

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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

— MARY BAKER EDDY

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A modern epic where Greece is the word

Christopher Nolan's movie adaptation of "The Odyssey" features a cast of 5,000 extras. It was filmed in Morocco, Iceland, Italy, Scotland, and, of course, Greece. Every aspect of the production – from ships to costumes – is historically authentic. Well, apart from Odysseus' American accent. We'll let it slide, Matt Damon.

Perhaps surprisingly for one of humankind's greatest stories, this is Hollywood's first large-scale production of it. "It's an odd gap in movie history," Mr. Nolan told an interviewer. Yet Mr. Nolan's epic arrives at a time when many colleges are ditching classes about Homer. Not to mention Virgil, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Some ask, Why should we bother with the classics?

We explore that question in this week's magazine. The centerpiece is a conversation that I convened with three scholars. (For the full conversation, use the QR code on page 31). We



By Stephen Humphries
Staff writer

discussed the resurgence of the classics in popular culture, their place in higher education, and why those works face ideological tussles between the left and the right.

In a related story, staff writer Emily Staunton reports on young people who are learning ancient Greek to better understand the classics. Film critic Peter Rainer ponders what elements make for successful "swords and sandals" epics. We've also compiled a guide to reading the classics, including an accessible entry point for kids.

Which takes us back to that central question of why the classics matter.

Well, here's one reason. For a young generation accustomed to surface-level scrolling through social media, these ancient scrolls demand deep-dive immersion. One of our panelists, J. Walter Sterling, is president of a university entirely devoted to that endeavor. At St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, students embark on a Great Books curriculum. Many students arrive ill-prepared for the rigor it requires, says Mr. Sterling. Yet engaging with the classics helps build up essential life skills, including concentration and focus.

More than that, the texts invite inquiry and contemplation. Tales such as "The Odyssey" ask us to explore what constitutes home, why some relationships endure, and how we're all on a quest to better understand ourselves and our true identity.

You needn't be a college student to start reading these works. "The Odyssey" is not just a story for the ages. It's a story for all ages.

In the panel discussion, Daniel Mendelsohn, an editor at large at The New York Review of Books, said, "By looking at these materials – which for whatever reason, three millennia worth of people have thought worth looking at – you're going to get more out of your life." ■

As more voters warm to socialism, Trump warns of 'communist' threat

President Donald Trump has long assailed Democrats as radical leftists and Marxists. But after recent primary wins by self-described democratic socialists in New York, Washington, and Denver, the president has seized on a new label to accuse the Democratic Party of wanting to jettison capitalism for an altogether different system.

In recent speeches and social media posts, the president has repeatedly warned of "godless communists" who are "making their move" ahead of midterm elections that could flip one or both branches of Congress to Democratic control. Speaking at Mount Rushmore over the July Fourth weekend, Mr. Trump said, "You can be a communist, or you can be a patriot. You cannot be both."

The Republican rhetoric echoes the red scares of the previous century, when the Soviet Union posed a threat to the United States, and the hunt for communist sympathizers became a rallying cry for conservatives. It fits with Mr. Trump's tendency to paint opponents as un-American or abnormal, says Robert Rowland, a professor of political rhetoric at the University of Kansas. "Trump is trying to boil down every possible sin into one word by using the word 'communist,'" he says.

While democratic socialists favor greater government intervention in the economy and admire Scandinavian societies, it's a far cry from Cuba's brand of communism, in which the government directly owns businesses and restricts private enterprise. But, to many voters, those distinctions might be blurred. The Cold War ended decades ago, and many Americans have only a faint understanding of either state-backed socialism or communism.

At the same time, polls suggest that "socialism" is not the taboo it once was, which might explain Mr. Trump's rhetorical pivot. Labeling Democrats as "communists" might resonate among older conservatives and immigrants from regions with communist or socialist dictators. But younger voters are less fearful of socialism, associating it more with European welfare states, and are more likely to question the benefits of capitalism as it relates to their lives.

By embracing socialism, left-wing candidates are giving Republicans ammunition that might make it harder for moderate Democrats in swing districts to win in November. The democratic socialists recently nominated in deep-blue cities are likely to join like-minded House Democrats such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar, who were both first elected in 2018.

– Simon Montlake / Staff writer

Supreme Court term readjusts presidential powers

In its recently concluded term, the U.S. Supreme Court solidified a decades-long movement concentrating executive power under the president alone – amid a broadening of presidential power in other directions.

The justices did not give President Trump victories on some of his most treasured policies, such as tariffs and birthright citizenship, however.

Overall, at a time of high tension between the judiciary and the executive branch, the Supreme Court has recalibrated the constitutional separation of powers to significantly empower the president's role. And while the court has pushed back on the president at times, it has been a willing partner in allowing the White House to effectively enact policies through emergencies, extending a yearslong trend that has seen the high court decide significant policy questions on its interim docket, with minimal briefing.

In terms of the separation of powers, the term was “a mixed bag,” says Jeff Powell, a professor at Duke Law School. But in his view, “The mixture [added to] a world that was already leaning too far towards the president.”

Still, it's notable that the constitutional crisis that some feared at the outset of the term last fall appears to have been avoided – for now, at least.

“There was talk that the president might ignore Supreme Court opinions, but that talk has receded,” says Saikrishna Prakash, a professor at the University of Virginia School of Law.

“So, the court has successfully stood up to the president,” he adds. “That's important to the court as an institution.”

The Supreme Court did rule in Mr. Trump's favor in the most important separation-of-powers case the court has decided in decades.

The high court had for years expressed skepticism that the president is unable to remove leaders of the independent regulatory agencies that make up what Mr. Trump and his allies call the administrative state, or unelected career bureaucrats whom they see as unaccountable to the American public.

The case began when Mr. Trump fired Rebecca Slaughter, a commissioner at the Federal Trade Commission, claiming her service was “inconsistent with [the] administration's priorities.”

With its decision in *Trump v. Slaughter* – a 6-3 ruling that broke along the court's ideological divide – the majority gave the president the authority to fire at will any leader of any regulatory agency, with an exception for the Federal Reserve, which the court in another case this term said played a different role in U.S. history and tradition.

– Henry Gass / Staff writer

Ukraine brings the war into Russia with drone attacks

Ukrainian drone strikes deep into Russia's heartland – including a wave on June 29 – are causing fuel shortages and long lines at gas stations, even in Moscow. The attacks are dampening the mood of average Russians more visibly than at any time since the war in Ukraine began 4 1/2 years ago.

For many Russians, particularly in the capital, it's the first time the war has struck so close to home. People have been irritated by internet and cellphone disruptions that authorities say are war-related, and small businesses have been hit with tax increases due to the rising costs of the war, but spending hours trying to fill gas tanks is a new level of inconvenience.

“The increase in drone attacks is putting pressure on the economy, civil infrastructure, and it's certainly affecting the public mood,” says Sergei Stokan, an independent political analyst. “Social tension is rising. People are worried. Things are obviously not going on as before.”

But experts like Mr. Stokan and Alexei Mukhin, the head of the Center for Political Information in Moscow, say the idea that Russians are likely to panic, even as the pressure ramps up, is misguided. Though public exhaustion with the war is growing, and the number of people who favor peace talks is high, experts say the voices calling for tougher prosecution of the war against Ukraine are also becoming louder and more persuasive.

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently made a rare admission of the difficulties during an interview with state TV journalist Pavel Zarubin, conceding that stepped-up Ukrainian attacks against bridges, oil refineries, and fuel trucks are creating “problems ... [and] certain shortages.” According to Russian media, those include restrictions on gasoline sales in at least 20 Russian regions, and price hikes and supply disruptions in several more.

The hardest-hit region is the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, where strikes against bridges and other infrastructure have severely reduced fuel supplies, ruined the summer tourist season, and led authorities to declare a state of emergency.

During his interview, Mr. Putin insisted the problems were “not critical,” the damage would be quickly repaired, and Russian air-defense forces were developing new weaponry and tactics to counter the Ukrainian assault.

Viktor Litovkin, a military expert with the official RIA news agency, says Russian air defenses are mostly coping with the surge in Ukrainian attacks, and only a few incoming drones actually get through – especially around big cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Speaking to state TV, Mr. Putin said the Ukrainian tactic of launching strikes deep into Russia, increasingly hitting civilian targets, has largely psychological aims. “Its purpose is to undermine our confidence in ourselves and our capabilities and, ideally, to create divisions within Russian society, force Russia to suspend, even temporarily, the advance of our forces along the line of contact, and create conditions for launching negotiations on terms favorable to our adversary,” he said.

Lev Gudkov, scientific director of Russia's only independent polling agency, the Levada Center, says anxieties are indeed spiking, with more than half of Russians indicating that they pay close attention to war news. While 74% of Russians say they support their

troops in Ukraine, more than 60% favor peace talks. Only about one-third say they want the war to continue, though Mr. Gudkov says that percentage has been rising over the past three months.

"The threat of drone attacks has been coming to the fore in public opinion lately, pushing aside other developments in the war zone," he says. "The general tendency is for people to mentally separate the attacks on us from what's going on in Ukraine. The number of people who support talks with Ukraine is decreasing, while there are more and more people who feel that Russia should take decisive actions to destroy Ukraine."

From the other side, Volodymyr Paniotto, director of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, reached via Facebook, says Ukrainians are generally pleased with their forces' improved ability to strike deeper and harder into Russia's heartland.

— Fred Weir / Special correspondent

Once 'ironclad' US-South Korea alliance appears weakened

At the National Assembly in Seoul last year, Foreign Minister Cho Hyun said something out loud that many in South Korea had already quietly concluded about the country's closest ally.

"I am coming to terms with the fact that the U.S. of the past, which engaged in really good cooperation with allies and friendly nations, is not the U.S. of today," Mr. Cho said during a parliamentary inquiry in September. The comments came soon after agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested more than 300 Korean workers at a Hyundai plant in Georgia.

Mr. Cho offered a rare moment of candor about his country's frayed relationship with the U.S. The comments also revealed that the U.S. might not be dealing with the same South Korea, either.

"The majority of politicians in Korea have become emboldened, or empowered, vis-à-vis the United States," said Youngshik Bong, a visiting professor at Yonsei University's Graduate School of International Studies. "Cho Hyun's remark shows how much South Korean officials are perplexed by the United States under the Trump administration."

With President Trump's second term, ultraconservative voices in South Korea "have been on steady decline," according to Mr. Bong. Meanwhile, public reaction to a South Korean politician, such as the foreign minister, drifting out of lockstep with the U.S. does not appear to ruffle nearly as many feathers.

"It's not just Korea who is questioning how and to what extent U.S. foreign policy is changing under the Trump administration," says Inwook Kim, an associate professor at Sungkyunkwan University's department of political science and diplomacy. "The entire world is doing this, right?"

