems barely to exist.

"The only way you know you've crossed the border is the color of the road markings," says Mr. Harrigan, a retired construction manager, who has watched the frontier fade from identity flash point to negligible line.

It has been more than a century since the British government broke off six of Ireland's 32 counties into Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, with the remaining counties eventually becoming the independent Irish Republic. Partition sparked sectarian strife in Northern Ireland, which was resolved by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, a multinational peace treaty that also set terms for how Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic might once again be joined.

From where Mr. Harrigan sits, the drift toward Irish unity feels inevitable.

"It's just been chipping away over the decades," he says. "There's a mood change in Ireland to a united Ireland."

The idea of reunification in the republic gained symbolic momentum with the October election of Catherine Connolly, a vocal proponent of unity, as the nation's president. All the republic's main left-leaning parties support preparations for reunification. Only the two historically dominant centrist parties remain more cautious about it.

New pressures, including the rise of the left, the fallout from Brexit, and shifting demographics have made unity feel less abstract and more attainable on both sides of the divide, according to some analysts. The time to act appears ripe.

"People expect it now in a way they didn't 10 or 15 years ago," says Brendan O'Leary, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, who leads ARINS (Analyzing and Researching Ireland North and South) surveys on Irish public opinion. Recent polling suggests about two-thirds of voters in the republic say they would vote to support unification (about 65%), with some 17% preferring that Northern Ireland stay in the United Kingdom.

Growing legitimacy of Sinn Féin

The election of Ms. Connolly could prove a significant catalyst for reunification, as it gives the pro-unity camp a visible figurehead.

"It's a very, very symbolic role," says Donnacha Ó Beacháin, a political scientist specializing in Irish politics. The president cannot make policy or redraw borders, for instance. But, he says, "symbols can be important."

For decades, Irish reunification has been more aspiration than policy. "Irish unification is not part of day-to-day politics," says Dr. Ó Beacháin. Politicians, he notes, tend to focus on short-term electoral issues such as housing and health care.

President Connolly's insistence on planning for unification could nudge Dublin's political class – especially the centrist parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael – to start thinking more concretely about how a shared Ireland might actually work.

The party that is perhaps most pivotal in paving the way toward reunification is left-wing Sinn Féin, the former political arm of the Irish Republican Army. It is now the largest party in Northern Ireland's regional legislature and the second-largest in the republic's main legislative body, the Dáil. Sinn Féin is uniquely positioned to press for the referendums needed to realize reunification on both sides of the border. And its growing legitimacy, once unthinkable given its historical ties to the IRA, has given the push for unity new momentum.

"You have a dynamic on both sides of the border that's unprecedented," says Dr. Ó Beacháin. "Sinn Féin's success north and south shows that if the left unites, it can win, and that changes the political landscape." If Sinn Féin were to win the next general election or become the leading party in government in the south, that would bring reunification to the top of the political agenda, with a poll likely materializing within 10 years, he adds.

The earliest that a referendum in the north might be successful is 2030, in the assessment of Dr. O'Leary.

An economy already primed?

If the political will is found for reunification, the economic changes required to realize it might not prove as difficult as they might have been, thanks to Brexit.

Brexit has already reshaped the island's economic geography more than any other event since Ireland's partition. Taking Britain out of the European Union – a move which nearly 56% of Northern Ireland's voters opposed – ultimately resulted in a new kind of border dynamic between the republic, Northern Ireland, and the rest of the U.K.

Under the Northern Ireland Protocol, the post-Brexit trade deal that addressed the new state of affairs, the north remains within the EU's single market for goods and agriculture, even though Britain does not. Customs and regulatory checks now take place between Northern Ireland and Britain rather than across the Irish border, effectively aligning the north's economy with that of the republic.

And if Northern Ireland were to vote for reunification, the united state would automatically become part of the European Union.

"There would be no messy negotiations," notes Dr. Ó Beacháin. "Economically, Northern Ireland is more directly linked to the republic than at any other juncture before. Everybody knows that the Republic of Ireland ... is an economic success story and in contrast the same cannot be said of Great Britain."

That's a boon for the north, and should make bringing it into the republic easier than the reunification of Germany in the 1990s. Ireland's recent budget surpluses and strong economic performance, Dr. O'Leary argues, mean the cost of absorbing Northern Ireland would likely amount to only a few percentage points of gross domestic product.

Dr. Ó Beacháin sees the economic challenge as real but manageable. Northern Ireland is the poorest part of the United Kingdom and would become the poorest part of a united Ireland. Estimates put the annual cost of integration at anywhere between €2 billion and €20 billion ($2.3 billion and $23 billion).

"The truth is somewhere in between," says Dr. Ó Beacháin. He

notes that the Irish government's annual budget surplus is currently around €9 billion, suggesting that integration costs could be handled.

Unity as part of Ireland's future

The real issue, Dr. Ó Beacháin warns, is not whether the republic can afford unity, but whether it avoids a scenario like Brexit, where all the hard decisions are made after the referendum. The risk is the Irish "could find themselves sleepwalking into a united Ireland without sufficient preparations."

Audrey Robinson, from County Mayo, says most people now see reunification as part of Ireland's future but stresses that this "has to be something that comes from the people of the country, rather than any one politician." She founds her optimism on younger generations."My nieces and nephews had no experience with the Troubles," referring to the violence that scarred Northern Ireland, and sometimes spilled into the south, between 1968 and 1998. "They have a very different attitude ... and could propel something like this forward."

Older generations tend to see reuniting north and south as righting a historical wrong. Younger people point to Ireland's multicultural and welcoming nature, though concerns over immigration and living costs are rising, as they are elsewhere in Europe.

In Ballybofey, builder Caolan Marley worries that reunification could come with a price, but remains firmly in favor of it. "If we accept Northern Ireland, the tax levels are going to be so high, it's going to change things," he says. But "the rest of the island of Ireland wants it to happen," he insists.

"If it's good, bad, or ugly, we'll fight for it. Ten years down the line, I'm pretty sure it'll work out." ▪

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

60

Milligrams, the weight of a newly developed, solar-powered radio tag that scientists have attached to at least 400 monarch butterflies this year. The tags allow scientists to track the monarchs' migration routes for the first time.

1/3

Cost savings on a small home in Nairobi using panels made from the root structures of mushrooms, instead of the standard brick, timber, and tin. One Kenyan company – and others around the world – are combining mycelium and agricultural waste for sustainable building materials.

265

Times, the warming effect of nitrous oxide on the atmosphere compared with carbon dioxide. Nitrogen application and other soil management activities contribute 75% of all nitrous oxide emissions. But "precision conservation" can help farmers target areas that test well for productivity, while excluding parts of a field from cultivation and wasted fertilizer.

44

Percentage of Peru's gold exports from illegal mining sources. The government says gold's steep price rise has increased the incentive to mine. Peru is South America's top exporter, at $15.5 billion in gold in 2024.

25,000

Seaweed farmers in Zanzibar, Tanzania. Global demand has increased for the crop as food and as a thickener and stabilizer.

2,819

Pounds, the weight of the world's heaviest pumpkin. The new record was set by British brothers this fall and has been broken 21 times since 1993.

– Audrey Thibert / Staff writer

Sources: The New York Times, The Associated Press, NYT, The Economist, AP, The Wall Street Journal

THE EXPLAINER

The fight over cashless bail: What you need to know

The issue of cashless bail is back on lawmakers' minds as President Donald Trump's allies in the House of Representatives passed legislation in mid-November that would, in certain cases, ban the reform that releases low-risk defendants without money payments before trial. The president and his supporters claim the practice puts the public in danger from potentially harmful individuals who may reoffend.

In late August, the president signed two executive orders: one directing federal officers in the District of Columbia to seek pretrial detention for offenders "to the fullest extent permissible," and another threatening to withhold federal funding from cities and states that have largely eliminated cash bail. The Department of Justice has yet to release an anticipated list of places it's targeting for their use of cashless bail.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Cashless bail is meant to ensure low-income people don't have to stay in jail pretrial, unless a judge deems them dangerous. President Donald Trump says the system itself is dangerous and is pressuring cities and states to end it.

Meanwhile, a bill introduced by Elise Stefanik, a Republican congresswoman from New York, that would prohibit cashless bail in Washington, D.C., was passed by the House Nov. 19, over the objections of leaders of the district who urged Congress to reject the effort as federal overreach. The bill now is under consideration by the Senate. Ms. Stefanik has also introduced a bill to end cashless bail nationwide.

Q: What is cashless bail?

Traditionally, bail is money posted by defendants to secure their release before trial. Because it is a refundable deposit, it serves as a kind of insurance that defendants will return to court. Critics say this system punishes the poor: Wealthier defendants can more easily post bail, while low-income people might have to stay in jail, sometimes for months.

Cashless bail reforms aim to address this issue by replacing money bail with risk-based or individualized assessments. Judges decide whether someone should be detained or released based on factors like public safety and flight risk, not their ability to pay.

Q: Why is the White House targeting it?

President Trump has seized on high-profile crimes by people released pretrial – incidents amplified in conservative media – to claim there is a revolving door in the justice system.

In Charlotte, North Carolina, a man with a long arrest record was freed on a written promise to appear in court – a form of cashless bail – before allegedly fatally stabbing 23-year-old Iryna Zarutska, a

Ukrainian refugee, on a light-rail train in August. The killing became a rallying cry for opponents of bail reform, who argue that repeat offenders are slipping through the cracks with little accountability.

Federal agents from the Department of Homeland Security arrived in Charlotte in mid-November in a highly publicized campaign against both illegal immigration and crime. (The suspect in Ms. Zarutska's murder is a U.S. citizen, not an unauthorized immigrant. But Republican state lawmakers and federal officials are using the case to highlight concerns about crime and Mecklenburg County's "sanctuary" policies.)

The president has also used cases like that of Ms. Zarutska to portray bail reform as "the Radical Left's fantasy" that has turned American streets into "hunting grounds for repeat criminals." But researchers say these examples are outliers: Study after study has found that the overwhelming majority of defendants released without bail appear in court and do not reoffend while awaiting trial.