President Lee Jae-myung has still managed to survive political accusations labeling him the "anti-American president," after repeatedly calling for South Korea to "move toward a strong, self-reliant defense." He has flat-out ignored Mr. Trump's demands for South Korea's navy to assist in the Persian Gulf during the Iran war, and he has openly railed against the conduct of another major U.S. ally, Israel. At the United Nations, South Korea has voted in favor of recognizing Palestine as a full member state.

"Those things are a really big change," says Eunbee Kim, an

associate professor at the Korea National Defense University in Seoul. "We used to follow whatever the United States' decision is – we would basically give up our vote. But recently, we decided to go against the U.S. or, rather, make our voice heard."

Officially, South Korea and the U.S. continue to describe their relationship as ironclad, and experts say there is little doubt over Washington's commitment to defend Seoul in the event of an armed conflict with North Korea. But politicians in Seoul are more willing to be forthright about the need to balance their own national interests against U.S. priorities.

President Lee "seems to have decided that the Trump administration cannot be trusted" on "global or economic issues," according to Cheehyung Harrison Kim, a professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Experts say South Korea has become more willing to act on its own in recent years, having climbed the ranks as a global economic powerhouse that has also invested in its soft-power reach around the world. Successive governments in Seoul have spent time expanding the country's influence in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

"South Korea has undergone a lot of growth in the last 10 years, in terms of economic strength and culture. We are more confident now," says Ms. Kim from Korea National Defense University. "We should not understand it as a move away from the United States, but people are aware of the risk of depending too much on one partner."

— Kelly Kasulis Cho / Contributor

Earthquakes test US goal to 'run' Venezuela

The devastating earthquakes that struck Venezuela on June 24 will have long-term implications for the country's already weak government, which, in the eyes of many Venezuelans, failed to deliver in an hour of national catastrophe.

But the Venezuela crisis also presents a first big test for President Donald Trump's National Security Strategy.

The administration's approach envisions the Western Hemisphere – and Latin America in particular – as the United States' primary sphere of influence and the first line of defense for national security. After Mr. Trump ousted unpopular President Nicolás Maduro in a military operation earlier this year, the administration said the United States would "run" Venezuela. But the devastation could upend the White House's strategy, analysts say.

The two major earthquakes that have left at least 3,500 Venezuelans dead and tens of thousands more missing or homeless highlight a dysfunctional state apparatus.

"It suddenly complicates the vision this administration has for the region, and it complicates the role of the U.S. in Venezuela," says Gladys McCormick, associate dean at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

The initial U.S. response to the disaster – substantial when compared with Trump administration contributions to other international disaster response efforts – suggests the administration understands this is a delicate moment, says Britta Crandall, a political scientist specializing in Latin American studies at Davidson College in North Carolina.

"Yes, you could say the needs over the long term are going to rise

into the tens of billions, and that the U.S. response is nothing even close,” she says. But pointing to the doubling of U.S. assistance from \$150 million to \$300 million announced June 29, Dr. Crandall adds, “it shows the administration is taking this seriously and suggests it knows the stakes.”

And those stakes are enormous, analysts agree.

There are multiple lessons across Latin America of cases where natural disasters that were poorly addressed by governments led to social and political upheaval. Experts cite examples: One was Nicaragua’s 1972 earthquake, which doomed a weak Somoza regime and provided fertile ground for the rise of the current leftist Ortega dictatorship. Another was Haiti’s 2010 earthquake, which revealed a hapless government and paved the way to the reign of violent gangs.

The magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 earthquakes in Venezuela could clear a path for organized crime groups and drug cartels to solidify their operations in the country, says Dr. McCormick, a specialist in Latin America’s political violence and corruption.

The U.S. could blunt such groups’ appeal, Dr. McCormick says.

“There’s potentially a huge upside for the U.S. if it can demonstrate through its response to the Venezuela crisis that its vision for governance can deliver,” says Dr. Crandall.

—Howard LaFranchi / Staff writer

UN report: AI brings opportunities – and plenty of risks

Artificial intelligence is advancing faster than humanity’s ability to measure or govern it, according to a preliminary report released in July by the United Nations.

The risk of humans losing control of AI systems is rapidly growing, the report said.

“The more AI advances without clear rules, the less say governments and people will have in the outcome,” U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres told reporters at a news conference announcing the report’s release.

The report found AI had the potential to revolutionize a broad array of social benefits across science, health, agriculture, accessibility, knowledge work, and information technology, including in the development of AI itself.

But the scientists also found that the technology was primarily in the hands of a small number of companies and countries, leading to concentrations of wealth, which could “lead to authoritarian capture and undermine democratic accountability.”

The United States controls 75% of global computing power among the world’s top 500 AI supercomputers. China accounts for 15% percent, according to the report.

Other nations are concerned that they will be left out of its future.

According to the report, AI tools already present cybersecurity risks and leave nations vulnerable to sustained influence operations.

“AI makes it easier to produce and target persuasive content at scale, including content designed to mislead, contributing to a gradual erosion of information integrity that can weaken the shared reality required for public trust,” the report said.

The findings represented the collective knowledge of 40 leading scientists from every region of the world.

“We’ve opened Pandora’s box,” the panel’s chairs – Nobel Peace Prize-winning journalist Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Canadian computer scientist Yoshua Bengio – said in written remarks accompanying the report’s release.

“What’s coming out is different from anything we’ve ever lived through,” they said, “in pace, power, control, and everyday risks.”

Speaking to reporters, Ms. Ressa said that, in the future, human “control is not guaranteed. No expert today can tell you that the most advanced systems will do what you instruct it to do.” In laboratory settings, she said, “these systems have already been found to deceive and to resist being shut down.”

Mr. Bengio said the report showed humanity had reached a “turning point” with regard to the “growing intelligence of machines. As this power grows, it can unlock great benefits, if we act wisely,” he said, “but it can also lead to many perils.”

Mr. Guterres said he would soon “set out proposals to help countries build the capacity to adequately deal with this technology – and share in its rewards.”

—Aaron Glantz / Staff writer

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

\$333
TRILLION

The estimated financial wealth of the world in 2025, according to a new report by the Boston Consulting Group. This represents a 10.7% increase from 2024, marking the fastest growth since 2021.

281,223

The number of fans who attended a World Cup game on June 16. This total beat the previous World Cup daily attendance record of 277,074 fans set in June 1994.

\$28,596

The amount that U.S. households spent on homeownership in 2025, including mortgage, taxes, and maintenance. This number has risen 39% from \$20,618 in 2019.

49%

The share of U.S. adults who use AI chatbots in 2026, up from 33% in 2024, according to a recent Pew Research Center report. The top three uses of chatbots include searching for information, completing tasks at work, and seeking entertainment.

1,000

The number of heat-tested corals planted in Palau, a Pacific island nation east of the Philippines. The reforestation is part of a collaborative three-year project to plant heat-tolerant coral to help reefs recover and withstand rising ocean temperatures.

—Emily Staunton / Staff writer

Sources: Boston Consulting Group, FIFA, The Wall Street Journal, Pew Research Center, Island Times

China investment rules raise alarm in Hong Kong

China is heightening its crackdown on the flow of wealth from Chinese citizens to other countries, and that is affecting Hong Kong as the key financial hub and destination for much of those investments. In May, Beijing issued new regulations on outbound investment, intended to plug loopholes that wealthy Chinese were using to move money outside the nation's strict capital controls – much of it going through Hong Kong. The latest measures, centered on illicit stock trading, are putting Hong Kong's status as the world's largest cross-border wealth hub at risk, according to the publication Nikkei Asia.

– Ann Scott Tyson

“A global turning point for mangroves.”

That's how Zhen Zhang, lead author on a recent study published in the journal Science, describes the rebound of mangrove forests worldwide. Mangroves play an important role in storing carbon and assisting healthy fisheries. But for much of the 20th century, mangroves were destroyed to build structures such as housing or fish farms. Using satellite data, the study found that through restoration efforts, mangroves are recovering in many parts of the world – and are even becoming denser in some. Researchers emphasize that continued mangrove protection remains critical.

– Whitney Eulich

Allies' confidence in US plummets

A 36-country survey by the Pew Research Center found steep declines in perceptions of the United States as a global leader and stable, model democracy. Marked by strong rejection of President Donald Trump, the survey shows particularly sharp drops in positive views among traditional allies such as Canada. The share of Germans who consider the U.S. a reliable partner fell from 83% four years ago to 39% today. Mr. Trump received his highest ratings in the Philippines, Israel, and Nigeria, and the lowest ratings in Mexico, Sweden, Turkey, and the occupied West Bank.

– Howard LaFranchi

Ska fela moya – “Do not give up.”

That was the Setswana slogan of this year's Comrades ultramarathon. For decades, runners from around the world have flocked to this grueling 55-mile race, which is run each June between the South African cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. This year, more than 18,000 people completed the Comrades within its 12-hour cutoff, including a man dressed as a can of deodorant to raise money for charity and a woman who jumped rope during the entire route. First organized in 1921, the Comrades is – by a very wide margin – the largest road race in the world longer than a standard 26.2-mile marathon.

– Ryan Lenora Brown

ODESA, UKRAINE

Resilient Odesans make this summer a season of hope

The port has come out of its worst winter of Russian attacks with redoubled fortitude and a determination to build a better future.

By Howard LaFranchi / Staff writer

The four-man crew of the CB-90 patrol boat traversing Odesa Bay is on the lookout for the sea mines, sea drones, and Shahed aerial drones that Russia regularly sends toward this Black Sea port city.

Russia's aim: to disrupt life and dishearten the population.

“If we spot a sea mine, we seek permission to shoot at it. If a Shahed's coming in, it might be our guy who fires to take it out,” says Serhii, captain of the naval patrolling unit, gesturing with an upward tilt of the head to the seaman manning the boat's machine gun.

Noting that his unit's most active patrols generally take place at night, Serhii (his last name was withheld for security reasons) says: “I guess you could say we are the night watchmen for Odesa. But day and night, we are out here doing our part for the port's security and protecting the city's economic life.”

Surveying the centuries-old city arrayed along the coastline, from the historic center and port to the beaches and upscale apartment buildings to the south, the engineer turned naval captain sums up his vessel's purpose: “We're out here every day so that, even with the war, Odesa can get on with life.”

Despite its worst winter since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, with attacks on civilian infrastructure resulting in scores of deaths, sustained power outages, and destruction of grain silos and other port facilities, Odesa is trying not just to survive, but to progress.