Q: Can the president overrule state bail reforms?

No. The federal government can't override state criminal procedure. But Republican lawmakers are considering legislation to tighten pretrial release rules in New York, and Texas passed limits on cashless bail this year. North Carolina, in September, passed "Iryna's Law," which eliminates cashless bail for certain violent crimes and repeat offenders. Some rules reintroduce money bail for certain offenses or allow judges more discretion to weigh whether a defendant might pose a danger to himself or others.

As the White House could try to punish states and cities financially, legal experts say withholding federal funds or issuing fines over bail policy is likely to spark lawsuits. In recent months, courts have struck down similar attempts by the Trump administration to overrule states on various issues, including sanctuary city practices, education policies, and immigration enforcement.

"There's certainly a chance of litigation," says Sharlyn Grace, a deputy public defender in Cook County, Illinois. "The courts have stopped many of the president's attempts to use unrelated funding as a way to punish states and municipalities with policies he doesn't like."

Q: What does the evidence say about whether cashless bail works?

Several states and jurisdictions have curtailed the use of money bail for low-income, low-risk defendants over the past decade, including Alaska, California, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Washington, D.C., promoting alternatives like supervised release.

But after violent crime rose sharply in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, many politicians, police leaders, and pundits were quick to blame bail reform.

In several studies, researchers have found no correlation between bail reform and higher crime rates.

In 2024, the Brennan Center for Justice conducted a study of 33 cities across the country to assess the causal impact of bail reform on crime trends. The study found no statistically significant relationship between bail reform and crime rates.

Illinois became the first state to fully eliminate cash bail in September 2023. Over the next year, violent crime fell by 12%, jail populations declined by 14%, and court appearance rates remained high at 95% overall and 98% for violent felony cases.

In Chicago's Cook County, homicides dropped 16% and shootings fell 23% compared with pre-reform levels, while 84% of people released pretrial were not charged with any new offense, and 94% were not charged with new violent crimes.

Experts caution against drawing a straight cause-and-effect line. Some studies focus directly on defendants released without bail, while others track broader trends in crime.

"The president is right that the current system is broken, but wrong about the solutions," said Jeremy Cherson, communications director at The Bail Project, an advocacy nonprofit. Criminal justice experts point to interconnected issues, like mass incarceration, uneven sentencing among racial and socioeconomic groups, overcrowded and underfunded jails, and overuse of plea bargains as contributors to larger systemic problems. "We know bail reform is working. It reduces unnecessary jail time, strengthens court appearance rates, and makes communities safer."

Q: What's next?

If the president moves to withhold federal funds based on his executive orders, states will likely sue. States like Illinois say their laws remain unaffected by the executive orders.

President Trump's executive order on Aug. 25 directed the Department of Justice to provide a list within 30 days of places that have "substantially eliminated cash bail" for "crimes that pose a clear threat to public safety and order." If that list is released publicly, it is expected to escalate legal fights – and set up another test of how much power Washington has to shape local criminal justice policy.

–Troy Aidan Sambajon / Staff writer

ECONOMIC CURRENTS

PEMBROKE, GA.

As mills close, timber industry pins its future on innovation, not tariffs

By Patrik Jonsson / Staff writer

Not long after four major paper and pulp mills closed in Georgia this fall, the phone at the South Georgia Sawmill began ringing nonstop.

Loaded down with logs they could no longer sell, woodsmen from around the state were hoping, begging Adam Williams, the sawmill's owner, to buy at least some of their logs to mill. A fifth mill had closed earlier in the year, and they were out of options. Given the small size of his family-owned operation in Pembroke, Mr. Williams had to say no.

"They are panicking," he says. "I had one guy tell me, 'I've been doing this my whole life, and I'm going to hang it up.'"

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Georgia is a hub of the U.S. timber industry, yet its mills are closing fast despite some help from new tariffs. Some family-run businesses say the key to survival is innovating and developing new products.

As the nation's businesses navigate the uncertainties of both America's trade and technological shifts, Georgia's wood industry i s feeling the strain – despite federal tariff policies aimed at encouraging the production of American goods.

During his first term, President Donald Trump slapped a duty on Canadian softwood lumber. (Unlike hardwood lumber that comes from slow-growing oak, maple, and hickory trees, softwood lumber comes from coniferous trees, including pine, fir, and cedar. These trees grow quickly, producing wood that is softer, cheaper, and easier to work with than hardwoods.) Then, this fall, he did it again, imposing wider-ranging tariffs on Canadian wood, as well as on kitchen cabinets and upholstered wood products, much of which come from China and Vietnam. But demand for U.S. lumber is being driven largely by broader economic trends – posing challenges that are especially deep here in Georgia.

The "Pitch State"

While this Southern coastal state is known as the Peach State, an alternative nickname might be more apt: America's "Pitch State," referring to the resin found in pine trees. Georgia plants, saws, and chips more timber than any other state in the country. In the past five years, Georgia has actually grown 50% more wood than it needs, says Devon Dartnell, chief utilization officer at the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Georgia once had 18 paper mills; it now has eight. Those last five closures cost the state more than $1.7 billion in overall economic impact and $318 million in lost wages, reported the Center Square website.

Meanwhile, demand for lumber has decreased from 58 billion board feet to 56 billion board feet since last year. Housing starts have declined from 1.7 million per year in 2007 to 1.3 million in 2024. Demand for paper products has also fallen by one-third during the same period. Recent paper and timber mill closures have translated to nearly 2,000 direct job losses and almost 8,000 indirect ones.

"We were lucky to avoid mill closures for so long here," says Mr. Dartnell. "But when it came, it came hard – a gut punch."

The scene is being replicated in other timber markets from New Hampshire to Idaho, raising questions about what measures the United States could take to become more self-reliant and preserve its foundational industries. While most of the U.S. wood supply has historically been homegrown, imports have surged, particularly from Canada. That country supplies about 30% of America's softwood.

In New Hampshire, the Trump administration shut down the state's hardwood trade with China, causing disruptions for mills that rely on that market. The same applies to New Hampshire's trade with Canada. That, combined with high inventories and a weak housing market, has made it difficult for businesses to plan effectively.

"We are talking about the primary input in home construction, about products that are part of our everyday lives," says Andrew Muhammad, a resource economist at the University of Tennessee. "But we also are talking about a natural resource that actually is vital in how we preserve biodiversity and fight climate change."

Reviving "Big Lumber," he says, referring to large-scale, industrial-level timber production, "is going to require that we rethink wood in the United States." This means promoting wood products as new building materials, using fuel such as pellets for heating in the European market, and expanding the Caribbean lumber market.

The Trump administration says it is trying to do just that. Preserving forestry to protect biodiversity and increase carbon storage is not a cause that has carried weight with the White House. But for its economic importance Mr. Trump has made wood – and the harvesting of timber – a national security issue alongside aluminum cans and auto parts. In March, he issued an executive order that the government ease up on "heavy-handed" regulations on timber harvesting on federal lands. In October, an order imposed a 10% tariff on top of a 35% tax already on Canadian lumber.

Given that timber is a larger part of gross domestic product in Canada than steel, British Columbia's premier complained that tariffs on Canadian lumber are now higher than those the U.S. puts on Russian wood. "Let that sink in," David Eby said.

For some American woodsmen, the tariffs have been a needed boost. Tariffs on Canadian wood are "part of the reason we're seeing a shift toward more use of Southern yellow pine," says Paul Jannke, a principal at Forest Economic Advisors in Littleton, Massachusetts. "But it's a slow shift."

Whether the tariffs are a practical or sustainable solution is another question.

Though the tariffs were meant to turn home builders toward domestic woods, some builders have simply switched to imported spruce from Sweden and Finland, less for price than for preference, they say.

And, for many, how the American market will adjust remains a mystery.

In Homer, Georgia, for example, Cory Keesee says that he is trying to cut his way out of an economic mess. The third-generation logger runs a crew of about 20 sawyers and loggers. Amid slumping demand and a need to retain his workers, he is operating his mill at 70% of capacity – near the U.S. average. But to make money, he says, the mill needs to run at 85%. "People like us who have been sawmilling their whole lives, it's hard for us when they are flooding it with cheaper lumber," says Mr. Keesee. "We can share the wealth. But we can't share it all."

New ideas and international competition

Trying to address Georgia's timber woes, Republican Gov. Brian Kemp has assembled a task force to suss out new opportunities for Georgia wood. Georgia Tech University, for one, is at the forefront of technology that might one day refine new types of aviation fuel from trees. The state is also pioneering the use of so-called "mass timber" – cross-laminated panels of two-by-sixes that replace concrete and steel. Mass timber was used in 2024 to build a new office complex at 619 Ponce de Leon in Atlanta.

How those nascent efforts compare with the rush among other nations to compete in timber products remains to be seen. "Brazil, China, and Indonesia are building brand new, state-of-the-art mills, and we're running mills built in 1936," says Mr. Dartnell.

For Professor Muhammad, tariffs are only part of a complicated set of solutions for sagging timber markets. Tariffs "may temporarily feel good, and it may also feel good to those who felt particularly threatened by Canadian lumber," he says. "But if we're talking about long-term structural change on the production and demand side, it's really about educating people about the importance of wood and forestry."

Mr. Williams, the sawmill owner, is trying to do his part in reimagining the industry. His small mill custom-cuts structures that he calls "barnominiums" – a cross between a barn and a condominium – from large yellow pine timbers. An aeronautical engineer by trade, Mr. Williams bought the mill five years ago. His 18-year-old son and two of his son's friends run the mill while he draws and assembles the housing structures.

By finding a niche, his mill is turning a profit. To Mr. Williams, tariffs are a form of "nonviolent leverage" that can be helpful.

"But our reforms have to go deeper," he says. "I think we have to go back to a family model, built on common sense, where we can find long-term solutions and create economic change by educating ourselves and also learning trades. Anything worth doing is going to be hard." ■

EMMAUS, PA.

At Jenae Holtzhafer's boutique, foster children are clothed in kindness

By Hillary Chura / Contributor

Jenae Holtzhafer and her husband, Brian, were applying to be foster parents when they realized they couldn't manage, partly because of money. Instead of stepping back, Mrs. Holtzhafer channeled that realization into The Kindness Project: a support hub for foster families that has served more than 3,000 children in eastern Pennsylvania over the past seven years.

Launched from the Holtzhafers' dining room, the nonprofit began by providing free car seats, toiletries, and clothing. Today, it offers babysitting for foster parents' nights out and runs community-building events, an annual picnic, monthly support groups, and a 3,300-square-foot boutique stocked with items.

"It's not just, 'Come in and get things,'" Mrs. Holtzhafer says. "We want families to feel connected, that they have that support behind them so they can keep doing this."

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Inadequate funding can strain families seeking clothing and other essentials for foster children. A support hub fills a critical gap in eastern Pennsylvania.

Based in Emmaus, Pennsylvania, The Kindness Project is part of a patchwork of volunteer-run closets. These grassroots groups help children – often arriving from their birth homes with only what they are wearing – and the foster parents who take them in. Nationally, the annual turnover rate for foster parents is 30% to 50%, largely due to lack of support, advocates say.

The Kindness Project's curated shop, known as The Kindness Exchange, provides each new foster child with a week's wardrobe, toiletries, and whatever they may need – be it a bed, backpack, diapers, or wipes. It has a birthday room, offers seasonal items such as Halloween costumes, accommodates back-to-school shopping trips, and fulfills holiday wish lists. It has distributed more than $5 million in goods since 2020, working with 44 foster care agencies in more than 35 counties in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Liz Reiter-Cook, who has fostered 20 children, says her county's $150 clothing reimbursement doesn't go far.

"Before The Kindness Project, good luck," she says. Her children swim competitively, thanks to free lessons through the group. "The cost to get a kid into regular kid activities is huge and insane," she adds. "I'd never have been able to afford that."

Foster stipends vary by location and depend on how much medical or other care a child needs. In this area of eastern Pennsylvania north of Philadelphia, foster families receive about $26 to $35 daily per child to cover food, clothing, toiletries, and transportation, according to Joyce Riche, former director of permanency services at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and now a Kindness Project board member. Studies estimate that raising a child in the United States costs $48 to $80 per day.

Child welfare experts say that while volunteer-run closets fill a critical gap for foster children, they would be unnecessary with adequate government funding.

"We are not a society that cares enough about children," says Mary Elizabeth Collins, a professor at Boston University's School of Social Work. "There should be much more money going into these systems."

Angie Gillen, education and outreach director at The Salvation Army Children's Services in Allentown, says Mrs. Holtzhafer has revolutionized local foster support. "Jenae worked so hard to make sure that the store was charming," Ms. Gillen notes. "She made sure it didn't smell like a thrift store. ... Every single bit of it was intentional."

Ms. Gillen recalls a family who initially agreed to foster one to two children – but ultimately accepted five siblings because they knew The Kindness Project would provide essentials and a sense of community. "I truly believe it's one of the things that keeps people fostering," Ms. Gillen says.

Rene Medina has fostered six children, accepting some with less than two hours' notice. She says The Kindness Project is a lifesaver in last-minute provisioning.

"In a perfect world, you would get support from your family and the case worker, but that's not always happening," Ms. Medina explains. "I think that The Kindness Project allows for that buffer."

Mrs. Holtzhafer says that being plucked from their homes can leave foster children feeling disconnected. The Kindness Project wants to make them feel seen and heard.

Ann Mahlmann, one of 120 volunteers, says that beyond material aid, the organization emphasizes dignity and choice. Children can shop for themselves instead of accepting hand-me-downs or items that someone else has selected. "They say, 'We can get this for free? ... Is that really mine? I can take this?'" she says.

Ms. Riche says reimbursement for what foster parents have bought can take up to six weeks as they juggle therapy and emergency medical visits.

Equipping a foster child with bedding, clothing, and age-appropriate necessities can run $1,900 for a teenager to $2,800 for a baby, according to The Kindness Project. When warehouse worker Joshua Rosado welcomed his infant foster daughter a year ago, the baby came with a car seat and two grocery bags of belongings. He says The Kindness Project saved him at least $800 – half a month's salary – on a stroller, clothing, stuffed animals, soap, and a high chair.

"Saving that much money is huge," he says.

Operating on an annual budget of $250,000, The Kindness Project relies on individual donors, local corporate sponsors, nationwide grants, and community fundraisers, such as twice-yearly yard sales and a mini-golf tournament. A church congregation bought 542 pairs of back-to-school shoes; a kitchen design store makes toddler beds; bakeries furnish birthday cakes; local businesses donate extracurricular classes and tickets to sporting events. Starbucks contributes overstock merchandise. Mexican restaurant Cactus Blue provides take-home family meals when a foster child arrives. Volunteers handle yard work around the cottage-like property.

Mrs. Holtzhafer runs every aspect of the operation – fundraising, marketing, social media, stocking shelves, organizing volunteers, community outreach, grant writing, and even making deliveries. She partnered with Lehigh Valley Reilly Children's Hospital to launch the Kindness Express van to reach far-flung families. She's also raising money for an on-site playground.

Mrs. Holtzhafer fears that federal cutbacks, rising costs, and unemployment will strain donors and foster parents. Before the recent government shutdown started, two foster families asked her for food.

"You see these kids and their potential," Mrs. Holtzhafer says, "and you want to be the person who gives them a future." ■

Seeking a better life

Many Senegalese are braving dangerous seas to get to Europe. Can they be convinced to stay?

By Colette Davidson / Special correspondent
and Essouly Diedhiou / Special contributor

JOAL AND THIAROYE-SUR-MER, SENEGAL; AND LA OROTAVA, CANARY ISLANDS

Pape Sady's teenage sons left in the dark.

One morning in 2020, he woke up and Abdoulaye and Souleymane weren't there. He waited two days, then three. He asked around. But deep down, he already knew.

Pape had warned them about the risks of the perilous days at sea. After all, he'd made the trip to the Canary Islands himself, over a decade ago.

"For over a week, I couldn't eat or sleep," he recalls from the courtyard of his sister's home in the seaside town of Joal, once a popular departure point for migration to Europe. "I knew the route, and that it shouldn't have taken so long."

Nearly 64,000 people arrived illegally in Spain in 2024, with a record 46,843 landing in the Canary Islands – the country's closest point to Africa – from the West African coast, according to the Spanish Interior Ministry. Aid groups say an additional 10,457 people died or disappeared trying to reach Spain that year, most of them attempting the Atlantic route from West Africa, whose strong currents have made it the most dangerous sea crossing in the world for migrants.

Many were departing coastal towns and villages like Joal, where families who once relied on the sea for jobs now struggle to put food on the table, as industrial fishing increasingly puts traditional fishermen out of work and strips the ocean of precious resources.

But as Pape knew only too well, if the risks of leaving are clear, so are the rewards. Nestled among Joal's simple concrete homes and dirt lanes are stately, freshly painted two-story houses, built with money sent home from migrants. This tempts those who can't make ends meet with the promise of a life in Europe. Last year, remittances accounted for 11.6% of Senegal's gross domestic product, according to the World Bank.

"Many here say it's better to die at sea than next to the sea because you didn't have enough to eat," says Moustapha Diouf, a local antimigration activist who is trying to convince young people like Abdoulaye and Souleymane Sady to remain in Senegal.

Two decades ago, when Mr. Diouf himself boarded a boat bound for Europe, he had felt that same tug. Now, as Senegal's coastal villages empty out of their young people, he is trying to make the opposite pitch: Stay, and try to build something better here instead.

The stakes of this fight are calculated in the lives of those like Abdoulaye and Souleymane, the stability of fishing communities like Joal, and even the future of this country. At a time when Senegal looks to build its industries and assert independence from the West, the country needs its young people.

But leaders, activists, and parents face an uphill battle to keep them at home. International migration is growing, and historical evidence suggests that as poorer countries approach middle-income status, people tend to leave more often, not less. Senegal now faces a quandary affecting countries across the region: When the promise of Europe burns so bright, what would it take to keep young people at home?

"I told Abdoulaye and Souleymane, 'Watch out, it's not better over there,'" says Pape. "But they were stubborn and determined. They went anyway. Luckily, they survived."

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ABDOULAYE SADY DIDN'T WANT to disappoint his father, but he knew he couldn't stay. He worked as a hairdresser in Joal and fished with his dad and brother on the weekends. Still, he found himself calling his mother in mainland Spain each month, asking her to wire him cash.

In Europe, he thought, he could earn more and help his family out.

When Abdoulaye boarded the wooden fishing boat along with 180 others that day in 2020, he knew the risks. But he had grown up on the water. The waves didn't scare him.

Nothing prepared him, however, for the harrowing voyage to the Canary Islands. The trip was supposed to take five days, but halfway there, the boat got lost. After a week at sea, it ran out of gas. The passengers could see the Canary Island of El Hierro, which their phones' GPS told them was only 11 miles away. But they were trapped, the last of their food and water gone.

For four days, the boat drifted agonizingly toward the shore. In desperation, some people drank seawater and became violently ill, or dehydrated. When his fellow passengers began to die, Abdoulaye watched as they were thrown overboard.

"I couldn't look at the sea for a long time after that," he says from a hillside café in La Orotava, on the Canary Island of Tenerife. "Every time I would go to the beach here, I always thought of that trip, of the people who died."

Like many young men who leave Senegal, Abdoulaye grew up in a fishing family; each evening, Pape came home with fresh fish for dinner. But by the time Abdoulaye began joining him on fishing trips as a teenager, they often returned empty-handed.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

In Senegal, poverty makes young people embark on a dangerous voyage to reach Europe. Parents, and local leaders, are seeking solutions to encourage them to stay.