“Unfortunately, the war reality we are living in has become our new normal life. We have adapted to it, and, every day, we are working to make life safer and better within this new normality,” says Oleksandr Filatov, first deputy mayor of Odesa. “At the same time, this effort to adapt quickly to a new reality has led us to think strategically about the Odesa we want to see after the war.”

Home to the largest port complex in a country that for decades has been one of the world's breadbaskets, Odesa is a key link in the global food security network. In good years (when the war hasn't disrupted harvests or Black Sea shipping), Odesa provides up to half of the grains delivered by the U.N. World Food Programme.

The rough winter put a damper on the city's morale, but, at the same time, the resilience and determination to persevere that some here call “the Odesa spirit” is widely on display. That's especially true with the beginning of the summer tourist season, which traditionally sees the city's restaurants and hotels filled.

Money to be made

At the beachfront Cottage Lanzheron hotel, contractor Mykola Todorov directs his crew as they repair the building's streetside facade, which was blasted away in a late April drone attack.

"I know people talk about an Odesa spirit, and it may be some of that, but honestly I think it's about making money," says Mr. Todorov. "The owner wouldn't be repairing this if he didn't think he could make up for it over the big summer season. And then for these guys," he adds, gesturing toward his work crew, "it's about putting food on the table."

Pieces of drone wing littered the sandy beach along the hotel's seafront, while on the entrance side, a crater marked the spot where the Shahed slammed into the ground, blasting out the hotel's windows and glass entrance.

"People lost a lot of hope over the winter," says Mr. Todorov, noting that his brother had to sell an apartment "to be able to eat." This spring, he says, more of his young male workers stayed home on days they feared they might run into the conscription police.

"But then we have rebuilding projects like this that in a way are a sign of hope," the contractor says. "This is the owner saying he has faith that people will come to Odesa this summer, and he will make money again."

The story of Cottage Lanzheron rings true for Oleksandr Babich, an Odesa history buff who ran a city tours agency until he joined the military after Russia's invasion.

"Odesa was founded by traders going back to the Greeks and the Turks, and throughout history, the motivation for developing a great port here and building a city has been the same," Mr. Babich says. "It's always been about making money."

In that way, he says, Odesa is like other European port cities built on commerce – he names Venice, Naples, and Marseille – where fortunes were made. In the case of Odesa, it's the grains and seed oils of the Ukrainian steppes that have been the draw.

Indeed, if Odesa's port – in reality a complex of three ports – has continued to operate and even thrive amid war, it's because the world's food markets crave the products that ship through it. And because people can make money doing it, says Dmytro Barinov, president of Ukrport, the Association of Ports of Ukraine.

"Every day, there are 50, 60, 70 vessels waiting to come into our ports, despite the risks of a random attack, the high insurance rates, and what might seem like other discouraging factors," he says. "The best explanation I can give is that the business is still profitable."

And for all the damage and suffering the war has caused for the port and its people, Mr. Barinov says it has also forced the learning of some useful lessons.

"The war has required a better organization of loading and unloading of the vessels, a better overall organization of port activity, even more consideration of worker safety, and better coordination with the navy on security issues," he says. "We've developed a confidence that we can operate in wartime that will serve us even after the war."

The "Odesa Mama" vibe

At the same time, there is a special spirit about Odesa that has allowed it to weather the storm of war better than other cities might have, Mr. Babich, the history buff, believes. It's this spirit that explains the flourishing of a distinct "Odesa humor" that confronts hardship with laughter, he says. And which explains "Odesa Mama," the term Odesans use to vaunt their city's warm and comforting vibe.

"'Odesa Mama' was what greeted visitors coming in at our airport before the full-scale invasion shut it down," he says, "but the 'Odesa Mama' spirit didn't disappear [during] the war."

At the white-columned City Hall, just steps from Odesa's signature Beaux-Arts opera house, Deputy Mayor Filatov doesn't try

to minimize the struggles of the past winter.

"Starting from Dec. 12, we had almost daily attacks on our city until mid-March," he says. Thousands of apartments in hundreds of buildings were without heat and water. "Not even one of our power stations was left untouched by the attacks," he adds.

More than 300 residential buildings were damaged.

But as depressing as Russia's winter onslaught against Odesa was, Mr. Filatov says, it also mustered a resolve to carry on and rebuild "smart" – to prepare as much as possible for the next winter.

The city has drawn up a "resilience plan" that includes wrapping repaired electrical stations in anti-drone mesh and providing seed money for residential buildings to install solar panels.

"Our main task over the coming months will be to help the apartment buildings in our city become as autonomous as possible with alternative means of generating heat and electricity," the deputy mayor says.

Grain silos at the ports are being encased in anti-drone grids.

Even as Russia's strikes on the city have increased year to year since 2023, new businesses have opened and – perhaps most promising for Mr. Filatov – housing starts over the past two years have jumped. The aggregate square footage "of new housing units more than doubled since 2024," he says, "so that tells you something."

Population regrowth

One thing the new housing points to is a recovering population. Before the war, officials bragged about leading a city of more than 1 million residents, Mr. Filatov says. That figure plummeted by several hundred thousand after the 2022 invasion.

But a recovery began in 2024, first with an estimated 200,000 displaced Ukrainians moving in from more threatened front-line cities, especially Kherson. Last year, officials started noticing signs that Odesans who had fled were also beginning to return. The result is an estimated population of about 850,000 today.

Odesa's historic district even saw a McDonald's open this spring, a short walk from the famous Potemkin Stairs that lead to the port.

"We got some resistance from residents who didn't think it was an appropriate location for a McDonald's," the deputy mayor notes, "but we saw in other European cities that it could be done tastefully – and we see it as a sign of business confidence in Odesa."

Dozens of Odesa's new small businesses have been opened by displaced Ukrainians, especially those who came from Kherson, about 130 miles to the east.

One of those businesses is Magrest, a company that designs, manufactures, and installs storefront fixtures. The war has uprooted owners Aliona and Oleksandr Kovalchuk twice: first from the now-Russian-occupied city of Donetsk in 2014, when they moved their fledgling business to Kherson, and then in 2022, after five months of Russian occupation that made business almost impossible and prompted several employees to move abroad.

The Kovalchuks chose Odesa, and both say they are glad they did. They arrived with their kids and six employees, and four years later, they've grown to a staff of 18 in production, sales, and accounting.

"The thing is, we are crazy optimists, and we're finding that fits pretty well with Odesa," says Aliona. For his part, Oleksandr says they lived through such "extreme conditions" in both Donetsk and Kherson that the past winter in Odesa didn't seem so difficult.

"We know it was terrible for a lot of people here," he says, "but I also think our past experiences gave us an ability to adapt and left us better prepared to figure out how to overcome the hardships."

The couple say that, after several years in their new home city,

they've decided there really is some truth to the "Odesa Mama" stereotype. "Sometimes, it can feel like you're getting a hug from your mom," Aliona says.

But both say they value at least as much the other qualities they've found in the people, including a flexibility and dynamism they have a hunch derive from Odesa's history and geography as a sunny southern port city.

Walking through one of Magrest's workshops, where employees operate laser saws and 3D printers, Oleksandr says the company's next goal is to expand into producing home office furnishings.

"We want to continue to grow and give our clients what they need to live and work better," he says. "We're finding Odesa to be a good place to do that."

■ *Oleksandr Naselenko supported reporting for this article.*

BUCKLEY SPACE FORCE BASE AND PETERSON SPACE FORCE BASE, COLO.

Space Force prepares for the next frontier of warfare

Created in 2019, this U.S. military service is already on the front lines of the next generation of battle. A budget boost is set to increase its capabilities.

By Anna Mulrine Grobe / Staff writer

In June of last year, with the United States and Israel poised to launch massive strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities, troops in America's newest military service, the U.S. Space Force, were preparing for battle.

In the shortgrass prairie of Colorado, electromagnetic-warfare-specialists pored over satellite signals, looking for signs of adversaries trying to tamper with U.S. military communications. Some of the Guardians, as Space Force troops are known, received firearms training – for the first time since boot camp.

They then packed up an arsenal of antennas and headed to the Middle East, ready to jam signals so that B-52 bombers could fly safely to their targets.

Many in the military were focused on whether Iran would escalate or de-escalate, says Col. Gerrit Dalman, who was leading the Space Force Crisis Action Team. But for those in his branch, another big question loomed: How would the Space Force prove its worth?

Military culture is forged in large part by waging war, but the Space Force had yet to be battle-tested. Iran was the first conflict that would have active participation from the service President Donald Trump has called "my baby," and which has seen its budget more than double in the past year.

In planning for Iran, commanders were confident in what they could contribute to the war effort, but conscious, too, of building a legacy. "One of the biggest strategic challenges for the Space Force is not potential adversaries. It's not the pace of change in technology," Colonel Dalman says. "It's telling our story."

Growing pains

When President Trump created the Space Force during his first term, there were jokes. The logo, for one, bears a striking resemblance

to "Star Trek" badges. It did not help that actor Steve Carell in 2020 launched the satirical television series, "Space Force" as the actual service was standing up, say some Guardians, who add that they still rarely make it through an airport in uniform without being stopped by someone surprised that the force is not just a Netflix show.

It soon became clear, however, that the service was on the front lines of the next generation of warfare, as China and Russia joined the space arms race. And many were eager to join the Space Force for the wonder of working in, and with, space.

When Colonel Dalman was a child in Juneau, Alaska, for instance, his dad would wake him in the middle of the night to see the northern lights. In 1993, he watched hours of NASA live video of the first Hubble telescope servicing mission. "Sounds exciting until you realize it's four hours of a guy in a spacesuit turning a wrench," he says.

Seeing the Earth spin below the astronauts imbued him with a sense of possibility – one he has retained as he considers the opportunity the Space Force has to set an example for the rest of the world on how to extend the American sense of "right" to this new frontier.

And this marvel of exploration often dovetails with martial aims. One of the most striking examples of this came in May with a suggestion from a major security nonprofit that, to win the space race, Guardians should deploy to the moon.

"The anarchic nature of space habitation, particularly on the Moon, dictates that the nation to first secure ... lunar human presence will be able to set [the] norms, standards, and legal frameworks to their advantage," wrote retired Space Force Col. Kyle Pumroy, a former senior fellow at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, whose funders include America's largest defense contractors.

"The prospect of China exercising hard power projection on the Moon," he added, "is a reasonable extension of China's clear track record of terrestrial territorial expansion through military means."

The notion of "space wars"

Concerns about the weaponization of space have been around since the inception of space exploration. Back in 1957, while the world was debating whether it would be acceptable under international law to fly a satellite over another country, Russia launched Sputnik 1. Emitting a steady beep that could be picked up by radios, it alarmed Americans, including Pentagon officials, but also answered the question of satellite overflight, establishing norms that hold to this day.

Operation Desert Storm in 1991 was widely considered the "first space war," when the Pentagon used satellites to track Iraqi troop movements and navigate with GPS, which at the time was relatively new. Space-based missile-warning systems helped U.S. forces quickly detect Iraqi Scud missiles. Satellite photos helped locate hidden Iraqi tanks.

In the years since, American military analysts have kept close tabs on the country's competitors as they have made moves to catch up. China last summer completed the first-ever refueling of a satellite in geostationary orbit, more than 22,000 miles above Earth. This is the orbital zone where many of the world's most sensitive satellites, including nuclear command links, are located.

Officials in the U.S., which has yet to demonstrate such capabilities, were watching closely, because the complex maneuver also means that China could jam, shove, or closely inspect its adversaries' satellites now, too.

There are also existential scenarios. U.S. Space Command ran a war game in March that involved a Russian nuclear device that could wipe out thousands of U.S. satellites, along with worldwide services such as GPS.

It is not hypothetical, analysts argue.

In 2024, Biden administration officials warned that Russia was deploying testing technology for such a device, known as a fractional orbital bombardment system. China is pursuing these space weapons as well.

And this is where the race comes in: Such weapons are, officials say, in large part a response to concerns that Beijing and Moscow have expressed about the constellation of U.S. satellites. These include those developed with commercial ventures like SpaceX's Starshield, a partnership designed to keep U.S. networks working even if there are attacks against its satellites.

An increasingly crowded sky

As other countries have joined Russia and the U.S. in space, congestion and jockeying for orbital slots are on the rise. Over the past five years alone, the number of objects in orbit, including satellites and debris, has increased by 600%, according to Space Force officials.

In 2007, China blew up one of its own satellites, a move that added an estimated 30% to existing space debris. As congestion grows, so has the challenge – entrusted to Space Force Guardians – of identifying and tracking any object larger than a basketball.

Guardians must keep close tabs on satellite signals as well. It's no small task.

Space tools like "Bounty Hunters," a system of sensors, software, and antennas that act as "celestial detectives," pinpoint the origin of signals that could interfere with, say, communications between commanders and troops.

While space operations are a strong point for the high-tech U.S. military, it is also an Achilles' heel, as America's adversaries seek out vulnerabilities, says Tech Sgt. Brian Wood, the senior enlisted leader of the 16th Electromagnetic Warfare Squadron, known as Space Delta 3.

"They want to see what they can get away with," he says.

To that end, the force also uses weapons such as the Counter Communications System to jam communications. "We can say, 'I want this terrorist leader or this commander to be unable to communicate at this particular time,'" Colonel Dalman adds.

Commercial opportunities

The telltale giant golf balls at Buckley Space Force Base, on the western edge of America's high plains, are radar domes designed to protect the sensitive antennas inside. But the radomes, as they are known, also serve to conceal the direction the antennas are pointing, keeping other nations' spy satellites from gleaning any intelligence about U.S. operations.

Here at Buckley, Capt. Rebecca Christensen works in satellite communications in Space Delta 8, where Guardians protect classified communications for deployed U.S. forces.

While Captain Christensen was a cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy, the Pentagon started the Space Force, and upon graduation, she became the 35th officer in the force. She's friends with Nos. 7 and 8.

The captain has not looked back.

"I get to feel like I'm doing a good thing here," she says.

Consider just the commercial opportunities from the force's

work. The global space economy, which was \$613 billion in 2024, is projected to triple to \$1.8 trillion by 2035, notes Colonel Dalman. And in 2024, more human beings – 20 people – were in space simultaneously than ever before. Those figures, experts say, will only get larger. Beijing's Tiangong space station will soon put additional astronauts in orbit. If space tech companies get their way, there could be a single starship with 100 passengers on a tourist flight.

This will mean more jobs for the U.S. Space Force to do, such as, say, on-orbit rescues, experts say. And Congress hasn't yet tasked any federal agency with "planetary defense," the term for deflecting incoming comets or asteroids. But there are Guardians thinking about that, as well.

Midnight Hammer

In June of last year, Tehran launched 19 ballistic missiles at Al Udeid Air Base, a U.S. military installation in Qatar. Guardians detected and tracked the fast-moving targets, then handed them off to Patriot missile-battery forces for shootdown.

Officials say this was the largest single Patriot missile launch in U.S. history. It remained a difficult defense, even though Iran provided prior warning to avoid escalating the conflict.

Midnight Hammer – the operational name of the U.S. mission to strike Iranian nuclear facilities last summer – was also "one of the first really tangible opportunities for a new service to act like a service during a time of battle," says Colonel Dalman.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and President Donald Trump, who created the Space Force in 2019 during his first term, all acknowledged the Guardians' work in Midnight Hammer, and, in the months to come, during U.S. operations in Venezuela as well.

This praise, and some of the details that came with it, is also time-honored military strategy: Show your opponents what you can do, and they might be less likely to test limits.

"Space Force is my baby," President Trump said during his State of the Union address in February. "It's becoming so important."

The service, in a nod to this, is set to see its budget more than doubled in the White House's latest defense spending proposal, to \$71 billion in 2027 – up from \$31.6 billion in 2026. The money reflects the pace of current operations, officials say, but is also an acknowledgment of Pentagon concerns about the kinds of activities America's adversaries are undertaking in space.

"Being able to achieve certain effects in space is critical to being able to win future wars," says Col. Raymond Brushier, who took over for Colonel Dalman after he retired in November as director of current operations at the service's Combat Forces Command. (The Space Force changed the name last year from Space Operations Command, or SpOC, avoiding the acronym's "Star Trek" reference.)

Space, Colonel Brushier adds, is "the ultimate high ground." ■

The future of *français* is African

Fifty-seven percent of the globe's French speakers now reside in Africa, a demographic shift that is influencing the language itself.

By Colette Davidson / Special correspondent
and Albain Adé / Special contributor

The first time Honorat Aziz heard someone in France say *je m'enjaille*, he had just arrived in the country from his native Côte d'Ivoire. He turned around, expecting to see a fellow Ivorian, since the phrase, meaning "I'm having fun," comes from an Ivorian slang called Nouchi. Instead, he saw a young Frenchman.

"I was definitely surprised," he remembers.

But that was a decade ago. Today, as Mr. Aziz stands in line at a Paris concert for Ivorian rapper Didi B, Nouchi words and phrases no longer turn heads. In many parts of France, one is likely to hear *goumin* instead of *chagrin d'amour* to talk about heartache, and *la go* instead of *la fille* to refer to a girl.

"It's a way for everyone to speak with one another," says Mr. Aziz.

The influence of Ivorian slang – and North and West African dialects more broadly – on French is due in part to artists like Didi B and Franco-Malian singer Aya Nakamura, whose hit "Djadja" ("liar" in the Malian language Bambara) has over 1 billion views on YouTube.

It's also sheer math. Of the estimated 396 million people who speak French around the world, 57% live on the African continent, according to recently released figures from the Observatory of the French Language. That's a significant change from 2014, when the number of French speakers in Europe and Africa was nearly equal.

As the number of Francophones in Africa grows, the power centers of the language are also shifting. Decisions that were once made in Paris are now happening in Abidjan, Algiers, and Yaoundé.

The Académie Française, the French language authority, "is realizing more and more that the French language owes its vitality and survival to all these other languages and countries," says Patrick Ouadiabantou, a linguist and research professor at Sciences Po Bordeaux.

Still, that new dynamic has created tensions. In France, the debate is about what – and who – is considered French. In Francophone Africa and its diaspora, meanwhile, the conversation centers on whether a language brought from Europe can ever be truly African.

A migration of words

Before there was *je m'enjaille* and *goumin*, there was *wesh* and *kif kif*.

While Ivorian Nouchi is popular among French youth today, Darija – an Arabic dialect from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia – made its way into spoken French decades ago.

During World War I and World War II, France recruited hundreds of thousands of soldiers from its West and North African colonies to fight under the French flag. The soldiers' close proximity facilitated a natural exchange of words and expressions in French and African languages, especially among those from North Africa, says Catherine Wihtol De Wenden, a specialist on immigration at the French National Center for Scientific Research.

Soon, Darija words like *kif kif* (same difference), *bled* (countryside), and *djebel* (mountain) entered the French lexicon.

When Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia gained full independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, hundreds of thousands of North Africans immigrated to France for its promise of economic opportunities. With them came more Darija phrases. Today, words like *wesh* (what's up) and *kif kif* are now seamlessly integrated into everyday conversation.

Subsequent waves of African immigration have brought Nouchi, Camfranglais – a blend of English, French, and Cameroonian languages – and Congolese urban slang to France. Today, there are about 8 million immigrants living in France, 49% of whom were born in Africa.

"There are a lot of people here [in France] that don't even realize the words come from Darija or Arabic originally, because they have become part of everyday French slang," says Yanis, an Algerian living in France who declined to give his last name because he does not have legal residency. "It's pretty cool."

New words, old debates

Today, foreign-origin terms like *wesh* can be found among the 100,000 words in the Le Grand Robert French dictionary. But that doesn't mean they – or the people who brought them to France – are universally accepted.

In 2024, when French President Emmanuel Macron suggested Ms. Nakamura – who was born in Mali and came to France as a child – perform the songs of Edith Piaf at the Paris Olympics opening ceremony, it caused a public outcry. Her critics said that the singer, whose lyrics frequently incorporate onomatopoeia, Nouchi, and Malian Bambara slang, did not represent France.

Meanwhile, last September, a parents group in the north of France spoke out publicly after a junior high school teacher assigned a crossword puzzle teaching Arabic-origin words like *wesh* and *chouïa* (a little bit) in a French class.

"The French are very hesitant to accept new words," says Jérémie Kouadio N'Guessan, an Abidjan-based linguist and a founding scientific council member of the Dictionnaire des Francophones, an online dictionary created in 2021 to celebrate the diversity of the French language. "But no language is pure," he says.

Some observers say the debate over foreign-origin words also reveals unresolved tensions over France's colonial past and its ability to accept second- and third-generation African immigrants.

"The problem is often not the word itself, but a type of rejection of different cultures mixing," says Mr. Ouadiabantou. "The question becomes, What country does the person using the word belong to?"

"Should we continue to speak French?"

For those living in Francophone Africa, questions about language and identity are not any easier.

French is an official language in 29 countries, the majority of which are in Africa, and it is the working language in several more. But in recent years, several of these countries have begun to reassess their relationship with both their former colonizer and the language it imposed on them.

Since 2022, several Francophone West African countries have demanded or negotiated the withdrawal of French troops stationed there. Among them were the military governments of Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, which also removed French as an official language and, in 2025, pulled out of the International Organization of La Francophonie.