The family's problem is one that faces fishing communities along the length of Senegal's coast, where the majority of fish populations are in a "state of collapse," according to a report by the Environmental Justice Foundation. Small-scale fishers like the Sadys have seen their catch decrease by over half in recent years, and say their living conditions are also plummeting.

One of the main culprits is the industrial fishing boats roaming the Senegalese coast, dragging tens of thousands of tons of fish into their nets each year. While most of these ships are registered as Senegalese, many are in fact controlled by foreign investors from Europe and China, and often flout restrictions on where they catch and how much.

That has squeezed the local fishing industry, and also altered the way Senegalese eat. Traditionally, fish has been a centerpiece of local diets, and the star attraction of beloved dishes like *thieboudienne*, a plate of stewed white fish served over a bed of rice and vegetables.

But as Senegalese fish exports quadrupled between 2008 and 2018, the amount of fish available to households here fell by half, according to a 2022 study in the journal Marine Policy. Losing fish means "losing tradition," U.S.-based Senegalese chef Pierre Thiam told The Associated Press.

In November 2024, the European Union announced that it would not be renewing an agreement with Senegal that allowed European boats to fish surplus stocks in Senegalese waters in exchange for yearly payments of around $1.8 million.

Although European boats are responsible for only a small proportion of the total catch in Senegalese waters, many Senegalese see the end of the EU agreement as a positive sign for the local fishing industry, in particular traditional fishers.

"Compared to two years ago, we're already seeing a difference," says Abdourahmane Diouf, a member of Joal's CLPA, the local artisanal fisheries council. "Revenues are going up. Marine life,

especially octopus and sardines, is starting to come back."

But for small-scale fishermen, so far little has changed.

Inside the Joal port on a recent morning, men in rubber boots scurry around, sorting fish and packing them into refrigerated trucks destined for the international market.

But local authorities estimate that nearly 90% of fishermen in the area work in the artisanal sector, and out on the beach, dozens of their wooden fishing boats sway idly near the shore. Meanwhile, fishermen crouch under the awning of a building with nowhere to go. Three women attempting to sell octopus say they do so in vain – most middlemen will end up buying from the big industrial boats.

Pape still tries to go out to sea each day with his 16-year-old son, Ibrahima, who dropped out of school to help his dad fish. Together, they catch miniature sharks to sell to hotels and clients in Ghana. Whatever the pair doesn't sell, they exchange for fish to feed their family of 10.

In addition to Abdoulaye and Souleymane, Pape's eldest son and his first wife live in Bilbao, Spain, where she earns a living braiding tourists' hair. In good times, Abdoulaye sends a few hundred euros to his father – enough to pay for the family's food for a month. But inflation and poor job prospects mean it's getting harder and harder for any of them to send money home.

Meanwhile, Pape's two other wives work odd jobs, collecting plastic garbage from the beach and selling it to recycling centers or selling small amounts of fish at the port.

"We have enough money to eat, but not much else," he says, crossing his arms on a low bench in the courtyard, while a sheep bleats in the next room. "I can never relax. There are so many mouths to feed."

But although Pape struggles to provide for his family, his friends and neighbors call him "the little rich guy" because he has sons in Europe. His second wife has started pleading with him to allow Ibrahima to migrate to Europe, so she can have a child who's "made it," too.

"If Ibrahima comes to me one day and says he wants to leave on a boat, I'll refuse," says Pape, shaking his head. If his brothers can sponsor him for a visa, "maybe," he says. "But on a boat, no way."

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THE PROMISE OF LEGAL STATUS is one of the key factors driving so many Senegalese migrants toward Spain in particular. The country has long had more open policies toward new arrivals than many of its European neighbors. In May, its government simplified the procedure for obtaining residency and work permits.

It has also expanded its circular migration program, which provides short-term visas for West Africans to come to Spain for seasonal work, mostly in agriculture, before returning home.

But the number of people who qualify for the circular migration program, which involves a lengthy interview process, remains small. And "because it doesn't provide a longer-term perspective, people don't get enough skills to invest back in Senegal," says Ravenna Sohst, a policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute Europe.

For migrants who are able to remain in Spain, meanwhile, there are other challenges. Far-right and anti-immigrant parties have gained ground across Europe – including some regions of Spain. Despite the country's open policies, polls show a growing majority of Spaniards support the deportation of both unauthorized migrants and those with legal status who commit crimes.

Abdoulaye says he has, at times, experienced "horrible" racism and battled assumptions that migrants like him are only in Spain to benefit from the country's social security net, instead of working to integrate into Spanish life. He just wants to be treated as a "normal person," he says, but instead, "everyone thinks all Black people just got off the boat."

Many unauthorized migrants also remain stuck working low-paying, under-the-table jobs that don't make them enough money to send home, much less pay their own bills.

"Families think that you arrive in Europe and it's an El Dorado. But it's exactly the opposite," says Alioune Fall, president of Sama Chance. The Dakar-based nonprofit provides newly returned migrants with temporary housing and psychological support to help them reintegrate into Senegalese life.

"Some people have had very intense experiences; many have been exploited," says Mr. Fall. "They're ashamed to return to their families and say, 'It didn't work out.'"

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MOUSTAPHA DIOUF, the migration activist, is determined to stop young people from leaving Senegal in the first place. In 2006, he was one of the more than 30,000 people who left West Africa for the Canary Islands, part of a historic migration wave that lasted until 2008. The majority came from Senegal, where global price shocks collided with an erratic rainy season that led to low crop outputs for farmers.

But soon after his arrival, Mr. Diouf was imprisoned and deported back to Senegal. Upon his return, he set up the nonprofit AJRAP – Association of Young Repatriates – and has since become an outspoken voice against migration. From his home in Thiaroye-sur-Mer, an impoverished fishing village outside Dakar, Mr. Diouf makes the rounds in schools and community centers across Senegal to spread the word about the dangers of migrating by sea.

"People here are very poor," he says. "But we shouldn't have to do this."

Mr. Diouf's campaign is part of a wider effort to reduce both the push and pull of migration. In October of last year, the EU announced that it was giving Senegal €30 million ($34 million) to help prevent illegal migration to its shores.

The money will go toward stopping departures and human trafficking, supporting sea rescues, and educating people about the dangers of migrating by sea. At the same time, Senegal's marine corps has begun tracking its waters for illegal fishing – which equally helps detect boats headed for Spain.

The EU has also spent more than €160 million ($185 million) in Senegal since 2015 on efforts to address the root causes of migration – like poverty, poor governance, and insecurity. But the impact has been inconclusive.

Now, activists like Mr. Diouf are pushing Senegal's national government to do more to convince young people to stay. He says not enough of the money promised for education and job training is actually reaching Senegalese communities.

Meanwhile, in towns like Joal and Thiaroye-sur-Mer, the lure of Europe and what it can offer continues to separate the haves and the have-nots.

In these towns, most residents live in weathered homes made of sand and clay that flood every time it rains, where flies buzz over fresh meat in open-air courtyards because refrigerators are too expensive. Wooden pirogue boats idle in the bay, while young people do odd jobs – rolling car tires across town or selling bags of tap water – to help their parents make ends meet.

But on nearly every corner, fancy houses tower above their neighbors. Inside are televisions and washing machines, purchased with money sent from abroad. Those with family in Europe sport Nike-brand tracksuits and shoes. They needn't worry how the electricity and water bills will get paid at the end of the month.

More patrols in Senegalese waters have largely stopped young people from boarding empty fishing boats in coastal towns like Joal and Thiaroye-sur-Mer, say local authorities. But the restrictions have only pushed them into the hands of smugglers on the coast of Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mauritania.

"Obviously, these kids don't want to risk their lives," says Mr. Diouf, crouching next to a pirogue canoe at Thiaroye-sur-Mer's beach. "They're just motivated to have a better life."

■ ■ ■

BACK IN TENERIFE, Abdoulaye has a temporary residency permit and is trying to move forward. He's training to be a chef and works as a translator from Spanish to Wolof, to help Senegalese arrivals with the challenges of adjusting to their new European life. His brother Souleymane recently moved to El Hierro with his Spanish wife, who is pregnant with their first child.

But Abdoulaye says their lives in the Canary Islands have, at times, been "extremely hard." He often struggles to pay his rent for the apartment he shares with a handful of other men from Joal, and every time he goes to the store, it feels like prices have gone up again. This fall, he had a bike accident, hurt his wrist, and hasn't been able to work since.

Abdoulaye tries to convince his little brother, Ibrahima, to be sensible – to wait for his brothers to send him an invitation to come to Spain on a tourist visa or through the family reunification process.

It's not just for Ibrahima's sake, but for Pape's, too. Abdoulaye grew up hearing his father's painful migration story. He'd set off for Europe on a fishing boat, working illegally at a Spanish port while their mother struggled back in Joal to take care of Abdoulaye and Souleymane – just toddlers then – by herself.

"I keep telling my brother to be patient, to wait for the paperwork to go through. 'We will buy you a plane ticket,'" says Abdoulaye. "'Don't come by boat; it's madness.'"

But for Ibrahima, the desire to have what his brothers do in Europe rings louder.

"Life is really hard here," he says, just out of earshot from his father, back in Joal. "There's no time to go out, only to go fishing and get enough money to eat. I want to be able to buy things, like shoes and nice clothes."

Pape knows what his son dreams of, and it keeps him awake at night. Already, each morning when he goes to wake Ibrahima for another day at sea, he pauses at his bedroom door, wondering if his son will still be there.

"Right now, Ibrahima is young. He still listens to me," Pape says. "But once he gets older, he'll stop taking my advice. I know he's going to leave one day, too."

■ *Colette Davidson and Essouly Diedhiou reported from Joal and Thiaroye-sur-Mer, Senegal, and Ms. Davidson from La Orotava, Tenerife.*

PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

Generosity as a climate-action driver

Perhaps the biggest news out of this year's global climate conference was not more government promises to reduce carbon emissions. Rather, it was a new survey by the ClimateWorks Foundation that highlights generosity at the heart of climate action.

Private donations to help people adapt to climate change more than doubled from 2021 to 2024, hitting a record $870 million, according to the survey. Meanwhile, the number of foundations making adaptation-related grants jumped by more than 50%.

During the two-week conference itself, more than 35 philanthropic institutions agreed to spend $300 million on meeting the health needs of those most vulnerable to droughts, floods, storms, or heat waves. And the Gates Foundation announced a $1.4 billion project to expand access to innovations that help farmers across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The actual amount of all this new giving – which donors admit is far less than what is needed – is not really the focus. Instead, private donors are essential because they are more risk tolerant and creative in putting money into showcase climate projects than risk-averse leaders in business and government.

"In a time of accelerating climate impacts, shrinking civic space, and fragile global cooperation, philanthropy's voice and support matter more than ever," wrote Nancy Lindborg, head of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. She also stated that many climate solutions can both curb emissions and help communities adapt. Adaptation goals were first established at the 21st U.N. Climate Change Conference a decade ago in Paris. That same meeting also produced a global agreement "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels." Since then, many of the world's biggest private donors have been organizing around climate action.

"People want to give money to help solve this problem but don't know what to do, so they're faced with decision paralysis," stated Dan Stein, executive director of Giving Green, an organization that helps individuals, businesses, and philanthropies make effective donations to combat climate change. Private giving and public spending on climate change, he told TriplePundit, which reports on sustainability in business, can complement each other. ■

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

Lawful checks on drug traffickers

President Donald Trump's military approach to cocaine traffickers in the Americas keeps hitting bumps. His assistance to the armed forces in Colombia – the largest source of cocaine – has slowed because of a feud with that country's leftist leader. In a referendum, voters in Ecuador – through which some 70% of global cocaine flows – rejected the idea of foreign bases in the country to help fight the drug trade.

And in recent months, as the United States military has built up forces near Venezuela and conducted lethal strikes against alleged drug-carrying boats, cries have grown louder that such attacks might violate international law.

Meanwhile, amid this forceful approach, one country in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic, has received an accolade for an alternative tactic to dealing with crime – whether it is petty theft or international drug runners coming to its shores.

A global ranking of countries on democratic rule of law found the Dominican Republic had the highest increase this year – 2.1% – in the overall scoring for areas from judicial independence to police performance to civic participation. That was up from a 1.1% improvement the year before. While its overall rank is still No. 76 out of 143 countries, the Caribbean's second-biggest country has become a model in how to make progress in democratic rule of law. More than two-thirds of nations, including in Latin America, saw a decline in their rankings this year.

Which country had the lowest overall score in the rankings by the World Justice Project? Venezuela, a southern neighbor to the Dominican Republic and home to one of the world's worst authoritarian regimes.

The progress in the Dominican Republic began in earnest about two decades ago but picked up speed in 2020 after an anti-corruption crusader, Luis Abinader, was elected president. Before his reelection in 2024, he acknowledged how much citizens have achieved in government transparency and accountability. "When you work with ethics and honesty," he said, "resources yield more and the possibilities of solving problems expand."

In all societies, law itself is not as visible as, say, a drone attack on a boat. Yet it helps keep people away from illicit activities.

As the late American legal scholar Harold J. Berman wrote, a belief in law appeals not only to people's finite interests, "but also to their faith in a truth, a justice, that transcends social utility."

Perhaps the best armor against the drug trade can be found in places like the Dominican Republic, which is striving to anchor itself in qualities from honesty to equality. ▪

READERS WRITE

Enlightening history

The Monitor's book reviews enlighten me. The books by David McCullough and Jill Lepore – reviewed in "Nothing had to happen the way it happened," from the Oct. 20 issue of the Weekly – are essential for these times.

I have simply learned so much from these two historians over the years, especially Dr. Lepore's book about Ben Franklin's younger sister, Jane. Who knew that most of Franklin's letters were written to her? Mr. McCullough's early history "Brave Companions" has been given as a gift over the years, even before his two remarkable Pulitzer Prize biographies of Harry Truman and John Adams.

I am ever so pleased that Michael Hill and Dorie McCullough Lawson pulled together more history by Mr. McCullough in the most recent book, "History Matters," published posthumously. And Dr. Lepore's ideas about amendments to the Constitution are extremely valuable to put into action as a possible remedy today.

Thank you for reviewing good books.

MARTHA BARKLEY
Menlo Park, California

Compassion for those in need

I loved the cover story "A bridge and a divide," which compared the treatment of refugees in Denmark and Sweden, from the Oct. 13 issue of the Weekly. It was brilliant and deeply moving.

I had put all Scandinavian countries up in heaven somewhere, with their good education, housing, and opportunities for all citizens. To find such a stark contrast between the two countries was fascinating. I loved how the article was constructed, starting with a refugee, Farzad Rahimi, who arrived in Sweden as a traumatized teenager, got swept into the crime scene, and was thrown in jail four times.

Yay for Denmark, which kept people like him out, I thought, and boo for Sweden, which was way too tolerant. Look at how its crime shot up! No wonder it has a nationalist, conservative movement!

By the end of the article, when it looked as though Mr. Rahimi had moved forward, I had changed my mind. Sweden takes those who are struggling and hangs in there with them. Yes, the best policy may lie somewhere in the middle between the two countries, but compassion for needy people, wherever they come from, is a good way to start. Yay Sweden!

LYNNE JOHNSON
Honolulu

Sticking to kindness

I'm a longtime reader, but first-time letter writer. Your magazine is one of my favorites because you lead with kindness and have a calm, respectful vibe in everything you publish.

Now, the essay "Come cry with me," in The Home Forum from the Oct. 27 Weekly issue, took the cake. What a story. Exactly what we need in America, where every video and show (but *not* book, story, or essay) is determined to show how much we all dislike each other.

The image of people passing that baby around, helping entertain him, helping reassure a great-grandmother with limited English, made my heart smile. It was the best description of this country I could have ever read.

Thank you for publishing it. And thank you for your calm, reassuring kindness. Keep it up.

MANDY BUNDOCK-SIMJIAN
Wallingford, Connecticut

GLOBAL NEWSSTAND

ARAB NEWS / JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

The US has a partner in Saudi Arabia

"The Saudi-US relationship has weathered storms," writes Faisal Abbas, editor-in-chief. "... Despite political shifts between Republicans and Democrats, the strategic value of Saudi Arabia has remained constant. It is not a cash machine – it is a stabilizing force. As custodian of Islam's holiest sites, the region's largest economy and a key player in global oil markets, Saudi Arabia is indispensable to US interests. ... The US needs a partner that commands respect in the region. Saudi Arabia fits that role. ... The emergence of a new Syria – after decades of turmoil – is testament to that influence."

LE MONDE / PARIS

Brazil should live up to its climate pledge to Indigenous people

"Among the protesters [at the United Nations climate conference held in Brazil in November] ... were many representatives of Indigenous communities," writes Bruno Meyerfeld, Brazil correspondent. "... Their objective: to protest a decree that facilitates commercial navigation on several Amazonian rivers and which threatens their sacred sites. ... [The summit was] supposed to be a moment of recognition for Indigenous peoples, who have been placed at the heart of [Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's] political agenda. ... Lula's efforts have fallen short. ... The president has formally recognized only 16 Indigenous territories, while 107 others ... are still awaiting approval. ... [The protesters were] determined to influence the outcome of [the] summit, ... rather than play a merely symbolic role."

AL JAZEERA / DOHA, QATAR

Let's give African startups a makeover

"African entrepreneurs can build world-class businesses, but investors hesitate because they cannot see how or when they will get their money back," writes Maxwell Gomera, resident representative of the United Nations Development Program in South Africa. "... Silicon Valley hums along because everyone knows the playbook: build fast, scale up and within five to seven years either list on an exchange or get acquired. ... If Africa wants its tech ecosystems to thrive, we need a parallel play. ... If we could walk into investor meetings and say, 'Here's the pipeline of companies. Here's the capital vehicle, and here is a clear five-year exit pathway,' we could shift the conversation. ... We could make African innovation not only attractive to foreign investors but also bankable for African ones."

EURONEWS / LYON, FRANCE

Europe can support itself by supporting farmers

"Too often, perhaps, food production is presented as at odds with climate action," writes Maria Walsh, a member of the European Parliament from Ireland. "... I've never met a farmer who was not acutely aware of the importance of the need for a sustainable climate and environment. Studies have shown that small farmers create higher yields and improve biodiversity. And increasingly, I see farmers who are working to alter their practices to ... sustainable ways of growing. ... It's not up to farmers to save the planet alone. ... But farms and food are literally what makes us what we are. Ensuring they are supported ... through a [climate] transition ... must be a priority."

THE GUARDIAN / SYDNEY

Finding friends across the generational divide

"I have the benefit of having a number of friends who are both much younger than me, and somewhat older than me, and the exchanges we have of ideas, advice and points of view are undoubtedly making me a better person," writes Zoya Patel, a writer and editor based in Australia. "... It's through these friendships that I've been able to both question my own assumptions, [and] push back against stereotypes about generational identities. ... Each generation is meant to forge new social movements and ideological shifts to the ones before them. We're meant to find some things baffling about each other, but we should also be able to recognise how crucial that diversity of experience and thought is ... to society, [and] in our individual lives."

– Compiled by Victoria Hoffmann and Audrey Thibert / Staff writers

HOME FORUM

More than I bargained for

From underestimating to overpaying, my failed adventures in haggling.

My father was a world-class dickerer. As a young boy, I remember looking on as he bargained with the owner of a sporting goods store over a fishing rod he wanted to buy for my birthday. The clerk engaged patiently with my father as the two went at it. In the end, my dad prevailed and garnered a 25% discount. (His argument was that the metal fishing-line guides were poorly angled.) He also got the clerk to throw in an extra spool of fishing line.