Meanwhile, Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, elected in 2024, has broken with tradition by delivering his official speeches in both French and Wolof, the most widely spoken Senegalese language. His administration has also pledged to expand the use of local languages as the medium of instruction in schools, where French has historically dominated.

In Côte d'Ivoire, French is not only used in formal settings but is also the language of daily conversation. As opposed to some of its neighbors, its government has also maintained friendly relations with France. Yet some wonder about the country's linguistic links to its colonial past.

"The whole colonial model needs to be reassessed, starting with language and what we teach in school," says Francis Akindès, a sociologist on youth and democracy at the Alassane Ouattara University in Abidjan. "Should we continue to speak French?"

Some see Nouchi as one answer to that question.

In a country with more than 60 distinct languages, the French-based slang transcends linguistic divisions, absorbing words from major Ivorian languages like Baoulé, Dioula, and Malinké, as well as from English and Spanish.

For many Ivorians, watching their slang cross the border to France is a source of pride.

Some also note the irony that people from the country that once colonized Côte d'Ivoire are now speaking a version of French that Ivorians invented.

But Ivorians also say the Nouchi used in France will never quite be the same.

"Nouchi is a code, an expression, a full-body thing," says El Matar, an Abidjan-based musical artist. "Even if French people tried to reappropriate our language, they couldn't use it like we do."

■ *Audrey Thibert contributed reporting from Boston.*

REPORTERS ON THE JOB

NEWBURY, MASS.



Melanie Stetson
Freeman

After 44 years as a photojournalist, I am comfortable photographing almost anything – except sports. I do OK with athletes who aren't moving around too much, like golfers. Recently, I had the bright idea to do a photo spread on vintage baseball. My editor mentioned I should get some action shots, knowing that is not my forte. Getting

those guys sitting on the bench waiting to bat? No problem. Shots of their old-timey uniforms? Easy-peasy. But I missed a million action shots. One secret I picked up? To get a great shot, you need to anticipate where the action will happen. (In baseball, it's usually on the bases.) In the end, I got a couple. No one knows about all the ones I missed ... except you. ■

RANDOLPH, MASS.



Kendra Nordin
Beato

It can be hard to know where to start a story. As I interviewed historian and tailor Henry Cooke for an article about re-creating 18th-century clothing, every anecdote seemed to meander through countless details. It was all interesting, but how should I lead readers through the many nooks and crannies of social history? Sometimes, it's daunting

to transform pages of research and reporting into an effortless

narrative. Later, while reviewing the transcript of the interview, I noticed a detail I had missed: a passing mention of the coat button that inspired Mr. Cooke to re-create a soldier's uniform and establish a historical regiment, still in operation 50 years later. It was just the detail I needed, and I was able to stitch together the rest. ■

OAXACA, MEXICO



Whitney Eulich

Most people are used to the stress of getting to the airport. But in Oaxaca in early June, on assignment for a story on cocoa production, photographer Alfredo Sosa and I had to navigate our way out. Large protests by a powerful teachers union were blocking the gates to the airport so that no taxis or cars could enter. Teachers seeking a salary bump and the overturning of a 2007 pension law sat under sun shades and in camping chairs just outside the airport entrance. Others were positioned at a nearby intersection, tangling traffic. Despite the initial confusion, the energy of the protest was upbeat. And it shone a light on Oaxaca's proud reputation for being a bastion of Mexico's social movements. ■

LONDON



Scott Peterson

An Iranian I have known for years messaged me soon after U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran began in February. He could hear the jets, drones, and explosions from his home on Qeshm, an island off the southern coast of Iran, in the Strait of Hormuz. Then, when Iran cut off the internet, his messages stopped – for weeks.

When he finally emerged, we exchanged messages and news, which I wrote about in an online piece in June. He described how the war had hammered his community, shuttering some 60 cafés and guesthouses on this tourist island and killing two of his friends. After more U.S. strikes, he decided to move back to the relative safety of mainland Iran. He loaded up his belongings, gave thanks for his nine years there, and left his home – now a battle zone. ■

THE EXPLAINER

Quantum computing promises new technological possibilities. How close are they?

The U.S. and China are racing to develop computers based on the properties of quantum physics – with implications for science and security.

By Donald Keough / Staff writer

After fundamentally changing science more than a century ago, modern physics may be about to revolutionize the world of computers – with implications for everything from the speed of doing complex research to nations' vulnerability to cyberattack.

Billions of dollars are pouring into quantum computing – a

budding field that relies on the sometimes surprising behavior of subatomic particles to process information.

The White House has recognized the potential for quantum computing. President Donald Trump in late June signed executive orders pushing for the creation of a quantum computer capable of scientific research, use of quantum science by the military, and protections for government computers against quantum cyberattacks by U.S. rivals.

If a technological breakthrough comes, wide-ranging implications will likely follow. Quantum computing poses potential benefits for the academic and business worlds, but also raises cybersecurity concerns, as it could be used to crack security codes that protect computers from hacking.

It might still take years for current quantum computers to reach an adequate level of development. However, more capital investment and assistance from artificial intelligence have accelerated development.

“Quantum technology is a really exciting area. It has the potential for major advances,” says Steven Olmschenk, an associate professor at Denison University in Granville, Ohio, who researches atomic physics and quantum information. “The path that it takes [to get there] is not completely clear, or how long those things will take ... but I think we are definitely on the path to realizing that future.”

Q: What are quantum computers?

Hailed as technology that can compute what’s currently impossible, quantum computers are a variation of computers used today. At their core is a quantum processing unit (QPU), their version of a classical computer’s central processing unit.

A classical computer stores information as bits, which are either 1s or 0s. Quantum computers store information as qubits, which can be 1s, 0s, or a combination of both at the same time, called “superposition.”

With superposition, qubits can exist in multiple states at the same time. One can think of it as similar to a coin flip. In our everyday world, when someone flips a coin, it must land on heads or tails. But if this coin were in a state of superposition, the result would be a combination of probabilities that the coin is heads or tails – it wouldn’t be just one or the other.

This ability of qubits to have multiple states could allow a quantum computer to yield a range of solutions, all at once, while a classical computer has to go through each calculation one by one.

Outputs in quantum computers also rely on what’s known as quantum entanglement, which causes the condition of one qubit to depend on that of another. For instance, if two qubits are entangled, and one of them is revealed (as “heads” in the coin toss analogy), we would know the outcome of the other qubit (as “tails”), even before it is revealed. This helps quantum computers explore many possible solutions to a problem much more efficiently than classical computers.

Creating and maintaining states of superposition and entanglement are the main engineering challenges behind building these computers, as qubits operate on subatomic levels. But once these challenges are overcome, harnessing a network of qubits can yield stunning numbers of outcomes. With 80 qubits linked together, a QPU could do more calculations at once than there are grains of sand on Earth.

Q: Where does current technology stand?

Dozens of companies, including IBM, Google Quantum AI, IonQ,

and Quantinuum, have already created quantum computers, but so far, none clearly leads in development.

There is also more than one way to create quantum computers. Each company uses different elementary particles or methodologies to build these computers or QPUs, so it is unclear what form future quantum computers might take.

Currently, the most advanced quantum computers use anywhere from hundreds of qubits to the low thousands. These machines are delicate and prone to faults. Still, with clever coding even faulty qubits can be optimized to create a high-performance system.

“We call that quantum error correction,” says Niklas Mueller, an assistant professor and researcher at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. “That is currently the big frontier.”

AI models might accelerate the development of quantum computing. They are especially useful assisting with quantum error correction, because AI can help code and pinpoint errors within noisy QPUs much faster than traditional methods.

While significant strides have been made, these computers have yet to sufficiently demonstrate full quantum advantage – the ability to deliver savings in resources or achieve higher accuracy compared with classical computing methods.

Q: What are quantum computing’s potential uses?

Although quantum computing is unlikely to ever fully replace current technology, its implications are varied.

Quantum computing could have significant uses in areas such as chemistry and materials science. According to global technology and consulting company IBM, quantum computing is especially helpful in modeling physical systems and discovering patterns and structures in data that might otherwise be missed. That could be useful in sectors from biology to finance.

Quantum computing could also be used to optimize supply chains, as it could find efficiencies by sifting quickly through thousands of pathways.

But quantum computing could also pose security risks to modern encryption systems. In 1994, mathematician Peter Shor developed Shor’s algorithm, a method that could be used by quantum computers to crack RSA encryption, which secures much of today’s online communication.

While classical computers would take millions of years to crack a frequently used RSA encryption, quantum computers could do so in just days.

To counter this, the United States has spearheaded a Post-Quantum Cryptography Initiative, which led to the development of new encryption algorithms expected to be released as standards for civilian and defense networks by 2027.

Various parties see quantum computing’s potential, as evidenced by a recent \$10 billion commitment by IBM. The consulting firm McKinsey & Co. has predicted the industry will be worth as much as \$1.3 trillion by 2035.

As with AI and other technology, China and the U.S. are rivals in the development race. China has recently focused more investment in quantum computing, and designed the world’s first dual-core atomic quantum computer.

The Trump administration committed \$2 billion to nine quantum computing firms, which included equity investments through the Commerce Department in late May. Mr. Trump’s executive orders in June to accelerate the sector, too, attempt to position the U.S. ahead of China.

These computers, however powerful, will likely solve different

problems than classical computers solve, Dr. Mueller says.

"[Quantum computing] doesn't mean, 'OK, I'm upgrading my laptop now to a quantum laptop, and you just start to surf the internet,'" he says. "We're solving different problems with quantum computers, and probably some problems that we don't even dare to try to solve right now." ■

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

LAGOS, NIGERIA

Mayokun Iyaomolere helps put rubbish on the run

Plogging – or picking up litter while jogging – started in Sweden but has flourished in Nigeria, thanks to an informal network of volunteers known as Ploggas.

By Kate Okorie / Contributor

At just past 8 a.m. on a Saturday, several dozen young people in athletic wear are moving briskly through a crowded outdoor bus terminal in Lagos, Nigeria. They stop every so often to peer around and pick up what the city has forgotten: A discarded shoe. Plastic bottles. So many crushed pouches of drinking water lying among weeds or wedged inside concrete gutters.

An hour and a half later, the young people – volunteers with the environmental group Plogging Nigeria – gather at a central point to get their trash bags weighed one by one on an orange hanging scale. In addition to collecting trash from the bus terminal, the volunteers, toting 12 black bags, had picked up all the garbage along the surrounding streets. A few more bags, including a tall mesh sack of plastic bottles, came in from locals who received cash in return. That brings today's haul to nearly 153 kilograms (337 pounds).

A local recycling company later took away 56 kilograms of recyclables – plastic, paper, and nylon – the volunteers had sorted out. The remaining waste went to a municipal dump.