For my part, I was embarrassed. Bargaining for something that has a plainly marked price seemed somehow wrong. As we walked along the street, I asked my dad if the man was mad at us. He looked down at me and smiled. "Of course not. If he didn't want to sell this rod at the price I had bargained for, he would have said no." Then he chuckled. "That man enjoyed the back-and-forth as much as I did."

With the benefit of hindsight, I realize that my dad was right. There are those who love the art of bargaining. There are even countries where it is built into the culture. Over the years, I tried my best to emulate my father, and I concluded that dickering ability is not hereditary. I stink at it.

I was 17 years old when I made my first independent attempt to haggle, on a class trip to Spain. "The street vendors expect you to bargain with them," our teacher, Mr. Gurske, told us. And so, on a brilliant Madrid day, I decided to make my father proud. I spotted a street vendor with a brimming display of sunglasses. In my halting high school Spanish, I approached him and picked out an attractive pair. In an offhand manner, he quoted me the American equivalent of the local currency – $5.

Mr. Gurske had told us to commence the dickering by offering half the stated price. Being an attentive student, I offered the man $2.50. I was taken completely by surprise when he flew off the handle and began to wave at me and berate me. I upped my offer to $3, then $3.50, then $4.50. The man told me I was insulting him. "The price is now $6," he said, holding up six fingers for emphasis. I don't know what possessed me, but I forked over the $6.

When I got back to the hotel, Mr. Gurske listened to my story. "You're supposed to bargain *down*," he said, agreeing not to tell my classmates about my embarrassing dickering gambit.

Over the years, I made further attempts to bargain, almost always with negative results. Regardless of where I travel, my efforts rarely bear fruit. On a recent trip to El Salvador, I was looking for a leather wallet for my son. I found the perfect item, embossed with a Salvadoran theme. The man quoted me a price of $10. I offered him $6. Looking pained, he placed his hand on his heart and then called his little boy out of the back room. The child emerged, sucking on his fist as he sniffed back tears from some scrape. The upshot: I gave the man $10. And I threw in an extra buck for some candy for the little boy.

I recall my dad once confiding the secret of successful bargaining: "You've got to convince the vendor that you don't need whatever it is they're selling. Get the stars out of your eyes. Learn to walk away."

Again, my dad was right. It was my mother who once told me, "You have soulful, trusting eyes."

As it turns out, my eyes have worked wonders for building relationships, but as for commerce, I've wound up paying top dollar for everything.

A couple of years back, I had a delightful student from Turkey in my university class where I teach. "You must go to Istanbul," she gushed. "You can bargain your heart out in the Grand Bazaar. What great deals!"

Yes, for anyone else. But once the Turks see my soulful eyes, I wouldn't stand a chance.

– Robert Klose

PAUSE FOR POETRY

NOCTURNE

The moon was once a pirate queen
Who brought along a treasure chest
When she climbed the clouds to heaven.
She lifts the lid when day is done,
Arrays her gems against a cloak of night:
Rivers become bracelets in her light;
They twine about the arms of earth, spill
Into seas turquoise and emerald.
Endlessly generous with her riches,
The moon casts diamonds upon the water;
Our eyes grasp what our hands cannot;
Together we share what none can possess.
At dawn the moon gathers up her gems
And places them back in the chest.
A Midas sun turns to gold

The shimmering surface of things,
But hers is the triumph of silver evenings,
The moon, this winsome lady.

– Andrew Armstrong

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Moving toward a fresh start

"I'd rather walk in the dark with God / Than go alone in the light," wrote Mary Gardiner Brainard, an American religious poet ("He knows"). Her sentiment reminds me of how I felt the first time I traveled out of my home country.

I had all of my earthly belongings with me in my truck, and I was going somewhere I'd never been, hoping for a fresh start in life. But as the sun was setting on the first day of my journey, I realized I was lost. The directions I had printed out before leaving home were to a destination with the same name as the place I'd meant to go, but it was actually an entirely different location. I had spent a whole day driving in the wrong direction.

I was worried, alone, and unsure of where I'd stay the night. But my feeling of God's closeness to me in that moment was tangible, and I attribute that to the fact that I had recently begun attending church. I was in my late teens and a new student in a Christian Science Sunday School, where I'd been learning about the life of Christ Jesus and his healing ministry.

My thoughts were uplifted by Jesus' encouragement to "fear not" (Luke 12:32), and other counsel in the Bible to "trust in the Lord with all thine heart" (Proverbs 3:5). Shutting out fearful thinking allowed me to feel the stillness and quiet where I'd learned I could hear God best. Before anything had changed about my circumstances, I began to feel completely overcome by the joy of realizing that I could never be separated from God.

Shortly after this, I was able to make a phone call, and I learned that a friend of a friend lived in a nearby town. I drove to the man's house and he welcomed me with the warmest hospitality I could have imagined. Then he sent me on my way the next morning with good directions. I made it to my destination feeling filled with gratitude for God's guidance. Not just the destination, but the journey itself felt like a fresh start in life.

Daily, we are reminded of issues related to home that many people are facing, as they seek better lives in new places or flee from challenging circumstances. For everyone on a journey of uncertainty, God is a resource, a very real help.

The Bible contains stories, from cover to cover, of people in unfamiliar lands who find God to be their most reliable source of supply. Christian Science helps us understand "the inspired Word of the Bible" (Mary Baker Eddy, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," p. 497). This has helped me see that an encouraging theme of so many of these Bible stories is that home represents more than a geographic location. It's a place in consciousness – a realization that we're truly spiritual, never separate from God. Reaching this understanding is, in itself, a destination, a "promised land," and a home.

Christ Jesus said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21). These words are a prayer that can open our eyes to inspired solutions that speed our journey to wherever we're going.

– A.J. Kiser

ARTS AND CULTURE

DEIR AL-BALAH, GAZA STRIP

In Gaza, a music teacher sings above the din of war

By Ghada Abdulfattah / Special contributor

One day in August, Gazan music teacher Ahmed Abu Amsha picked up his phone, faced the camera, and pressed record.

"Today, there's a lot of drones," he explained from inside a tent in Gaza City.

With a group of his teenage students gathered behind him, the 40-something teacher began to hum, harmonizing with the low, monotone pitch of the machines hovering above. Then he broke into song. The students drifted in behind him, the layers of their voices rising hauntingly above the mechanical buzz.

On Instagram, the video went viral – a call-and-response with a duet partner no one would ever choose. It became a symbol of Gazans' determination to pluck beauty from the horrors of life under Israeli siege. "We will not cancel the music," Mr. Abu Amsha remembers telling his students then. "We will sing with the drone – over it, not under it."

WHY WE WROTE THIS

In Gaza, war is a constant soundtrack. Music teacher Ahmed Abu Amsha teaches his students to lift their voices beyond it.

Several months later, a ceasefire in Gaza has largely silenced the crash of airstrikes here. But drones still fly low over Mr. Abu Amsha's tent, the soundtrack of an occupation that hasn't ended.

"I cannot feel [the ceasefire]," he says. "The war is still here on the ground."

Determined to carry on

Mr. Abu Amsha had been teaching music for nearly two decades when Israeli retaliation for Hamas' Oct. 7 attack forced him from his home in Beit Hanoun, in northern Gaza, in October 2023. His family fled south, first to Rafah, and from there to Khan Younis, where they settled in a makeshift tent camp hugging the sea, known as Al Mawasi.

Immediately, Mr. Abu Amsha approached the camp's informal leaders, introducing himself as a music teacher. The reply was blunt.

"Music! Ahmed! We do not want music," he remembers being told. "We need food, we need water, we need tents."

But he was determined, and began circulating an offer of free music lessons to parents across the camp. At first, they were wary. But then reports trickled back from the first students: A boy with severe insomnia slept through the night; a girl who had gone quiet began to speak again.

"Parents started thanking me," he recalls.

Mr. Abu Amsha called his project Gaza Birds Singing. To keep up with demand, he scavenged for anything he could find that made a musical sound. He followed carts hauling rubble and picked through them in search of broken instruments, repairing whatever he could find. When salvage ran out, he took wires from broken bikes and turned them into strings for a guitar. He drilled holes into plastic pipes and transformed them into flutes.

As Mr. Abu Amsha and his students made melodies from the detritus of war, he was also using music to tell stories of the losses vibrating through Gaza.

One day, he came across a neighbor sitting wordlessly beside a half-built tent. Did he want help? Mr. Abu Amsha asked. The man refused. The next day, Mr. Abu Amsha returned, and the next. But the man would not accept. Later, he learned why: All eight of the

man's children had been killed.

From the encounter came a poem, "I Have No Address," which fed a melody – a song that is part lament, part letter to an abstract future.

He tells me his story with determination in his eyes ...
Children sleep beneath the rubble
But we are not afraid of your bombs.
The sun will rise and the darkness will fade.
Free Palestine.

Another song grew from Mr. Abu Amsha's return to his home in Beit Hanoun in January 2025, during the first ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. Leveled by Israeli bombs, the familiar city disoriented him. Streets mapped to memory no longer existed.

I had a neighbor,
Walking strangely,
He did not know where to find his home,
Although it was close.

Finding voices – and comfort

By March, Mr. Abu Amsha and his family had finally managed to clear the rubble from their home, setting up a small corner for music lessons, when Israel broke the ceasefire. They fled again, this time to Gaza City.

There, drones hovered overhead day and night.

"They are like mechanical insects," Mr. Abu Amsha says. During music lessons, his students began to complain. Some suggested they just cancel their sessions altogether. No, Mr. Abu Amsha told them, when the drone's pitch wavers, your voices must be steady. If the sound gets louder, lift your voices higher.

As in Al Mawasi, the music lessons brought comfort. Children who had stopped speaking found their voices in a chorus. A boy displaced multiple times learned to keep time on a drum made from salvaged plastic.

Mr. Abu Amsha's eldest son, Mu'in, soon joined the project, learning to tune by ear and change the strings of an oud, a traditional Middle Eastern stringed instrument with a short neck and pear-shaped body, known for its warm, resonant tones. The family's running inventory included five guitars, three ouds, four tabla drums, and three violins – some pieced together from shards, others donated.

When Israel ordered residents of Gaza City to leave again in August, Mr. Abu Amsha and his family ferried these instruments with them. In Az Zawayda, in central Gaza, the music lessons started again.

After a new ceasefire began in mid-October, some of his students returned to the remains of their homes in Gaza City. But Mr. Abu Amsha's house in Beit Hanoun lay within the half of Gazan territory still occupied by the Israeli military.

Homesickness thrummed through him.

"It's there that my father taught me music, where I built my first studio, where I sang for the first time," he says. "That is the origin."

A source of inspiration

Meanwhile, for many of Mr. Abu Amsha's students, he was the origin, the source of their love for music.

On a recent Saturday afternoon, about 50 students gathered in his tent. Some had never seen a musical instrument before. One awestruck girl kept reaching out to touch Mr. Abu Amsha's guitar.

He split them into groups. Some of the students worked on percussion, tapping out rhythms while sitting on overturned jerrycans. Another group watched attentively as he introduced them to the guitar. In the third station, another teacher, Osama Jahjouh, or Abu Awni, led a flute lesson.

Forty minutes later, Mr. Abu Amsha gathered the students back together in a circle and started to teach them a simple song.

There was a young boy
Playing in the neighborhood,
Searching for string to fly his kite.
He looked up at the sky and wondered
What was shining there so bright.

"Look, look! A kite is coming to me!"
But it was no kite at all.
It was a great airplane,
flying free without any string. ▪

WASHINGTON

'We don't even know all of what we have.' Howard fights to preserve Black newspapers.

Across the U.S., scholars are digitizing and archiving to save the history of the Black press.

By Ira Porter and Cameron Pugh / Staff writers

Brandon Nightingale walks to the stacks in the basement of Founders Library and opens a cardboard box. Inside sits a treasure that had been feared lost: The North Star. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who has a hall here on Howard University's campus named for him, founded the antislavery newspaper in 1847. He named it after the star that enslaved people followed to freedom.

Last year, during a move, workers found two whole boxes of the newspaper's first year of publication.

"When they came and said, 'Hey, we found this. What do y'all want to do with it?' – we were mind-blown," remembers Mr. Nightingale, senior project manager for the Black Press Archive digitization project, which operates from the library's basement.

The papers haven't been inventoried just yet. "We don't even know all of what we have," Mr. Nightingale marvels.

The basement is a trove of artifacts, including old editions of Black-owned newspapers that tell the life of Black Americans during the 19th and 20th centuries. Articles cover slavery, lynchings, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights era. The archive project, which is part of the university's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, is bringing to life the faces of yesterday by merging them with the digital world of today. This way, the hope is, they won't be lost ever again.

It is just one of many efforts across the country to preserve the history of the Black press. This year, the Amsterdam News, started 115 years ago in New York City, announced that most of its Harlem building will be turned into a museum and community space. The Afro American Newspapers, which has more than 100 years of articles and photographs, also has an expansive archive collection in Baltimore.

"America does not have a full accounting of itself without the historic Black press," says Nicole Carr, author, investigative journalist, and professor at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

"I've argued that the Black press democratized America," says Professor Carr, who won a 2025 prize from the American Society of Journalists and Authors for her thesis. She says that the pages of the Black press, particularly before newsrooms were mostly integrated during the Civil Rights era, told unvarnished stories of labor,

resilience, and fortitude. Those stories examined themes that can serve as a beacon for journalism in a democracy.

"We know that it's protected"

There might be another prize yet to be uncovered at Howard: The library is rumored to possess an original copy of Freedom's Journal, the first Black newspaper in the country, from 1827. The Library of Congress has requested to see a copy when the center finds it.

Mr. Nightingale and his staff say it's not lost on them that their work to give new life to Black Americans' history is taking place just miles from the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture. This past summer, President Donald Trump complained that the museum focused too much on the negatives of history and ordered the Smithsonian to conduct a review to make sure exhibits were aligned with the White House's definition of patriotism.

"It's something about it being here, we know that it's protected. We know that nobody's coming in these doors taking this down from Howard," says Mr. Nightingale.

He and his staff of about 11 people, including students, have curated a digital collection of thousands of pages of the Black press. Some have been digitally preserved before the brittle pages of the original sheets they were printed on faded from history forever.

The project started in 2021, as part of a $2 million grant from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation. This was in conjunction with National Newspaper Publishers Association, a trade organization made up of more than 200 Black-owned newspapers. Google also donated $760,000. Mr. Nightingale's hope is that the center will become a part of Moorland-Spingarn's budget in 2027. So far, he has secured $1.3 million from OpenAI, the Ford Foundation, and the Marguerite Casey Foundation to keep it going.

The project is digitizing U.S. newspapers that are 95 years or older, which are in the public domain. The center also has permission to place online certain newspapers still under copyright. Moorland-Spingarn has international Black papers from the Caribbean and Africa, but they will not be digitized. They are, however, available for researchers to visit and read, as well as U.S. papers not yet in the public domain.

"When we're thinking about our journalism and reckoning with the evolution of journalism, way too often, the Black press is discounted – or it's fed to those of us who are descendants of the diaspora, or a part of it, but not to everyone else," says Professor Carr. People treat the Black press as a special thing instead of looking through its pages for instruction, she adds.

She applauds the move by Howard and other grassroots organizations to preserve the legacy of the Black press. It should be shared with the entirety of society, she says.

"You really want people to feel welcome"

In Flint, Michigan, where Black people make up 57% of the population, Black newspapers can provide an important perspective on the city's complicated history, says Callum Carr, an associate archivist at the University of Michigan-Flint, and who is no relation to the Morehouse professor. Preserving those newspapers, they add, is also a matter of respecting the community – and representing history accurately.

"When you serve a community like Flint, that is so diverse and is so Black, you really want people to feel welcome in this archive and to feel represented and be represented properly," says Carr.

Last year, Carr oversaw the launch of the Black Community Newspapers collection to do just that. It's a partnership between the University of Michigan, the Genesee Historical Collections Center, and the Gloria Coles Flint Public Library that has been working for years to digitize the Black newspapers that covered Flint for much of its history.

So far, the project has archived three papers: the Bronze Reporter, the Flint-Brownsville News, and the Flint Spokesman – covering the late 1940s through the early 1960s. They chronicle everything about Black life, from slice-of-life stories about residents' vacations to heavier topics including police brutality and Jim Crow.

Now, Carr is working on archiving the second run of the Spokesman, which paused publication in the 1950s. During its second iteration, from 1971 to 1978, the paper covered urban-renewal programs, federal initiatives that sought to redress a range of perceived urban problems. These included unsanitary and unsafe housing, high crime, and infrastructure decay.

Such programs often destroyed Black neighborhoods in the name of removing blight. In Flint, the programs targeted neighborhoods such as Floral Park, which, as a result of redlining, was one of the few places in the city where Black people could own property. Municipal neglect led to the degradation of these neighborhoods. The construction of a highway interchange in the 1970s forced residents of Floral Park and surrounding communities from their homes and destroyed swaths of the neighborhoods.

The aim of the archive, Carr says, is not only to remind residents of that history – and how it might impact the present day – but also of the vibrancy of Flint's communities. "The '70s saw a very purposeful destruction of Black community, and reminding people of that community and showing what that community could look like is huge," Carr says. "Hopefully, maybe, we can learn from these newspapers. ... Maybe looking at that history and seeing it still happen will inspire some sort of change." ▪

BOOKS FOR GLOBAL READERS

Q&A with Joseph Torigian, author of 'The Party's Interests Come First'

In "The Party's Interests Come First: The Life of Xi Zhongxun, Father of Xi Jinping," Joseph Torigian sheds light on the coercive power of China's Communist Party regime. Drawing on his deep knowledge of authoritarian states, Dr. Torigian, who speaks Chinese and Russian, unravels the mystery of why revolutionary veteran Xi Zhongxun remained so loyal to the party after years of persecution. In doing so, Dr. Torigian offers a nuanced portrait of the elder Mr. Xi, who had a conservative streak despite his reputation as a reform-leading senior official instrumental in pushing forward market-oriented economic and trade policies in the late 1970s and '80s. This also explains why current Chinese leader Xi Jinping defied early expectations that he, too, would advance reform. Dr. Torigian spoke with the Monitor's Beijing Bureau Chief Ann Scott Tyson. Their conversation has been lightly edited and condensed.

Q: What drew you to write this book?

I wanted to give a picture of what it was like for Xi Jinping to grow up in a revolutionary family. I also wanted to tell the story of the Chinese Communist Party through the life of Xi Jinping's father, Xi Zhongxun, who was present for many of the most important moments in modern Chinese history.

Q: How did your expertise in both Russia and China help you with this project?

It's not easy to research authoritarian regimes, especially China and Russia, but I have tried to develop a set of detective skills. It's necessary to be sensitive to possibilities and not limitations.

Xi Zhongxun was interesting in part because he played a role in the relationship between China and the Soviet Union. He man-

aged the Soviet expert program in the 1950s, so I needed an ability to access Russian sources. I was able to make a quite complete list of every time Xi Zhongxun met with a foreigner, whether within China or outside China. Then I went to the relevant archives in those countries or even spoke to the person who met Xi Zhongxun, including the Dalai Lama.

As I learned more about Xi, a central puzzle emerged, which is why he remained so loyal to the party, even though it persecuted him so many times, hurt the people around him, and often made choices with which he disagreed.

Q: How would you compare the two generations – the old guard, revolutionary veterans, and their offspring, known as "princelings"?

Both generations went through excruciating experiences. The founding generation fought the Nationalists and the Japanese, were nearly destroyed on many occasions, and saw so many other revolutionaries die before the victory of 1949.

Xi Jinping's generation underwent the Cultural Revolution. Xi said nobody could ever imagine what he experienced, that there was nothing harder than that, and that it toughened him.

Some princelings were profoundly disillusioned and decided on another life choice, which was to have fun and make money. Others wanted China to move onto a path of constitutionalism and rule of law.