Plogging – picking up litter while jogging – started in Sweden but has flourished in Nigeria since 2018, when Mayokun Iyaomolere created an informal network there of volunteers known as Ploggas.

"When [Plogging Nigeria] started, we were just picking plastics, but we understood that we could not leave any waste behind," says Mr. Iyaomolere, who now runs the nationwide volunteer network from his home base in Ibadan in southwestern Oyo state.

His ultimate ambition is for the Ploggas to become redundant. He wants Nigeria to be so clean that there is no waste left to pick up. "If we're still plogging," he says, "it should only be for the fitness part."

The muddy path

Mr. Iyaomolere grew up in Igbokoda, a town in the riverine region of southwestern Ondo state, where the rainy season brings flooding that routinely swallows the dirt roads. As a boy walking home from school, he once slipped off the planks laid across a flooded pathway and landed in the water with his books. But shoreline communities bordering Igbokoda had it worse.

"I always heard stories of these other communities that were

getting attacked by the ocean," he says.

As he grew older, little changed for these residents. Many lost significant stretches of land to the sea as government promises of shoreline protection came to nothing. "I felt their pain, and it's what led me to become an environmentalist," he says.

Mr. Iyaomolere earned a bachelor's degree in biology education from the University of Benin in southwestern Edo state in 2009. Seven years later, he went to study environmental management for a master's degree program at Obafemi Awolowo University in neighboring Osun state. In his first class, the lecturer spoke about studying not only for a certificate, but also to solve society's problems. "It was like he was waiting for me," Mr. Iyaomolere says.

Within six months, Mr. Iyaomolere was volunteering on environmental projects across campus and was so vocal about it that friends nicknamed him "Mr. Green." It was around then that he understood flooding was a problem shared by many coastal communities.

In early 2018, a friend tagged him in a Facebook post about plogging, a concept that was new to Mr. Iyaomolere. But as World Environment Day approached, with the theme of "Beat Plastic Pollution," Mr. Iyaomolere decided to mark the day with a plogging activity. He bought cleanup supplies himself and sent invitations around his university; 17 people turned up.

"To my surprise, people really enjoyed it," he says. They wanted to do it every week, but he settled on every two weeks and set up a WhatsApp group to keep everyone connected. That was the birth of Plogging Nigeria.

Nigeria generates an estimated 44.5 million metric tons of solid waste a year, but only up to 30% is properly collected and disposed of. The rest is typically dumped on open land or burned. Informal networks such as Plogging Nigeria have stepped up to handle much of the growing pile.

Big on communication

Running on an open model that allowed anyone to start a plogging community anywhere, the network grew fast in its first five years. Last year, Mr. Iyaomolere says, he had to stop registering new plogging communities. "We want to deepen the work where we already exist," he says. There are now 26 plogging communities spread across 16 states, in five of Nigeria's six administrative regions.

As the network expanded, Mr. Iyaomolere set up a national council of about eight people to oversee the organization. Among them is a plogging director, to whom the community leaders report. Information travels along that chain.

Mr. Iyaomolere notes that the network's WhatsApp groups and social media platforms have played a big part in keeping members in the loop on plogging events.

Priscilla Folayemi, who heads the Lagos plogging community, one of the largest off-campus groups, says, "Even when things are falling apart, [Mr. Iyaomolere] knows how to bring them under control."

Mr. Iyaomolere is always reminding Ploggas whose movement it is. "If there are no Ploggas," he says, "there is no Plogging Nigeria."

From the street to scaling up

Plogging Nigeria has helped collect more than 50 metric tons of recyclables in the country, which Mr. Iyaomolere acknowledges is a small figure compared with the scale of the problem. Nigeria generates an estimated 2.5 million metric tons per year of plastic waste alone.

"The worth of such grassroots work is in the aggregated efforts of all the players in the sector," says Victor Oyejide, co-founder of

a recycling company, Recycledge, in Ibadan. It receives about 70% of its recyclables from efforts such as the Ploggas’.

Grassroots communities “are the ones doing the [largest] volume of the work,” he says. Government, he adds, mostly stays at the edges, partnering with these communities doing the picking.

Mr. Iyaomolere often gets messages asking how to manage waste better. So, he built a national directory of verified waste collectors; it now lists 220.

To scale up the Ploggas’ efforts, he is interested in building environmental policies that support responsible waste disposal, infrastructure that drives behavioral changes, and direct access to waste collectors for every home. “People are starting to listen,” he says, his voice lifting.

Picking litter off the street was only ever the beginning. ■

EDITORIALS

Living better, not just longer

In an era of information overload, fresh news and concepts can get obscured by “slop.” But eventually, thought-expanding data and perspectives rise to the surface and into wider public attention. This is the case with a Yale University study on aging in America published in an academic journal in early March.

The findings of “Aging Redefined,” gaining media attention last month, defy – and can help redefine – long-held and limiting views about the older demographic. Collecting data on some 11,000 participants over a 12-year period, the researchers found that nearly half of American adults age 65 or older became physically stronger, mentally more acute, or both.

“If this finding was extrapolated to the entire US population, it would suggest that more than 26 million older persons are experiencing [such] improvement,” the study’s authors noted.

A key contributing factor to these enhanced abilities? An outlook that counters traditional “age beliefs,” ingrained theories that equate growing older with growing less capable. Those who held positive expectations of what future years might bring showed better life outcomes.

“Most people are thinking about aging all wrong,” Washington Post columnist Leana S. Wen wrote in June. “People need to know that improvement in later life is a common experience.”

Becca Levy, one of the study’s main authors, has previously noted that “age stereotypes [are] absorbed from culture” – such as advertisements and social media. By the same token, new information and messaging can help modify or entirely erase such limiting perceptions.

And in societies where the share of older citizens is expanding, breaking out of ageist views and modes of thought can be a boon. As the Yale University news service reported, the authors “hope their findings will reverse the popular perception that continuous decline is inevitable.”

More than a century ago, the founder of the Monitor, Mary Baker Eddy, encouraged a similar shift in thought. Instead of measuring or outlining life and its possibilities by “solar years,” she urged, “Let us then shape our views of existence into loveliness, freshness, and continuity, rather than into age and blight.” ■

Hong Kong mirrors China’s challenges on trust

Each July marks the anniversary of the end of British rule not just in the United States but also – halfway around the world – in the Asian territory of Hong Kong.

Under the 1997 “one country, two systems” handover, Hong Kong was to exist as a special region, maintaining a wide range of political freedoms. And many, if not most, Hong Kongers want to hold on to their traditions of democracy and debate.

But after several years of tighter control by China’s authoritarian government, Hong Kongers are joining forces online with Chinese on the mainland and around the world – to protect freedom of thought and speech. China has imposed a sweeping national security law and forcefully put down widespread protests. This year, it sentenced media activist Jimmy Lai to 20 years in prison and arrested owners of two independent bookstores for carrying “seditious” publications – such as a biography of Mr. Lai and George Orwell’s “1984.”

Meanwhile, the territory’s Beijing-backed leader is seeking to burnish the image of the ruling party. He has kicked off a campaign to enhance Hong Kongers’ “understanding of the significant accomplishments” of the ruling party.

Innovating for freer expression

The combination of heavy-handed security tactics and info wars hints at Beijing’s concerns about dissent. China spends about \$200 billion a year on “stability maintenance,” or monitoring of its citizens. But even with artificial intelligence tools, there are limits to what it can do.

Between January and April this year, the online China Dissent Monitor documented 1,396 protests. Last August, in the city of Chongqing, large-scale political slogans were projected onto a building. “Freedom is not something bestowed; we must fight to reclaim it,” said one.

“The ingenuity of human expression can still outpace the ... machine,” according to a 2026 report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Chinese citizens on Western platforms are shifting from homophones and wordplay to plain language, the report noted. “Doing so limits the regime’s ability to harvest more [data] ... to train its censorship AI system.”

One social media account, operated by Italy-based exile Li Ying, is of special concern to Beijing. Its 2 million followers in China regularly feed it fact-checked, uncensored images and videos of daily life through encrypted channels.

“My work is about bringing to light the voices of ordinary people,” Mr. Li told the Financial Times in May. “The point of my work is to build trust.”

And, for a government that often exercises power by sowing division and distrust among its people, “I suppose that is dangerous,” he concluded. ■

The principle of Americanness

Sometimes, the confluence of disparate events unexpectedly illuminates ideas and ideals that have universal and enduring resonance. Three recent occasions point to the essence of being American: celebrations of 250 years of independence, the Supreme Court ruling on birthright citizenship, and an annual recognition of “Great Immigrants, Great Americans.”

The thread of citizen rights and responsibilities wove through each of these, uniting evolving conceptions of freedom, self-government, and individual achievement from the nation’s past through to its present.

In their 1776 Declaration of Independence from British rule, the Founding Fathers claimed for all future Americans the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” In the court ruling, Chief Justice John Roberts affirmed that all individuals born on U.S. soil have a constitutional right to citizenship, which he described as “the right to have rights.” And the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, as it has done since 2006, honored “25 distinguished naturalized citizens” – former immigrants – “whose contributions have strengthened America.” This year, the foundation also acknowledged the “eight foreign-born signers of the country’s founding document,” the Declaration of Independence.

Referring to these signatories, New York University Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah observed, “The United States was not first a settled national community that later decided to admit immigrants,” but one that “immigrants and their children helped create.”

One of those signers, Robert Morris, who helped finance the American Revolution – reportedly stated: “I am a native of England, but from principle am American.”

That “principle” of being American, through alignment with the nation’s founding ideals rather than through ancestry or parentage, endures today.

“A political identity founded on principle” – instead of person – can be “made capacious enough for subsequent generations,” noted Dr. Appiah, himself a naturalized American.

In this “capacious” space, there’s room for complicated or contradictory feelings, too. A recent poll showed that only 52% of adults think the U.S. is living up to its founding promises – but that nearly three-quarters (72%) are “proud to be an American.”

Of this combination of pride and aspiration to do better, 19th-century poet Katharine Lee Bates once noted, “Americans are at heart idealists, with a fundamental faith in human brotherhood.” In that vein, a stanza from her 1893 poem, “America the Beautiful,” offered a fitting benediction for the nation’s 250th:

*America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea! ■*

BOOKS

‘Odyssey’ roundtable: Today’s connection to the classics

The July 17 release of the Christopher Nolan film adaptation of “The Odyssey” has provoked the kind of chatter that big-budget movies always bring. That cast! But this one has also stirred conversation about the relevance of the classics in contemporary society. **Stephen Humphries**, our senior culture writer, reached out to Daniel Mendelsohn, editor at large at The New York Review and a professor at Bard College whose 2025 translation of “The Odyssey” is widely acclaimed; Walter Sterling, president of St. John’s College in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Anika Prather, a professor at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., for an online meetup to see what some of those closest to classic literature were thinking. Notably, none of them scoffed at the mass-market presentation. When we spoke, they’d only seen the trailer. But we got the feeling all three might be reaching for the popcorn. We boldly ventured: Might it be better than the book? “Uh, well,” said one of our distinguished guests, “it’s going to be different.”