Now the puzzle for Xi Jinping – and it's an existential one – is how you win over yet a third generation of young Chinese people to the cause. He sees meaning in calls to sacrifice, but we'll have to see how many young Chinese people find meaning in that the same way he does. What kind of suffering leads to alienation, and what kind leads to dedication?

Q: What does your book tell us about politics inside the top levels of China's Communist Party, which is often dismissed as a black box?

Well, it's a black box even for people at the apex of the party elite. One of the most striking findings of my research is how often even very powerful individuals with a great deal of experience don't have a full picture of what's going on. And one implication of that is we don't see factions forming within the elite in a way that many Western analysts have presumed. You don't know what other people are thinking, and if you do try to act in concert with other people, that's politically dangerous, because the top leader sees that as a threat to party unity.

The continuities in the Chinese Communist Party are astounding. It's an organizational weapon, and it always has been. On the other hand, it's hard to predict the outcome of any particular scenario. There are many intricacies in how the party works, how people think, and how the cards may fall. So it's both predictable and unpredictable.

Q: Xi Zhongxun was not an ideologue. Would you say that he was less dogmatic than his son?

Xi Zhongxun has a reputation for being more liberal, but he still believed the Chinese Communist Party needed to build a spiritual civilization. He deserves credit for being a reformer, but he was also very conservative in some ways. For example, he at least initially opposed the late 1970s household responsibility system, which reallocated collective farmland to individual families. When Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping made decisions with which he disagreed, he still put the party's interests first and obeyed. ▪

Gripping action propels a tale of family and reclamation

Nathan Harris' boldly rendered post-Civil War Western delivers a riveting and explosive story.

By Erin Douglass / Contributor

"Amity," the new novel from bestselling author Nathan Harris, is quietly breathtaking. Chronicling the journeys of separated Black siblings across a tumultuous post-Civil War landscape, the book delivers a riveting tale of survival, relationship, and courage.

It's 1866 in bustling New Orleans. Coleman, a young man once enslaved by the Harper family in Baton Rouge, continues to serve the histrionic matriarch and her strong-willed daughter, Florence, in their new home on the Gulf. Between running errands, cleaning house, and tending to Mrs. Harper's constant demands, Coleman has scant time for his life's few pleasures: the books in the household library or the peace of his attic room. The exception is a spotted, auburn-hued terrier named Oliver. Technically belonging to Florence, the sprightly pup – "the most intelligent, loyal companion one could ask for" – is doted upon by Coleman, who claims "in all ways that mattered, he was mine."

Despite Oliver's camaraderie, Coleman's world has pinched into a dull routine. His older sister, June, his closest confidant and staunchest protector throughout childhood, has left. Two years prior, she was all but dragged to northern Mexico by Mr. Harper, an entitled, grasping bully long besotted with her – and newly obsessed with a mining project in the desert. They've barely been heard from since.

The story leaps into gear with the arrival of a letter on the family's doorstep. At long last, Mr. Harper has written! The patriarch would like the ladies and Coleman to join him forthwith in Mexico; the letter's bearer – a cold-eyed brute named Amos Turlow – will serve as guide.

The plan smells fishy to Coleman, but at least there's a spot for Oliver.

As the party embarks on the first leg of the journey – a paddleboat excursion westward across the Gulf to the Port of Bagdad – Coleman learns from Turlow the truth behind the trip. June has disappeared, and Mr. Harper hopes her brother will be able to find and return her to their settlement at the mine. The secret alarms risk-averse Coleman, in both its challenge and its callousness: "It was not his family Mr. Harper sought. It was me."

A perilous trip follows over deep waters, through hard-bitten towns, and into Mexico's northern desert expanse – a baffling cauldron of threats to Coleman and the group. Governed by the French, claimed by the Mexicans, inhabited by Indigenous tribes, and desired by American newcomers, the hostile landscape and its punishing climate whipsaw the travelers – and quickly winnow their numbers.

Deftly woven throughout the narrative is the story's second journey: June's trek with Mr. Harper, plus a motley band of fellow seekers and opportunists, to the foot of the Sierra Madre. The travel exhausts them. "They encountered great cascades of nothingness," Harris writes, "and when an occurrence ruptured from the blank of their surroundings it was almost always unwanted." Here – and throughout "Amity" – the prose matches the moment: apt, emotive, encapsulating, and fresh.

June, desperate to escape the clutches of Mr. Harper, plots and waits. "She could bear anything," she tells herself. After all, her former enslaver, a man who had the gall to abandon his family for a ludicrous project, "was a *child*. She could vanquish a child."

Further fueling June's resolve is a Black cowboy named Isaac she encounters while watering the oxen outside camp. His ease in

the landscape, practical intelligence, local alliances, and obvious interest offer not just an escape, but one new amity – a true alternative to the abuse she's endured.

Will the siblings find each another? Will courage bloom and refuge be found? It would be unkind to spoil the book's entwined plots, but do know this: Transformation awaits, and buoyant Oliver indeed survives.

Harris' 2021 debut, "The Sweetness of Water," earned plaudits galore, including a spot on the Booker Prize long list and the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. That story, too, wades through the Civil War's wake alongside a pair of distinct, beautifully rendered Black siblings.

Now, in "Amity," Harris intersperses gripping action and explosive standoffs (brace for violence) with quiet stretches tuned to the work at hand: characters shaping and presenting their true, free selves, each feeling "the forfeiture of a previous life give way to a new one."

It's a gorgeous, evocative triumph. ▪

SUDOKU

Sudoku difficulty: ★★★★

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

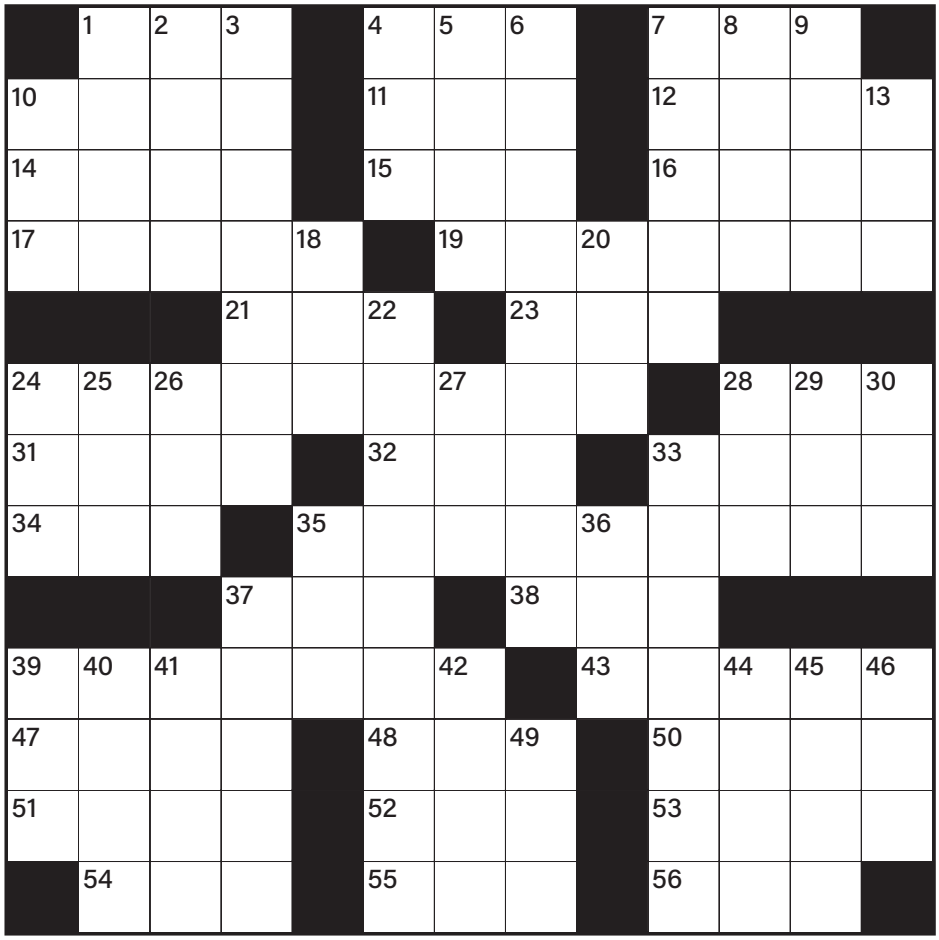
How to do Sudoku

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

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

Crossword



Across

1. "___ Jude"
4. Fix the outcome of
7. Word with nail or nob
10. Wash out
11. Big slice of history
12. Mimics
14. Solo at The Met
15. Hardy
16. Slangy assent
17. Aquarium beauty
19. Roman LXX
21. Lowest score
23. They're often grand
24. Middle Ages stoneworker
28. Filing facilitator
31. Laundry unit
32. It's found in poetry?
33. Metric wt.
34. Even
35. Surely
37. Just scratch the surface?
38. Video game family name
39. Piano event
43. Pricey wheels
47. Stratford-___-Avon
48. Reading material, for short
50. Claw, e.g.
51. Crane or kite
52. Singer Brenda
53. Were it not that
54. DJ's stack
55. Dee-lish!
56. Cloudland

Down

1. Tortoise's rival
2. Prune print
3. Had a hankering
4. Ring figure
5. Novelist Murdoch
6. Garden fence uprights
7. Soul legend Isaac
8. Welcoming window word
9. Cadence
10. Falstaffian
13. Averse to conversing
18. End
20. Mover
22. Sideways
24. Ointment denizen?
25. Egg mass
26. Command to hesitant diners
27. Address heard while kneeling
28. Plating option
29. Nothing antithesis
30. Peter Pan, permanently
33. Kyoto kaftans
35. Victim of curiosity
36. Hang out to dry
37. Is bothered by
39. Burnish
40. Word often preceding 'proportions'
41. Insulated electrical cable
42. Place or stead
44. Lacking any curl
45. White shade
46. Mischievous
49. President pro___