This excerpted discussion has been edited for length and clarity. You can find a video of the full, one-hour conversation on our YouTube channel.

STEPHEN HUMPHRIES: We’re living in an era in which there’s a lot of debate within higher education about the place of humanities, including the classics. Institutions of higher education are facing a demographic cliff, lower enrollment, a young generation of kids saying, “Why should I spend the money and have all that debt and end up working at Starbucks? Is it worthwhile?” Others are saying, “Maybe it’s a better idea to study accounting, or take up learning how to become a plumber.”

So there’s a lot of discussion at the moment about what the role of higher education is. What is it for? So, what do you say to kids who are wondering: Should they study Homer’s “The Odyssey” or go learn how to do plumbing?

DANIEL MENDELSON: Well, I always have the same response to this question about practicality. I luckily had great parents, and when I announced to them at the age of 18 that I wanted to major in Greek, they didn’t bat an eye. You know, they never said, “What are you going to do with that?”

I always tell my students the same thing – or their parents actually, who are concerned, [and] not without reason – you know, “How are you gonna put a roof over your head? Blah, blah, blah.” I always say it depends how you define “practical.” You know, if you want to come out of four years of college and know for a fact that you’re going to get a job, by all means, study accounting. That’s the practical thing to do.

I also say, “But when your father dies, your accounting degree is not going to help you at all. But ‘The Odyssey’ is going to help you. Having read great authors is going to help you.” That’s a different kind of practical, and I have to tell you that most of life is that stuff, not your job, you know?

It's the bedrock of how to think about your life that you're getting from these texts. And you may make less money, you know, if you study English than if you study AI. But what is your life going to be like? What are the tools that you are going to have, to think about what's important in life? Those you are not going to get, necessarily, out of your STEM degree. And you know what? It's not necessarily a competition. You can read the classics and be a scientist, like my father, like a lot of people. You know, I do think it's important to frame it not as some dire zero-sum game.

By looking at these materials – which, for whatever reason, three millennia worth of people have thought worth looking at – you're going to get more out of your life. The unexamined life is really not worth living, I have news for you. And so that's what I always tell them. Define practicality! Let's start there.

HUMPHRIES: Walter, how about you? Tell me about your connection to the classics. And what is your experience of students who are discovering [them] for the first time?

WALTER STERLING: I was a seeker, like young people are, and a seeker for meaning. And we look for it in so many places. We look for it in pop culture, in art, in music, with our friends, in politics, religion, and all these things that are swirling around us. I think for some people, if you're able to go into classic texts of literature and philosophy from the tradition, and engage with them in a certain way, you realize that there are deep reservoirs there that in a way are deeper often than the things you're encountering on the surface in your immediacy and in your present world.

HUMPHRIES: Anika, what's your response to this cultural moment we're in now, of interest in the classics again?

ANIKA PRATHER: I feel like reading "The Odyssey" helps you understand a lot of literature. I have not been able to prove it, but I have a sneaking suspicion because Zora Neale Hurston was classically educated ... "Their Eyes Were Watching God" is her version of "The Odyssey." Because it follows a similar pattern of Odysseus.

The main character is Janie, and she starts off at home and somehow wanders away from home, ends up in a relationship that she doesn't need to be in, and then ends up back home after that relationship doesn't work. This is a really broad summary I'm giving. But it follows a similar pattern of "The Odyssey," and I feel like that story of "The Odyssey" has formed a foundation for a lot of storytelling across cultural lines.

When I read "Their Eyes Were Watching God," I had already read "The Odyssey," and so immediately I'm like, "Oh my gosh, she's Odysseus."

But that is a story of [us all], right? We're always on this journey of self-discovery and eventually coming back to the roots of ourselves. The things we thought we didn't want to be a part of, we go away from it for a while, and we realize, "You know what? I need to go back."

You can tell there was a little bit of a change in Odysseus when he came back home. He wasn't the same, right? And so you come back home, but you're a different person ready to do more or better than what you had done before.

And I think that is the journey of every human being. So I feel

like [for] those of us who understand, this tradition is not supposed to be protected by one [group of people]. It is the story of every human being.

And this is the other thing: Like I said earlier, a lot of the Greek plays came out of these stories. So I believe that Homer and others created these epics for us to continue storytelling, to integrate it into our humanity and to our human life, and then to re-create and to continue to re-create. And that's how we keep humanity alive – by continuing to do storytelling, and that storytelling is birthed out of the stories that came before us.

HUMPHRIES: The classics have been very politicized. Some on the right claim that our civilization should depend on these traditions. And that the classics should be represented in a certain way, whether it's in the depiction of a scene on an urn or in a Christopher Nolan blockbuster. There's been a lot of controversy about Nolan's casting choices in "The Odyssey." He's cast Zendaya to play Athena, and Lupita Nyong'o as Helen of Troy, and people such as Elon Musk and Matt Walsh have called that blackwashing.

PRATHER: One thing that came to mind, because I was reading an article where they were concerned that a transgender person, Elliot Page, might be playing Achilles or [another] male character, and they were upset about that. As you all know, I have very deeply religious values myself, but I am a realist, and the first thing I said to myself when I read that is, "You do realize that ancient Greek tragedy was only performed by men?" Men were playing women.

And I do struggle when people try to bring their values into a free country. Everyone should be free to live as they want to as long as they're not hurting others. I have a real visceral response to some of these things. It frustrates me ... as a Black woman.

When different scenes from this myth are portrayed on the ancient Greek stage, men dressing up as women, portraying them, it reveals that they weren't concerned about that. They were [more], "Just enjoy the story, because these stories are about all of us."

An African woman can be Helen, a white woman can be Helen. And I feel like a lot of these Greek authors did have this in mind. ... And that's why so many diverse people connect to the classics. It's because when we read them, [we are] drawn to these stories because we [can] see ourselves in these stories, right?

A lot of us, when we read "The Odyssey," we identify with it because we are far from home. My great-grandfather was separated from his first wife because he was sold away from her. Like, we all have this experience of being away from home and just trying to get back there, and some of us have realized, you know what? We'll never get truly back to Africa because too much of our roots are [now] here. So we're trying to make home here. ... It's a book that we can really, really identify with on such a global scale.

HUMPHRIES: Walter, I'm going to move over to you now to talk about the flip side of the culture wars when it comes to the classics. Because there are some on the left who disdain the classics and say that they're filled with justifications of slavery, and that they exalt nationalism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. But there's a book by Mary Beard called "Talking Classics" in which she says, "The classics belong neither to the left or the

right.” In fact, she writes, “The simple fact that classics belong to none of us can offer a safe space to argue about the most difficult debates we face now.” So how do you view the classics amid these ideological debates, and can they function as a neutral zone for us to look at our modern world?

STERLING: I agree 100 percent with what Mary Beard said there. Let me make a quick analogy, because I find myself talking about this a great deal in the year of America 250, and I’ll talk to folks about what it means to read the Declaration, the Constitution, Federalist Papers, and so on – American foundational texts. I often just assert, “If you think you can get those texts to map on to any party platform or any one side of our contemporary ideological debates, you’re going to fail.”

And that’s part of what’s brilliant about putting students together to actually read, interpret, and discuss those texts. You’ll find complexity and ambiguity. I’m not saying they can mean just anything. This is not – you know, this is not wild relativism – but you’re going to find complexity and ambiguity that can’t be reduced to the terms of our normal political partisanship.

You’re going to find, in most of them, elements that are deeply tensional just along the kind of axes that we talk about. You’re going to see things that look like they underwrite maybe certain traditionalist understandings of gender and family and hierarchy or something like that. And you’re going to see powerfully those things critiqued and questioned and challenged.

I mean, any thoughtful reader of “The Iliad” and “The Odyssey” – though both of them in different ways – is going to find things that look like celebration and valorization of warrior ideals. But boy, are you really going to find questions and critiques of those ideals. And that just runs all the way down about every single issue that activates us along these lines. ■

For a classical education, start with these texts

Interested in delving into the classics? From a traditional translation to a middle school hero, here are several suggestions on where you (or your kids) can get started.

The Odyssey (2025)

By Homer, translated by Daniel Mendelsohn

For an accessible version of Homer’s epic, try Emily Wilson’s 2017 translation to plainspoken language in iambic pentameter. By contrast, this translation by Mendelsohn replicates the six-beat, 17-syllable dactylic hexameter of ancient Greece. It’s not lightweight, but its prose soars. Here, for example, is a description of Hermes’ flight to Kalypso. “Swooping down, he set foot on Pieria; then he plunged into the sea / And skimmed along the breakers like nothing so much as a tern, / Which drenches its thick plumage in the brine as it hunts for fish / Down through the troughs of the breakers on the restless wastes of the sea.”

Circe (2018)

By Madeline Miller

In Homer’s “The Odyssey,” Circe is a wily antagonist with the power to turn men into animals. In Madeline Miller’s spinoff novel,

Circe is a misunderstood protagonist who is seeking acceptance. Does she belong to the world of gods or to the world of mortals? Miller’s follow-up novel to “The Song of Achilles” was a bestseller and book club favorite in 2018. The Monitor’s review of it that year lauded Miller for weaving “powerful imagery and emotion into a rich tapestry.”

Talking Classics (2026)

By Mary Beard

Mary Beard starts her book with the following question: “What is the point of the ancient classics?” Too often, these civilizational monuments are presented as if they’re museum pieces, best handled by curators wearing white gloves. Beard, a renowned British professor of ancient literature, recommends a less reverential approach. That way, it’s easier to experience what she dubs “the shock of the old.” She invites the modern reader to discover how the ideas within works of antiquity aren’t antiquated.

Plato and the Tyrant (2025)

By James Romm

Who was Plato, the pupil of Socrates who went on to teach Aristotle? James Romm, a professor of classics at Bard University, studies letters purported to have been written by Plato. His goal is to reveal the man behind the myth. The Greek philosopher “believed that an enlightened strongman, unconstrained by law or limits on power, could solve the world’s ills, which he otherwise deemed insoluble.” Struggling to reconcile his philosophical ideas of justice with the tyrannical real-world politics of Syracuse, Italy, he didn’t exactly measure up to the Platonic ideal.

Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief (2005)

By Rick Riordan

Imagine Harry Potter but with a hero who wields thunderbolts instead of a wand. Contemporary teenager Percy Jackson learns that he is the son of Poseidon, god of the sea. Despite his heritage, Percy lives on terra firma. In “The Lightning Thief,” the first book in Rick Riordan’s popular series, Percy finds himself in a training camp for demigods that includes a daughter of Athena and a son of Hermes. Setting out on a quest that mirrors the journey of Odysseus, Percy faces threats from a Minotaur, Titans, and a Medusa-esque character who would like to turn him into a garden statue. The bestselling series, most recently adapted to television, offers young adult readers an entry portal into the characters and storylines of Greek mythology.

Mythos: The Greek Myths Reimagined (2019)

By Stephen Fry

If you’re a fan of Douglas Adams’ “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,” then Stephen Fry’s series “Mythos,” “Heroes,” “Troy,” and “Odyssey” is for you. In “Mythos,” the British actor recounts tales of Zeus, Athena, Persephone, and others with irreverent wit and sage wisdom. For instance, he describes the goddess Gaia visiting her daughter Mnemosyne, “who was busy being unpronounceable.” When the Earth goddess meets Ouranos, supreme ruler of the cosmos, Fry writes, “Gaia listened carefully to this wise counsel and – as we all do, whether mortal or immortal – ignored it.”

– **Stephen Humphries** / Staff writer

Epic literature, epic screen adaptations

Classic stories like “The Odyssey” don’t often make great movies. Here are some joyous exceptions.

Being both a movie maven and a lit guy, I’ve often bemoaned the dearth of great movies adapted from great books – a thought prompted once again by the imminent release of Christopher Nolan’s “The Odyssey.” The reasons for this scarcity are legion.

A great novel or short story is great in large part not because of its plot but because of the ways in which the author has framed his or her very personal way of seeing, of feeling. The language employed is indistinguishable from the author’s vision. When William Faulkner, for example, describes a rising moon as a “wan hemorrhage,” it won’t do for a filmmaker to express the beauty of this phrase by simply photographing a moon, no matter how artfully composed.

The deep degree of psychological insight in a great novel is also difficult for a movie to measure up to. A writer can plumb the inner lives of characters in ways often inaccessible in film except by the finest of actors, and through very different means. It is no accident that many of my favorite literary adaptations showcase great performances. Great actors bring inner lives outward.

I once asked Norman Mailer if there could ever be a movie as great as, say, Dostoevsky’s “Crime and Punishment.” He answered that it was possible, but it wouldn’t be a movie of “Crime and Punishment.” Movies hit us in different ways than novels. One thing novels can’t match, obviously, is the sheer physicality, the sheer sensuousness, of the visual and theatrical experience. The movie “Jaws” is infinitely better than the novel. The same is true of “The Godfather.”

It’s worth pointing out that, in these two instances, the source material was far from a masterpiece. It’s a truism that second-rate novels often make for far better movies than first-rate ones. Great novels are great because of the web and texture of the writer’s vision. They are too intimidating for most filmmakers to tackle, though the many who have tried should not be disparaged. Their attempt, after all, is often inspired by a love of the book.

There are, however, exceptions to this truism, which brings me to my brief personal list of best movie adaptations of great literature. Most can be streamed. To make the cut, they had to be close in quality to the book. So, although I’ve enjoyed, for instance, some of the Jane Austen adaptations over the years, especially “Pride & Prejudice” with Keira Knightley, and Emma Thompson in “Sense and Sensibility,” I wouldn’t place these films at the top. Some of my picks may be unfamiliar to you. All the better: I envy what you have to look forward to. One caveat: Please read the book before you see the movie if at all possible.



By Peter Rainer
Contributor

Reading it afterward saps its strength.

“The Grapes of Wrath” – This 1940 John Ford adaptation of the John Steinbeck novel about Dust Bowl migrants in California is almost as renowned as the book, and rightly so. It captures the faces of the dispossessed with a fierce authenticity that matches Steinbeck’s prose and recalls the photographs of Dorothea Lange. As Tom Joad, Henry Fonda, who played Lincoln for Ford the year before, is at his most iconic.

“Great Expectations” – David Lean’s 1946 version of the Charles Dickens novel is, for many, the pinnacle of all great book adaptations. Writers often don’t like the movies made from their books (though they like the paychecks), but I believe Dickens himself would have been pleased. Two years later, Lean made an excellent “Oliver Twist” and, for his last film, a highly creditable “A Passage to India,” from the E. M. Forster novel. And while we’re on the subject of Dickens, the Alastair Sim “A Christmas Carol,” not directed by Lean, is impeccable.

“The Heiress” – William Wyler’s 1949 movie, adapted from a stage play based on Henry James’ “Washington Square,” is ferociously powerful. Olivia de Havilland, at her peak, plays the jilted heiress and Montgomery Clift is the gold-digging suitor. It also boasts a terrific score by Aaron Copland. Another marvelous James adaptation is “The Innocents” (1961), derived from his chilling otherworldly novella “The Turn of the Screw,” with a career-best performance from Deborah Kerr as the imperious governess.

“The Leopard” – Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s famous novel, set in 1860s Italy during the insurgent Risorgimento movement, was transformed by Luchino Visconti in the 1963 film into one of the most sweepingly operatic movies ever made. As the noble Don Fabrizio Corbera, prince of Salina, who recognizes his time has passed, Burt Lancaster is beyond praise.

“The Scarlet Letter” – Lillian Gish gives one of the greatest of all movie performances in this superlative 1926 silent adaption of the Nathaniel Hawthorne novel. Gish personally chose its director, the Swedish Victor Sjöström, because she felt, rightly, that his Scandinavian sensibility was attuned to Hawthorne’s.

“The Member of the Wedding” – Adapted from the play and novel by Carson McCullers about a lonely tomboy in the Deep South, superlatively played by Julie Harris, the 1952 dramatization is one of the most moving films ever made about race relations and the hazards of growing up. Ethel Waters’ performance as the housekeeper is legendary.

“The Dead” – John Huston was perhaps the finest of all directors of great literature. “The Dead,” his final film, an adaptation of the peerless James Joyce story, is among his very best, as rich and lived-in as anything he ever did. Also high on the Huston scale is his 1951 movie of Stephen Crane’s “The Red Badge of Courage,” even though MGM severely trimmed the release version, and his 1975 Rudyard Kipling movie, “The Man Who Would Be King,” starring Sean Connery and Michael Caine as the hapless adventurers Danny and Peachy. And his 1956 “Moby Dick” has occasional passages that match Herman Melville’s prose. Speaking of Melville, there is much to commend in Peter Ustinov’s 1962 “Billy Budd,” with a young Terence Stamp as the angelic sailor Billy and Robert Ryan as his nemesis Claggart.

“Intruder in the Dust” – The movies have mostly not been kind to William Faulkner but this 1949 adaptation, filmed in his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi, is the exception. Juano Hernandez, one of the finest of all American actors, plays a proudly

defiant Black man falsely accused of murder.

“**Carrie**” – No, not the Sissy Spacek shocker, but William Wyler’s deeply affecting and little known 1952 adaption of Theodore Dreiser’s “Sister Carrie.” As the wealthy married man whom Carrie, the small-town girl played by Jennifer Jones, falls for, Laurence Olivier gives perhaps his best unheralded performance. Olivier always credited Wyler, who starred him as Heathcliff in “Wuthering Heights” years before, with teaching him how to act for the screen.

“**The Lady With the Dog**” – Anton Chekhov’s short story is one of my favorites and so is this 1960 Russian movie. It’s about an affair between a married woman and a married banker vacationing in Yalta. It honors the writer while possessing a full life of its own.

The same is also true of the other films discussed here. You can’t ask for more. ■

In their philosophy, ancient Greek is a living language

Students of ancient Greek are making antiquity new again, diving deep into “The Iliad” and the Bible.

By Emily Staunton / Staff writer

Three years ago, when Abigail Geffken was at the beginning of high school, her mother asked her a question: If she didn’t have to think about impressing colleges, how would she spend her time?

For Ms. Geffken, the answer was easy.

“I’d be reading ‘The Iliad,’” she said. And she’d be reading it in its original language, she informed her mother. Ancient Greek.

It’s “such a beautiful language, just the way the alphabet looked,” she recalls. “I just was so fascinated by it.”

So, for the next two years, Ms. Geffken studied ancient Greek with an online Christian classical education school called Scholé Academy. And when she finished high school, she took a gap year to complete a third year of the language.

Ancient Greek, it turns out, is not dead – not quite. Indeed, as antiquity becomes new again, with the classics getting a boost from everything from TikTok trends to this month’s Christopher Nolan blockbuster film “The Odyssey,” a small group of devotees like Ms. Geffken are trying to understand the Athenians in their own tongue.

Justin Belote, for instance, a high school English teacher and poet from Staunton, Virginia, is fascinated by ancient Greek philosophy and history. His love for poetry led him to teach himself ancient Greek.

“To be able to read a language that people wrote sometimes thousands of years ago is ... a wild experience,” he says.

During Lent, Mr. Belote met weekly with another teacher to read ancient Greek passages from the Book of John in the Bible.

He’s not alone in this theological inclination.

Benjamin Dunning, a professor of the New Testament and early Christianity at Harvard Divinity School, says he’s seen growing interest among students in applying ancient Greek to the Bible. In the past, he would have expected no more than seven students

to register for his upper-intermediate ancient Greek class. Last semester, 12 students took the class.

Some of his students are training for the ministry, while others are historians. Some are just wrestling with religious concepts.

“I’ve been very impressed [with] the ... students that I’m working with now,” Dr. Dunning says. “They don’t want to go quick and shallow. They really want to dig in and get into the text very deeply, and there’s only so far you can go when you’re working in English translation.”

Going deep is part of the philosophy of Scholé Academy, the school Ms. Geffken attended. The ancient Greek word *scholé* means “leisure.” But leisure doesn’t equal lazy, explains Edward Kotynski, the academy’s chair of languages.

The school is “trying to get that balance of going deeply and having discussions and making sure that we don’t have ... lots of busy work,” he says.

Proponents of the approach say this relaxed-but-deeper thinking can be refreshing in a high-tech society with decreasing attention spans. Swiss German University reported that the average attention span on a digital device had fallen to 47 seconds in 2024, down from 75 seconds in 2012.

Learning ancient Greek takes a lot longer than 47 seconds.

Indeed, studying it, “requires you to think very deeply and just grow your attention span,” Ms. Geffken says.

During her gap year, she participated in the Catherine Project, an online forum that offers courses and reading groups focused on the classics. Her ancient Greek reading group included people of all ages joining from India, Texas, Brazil, and Portugal. Ms. Geffken says her classmates “were from very different walks ... and stages of life, but who all wanted to talk about these books together.”

When she headed to Deep Springs College earlier this month for freshman orientation, she brought some of her own study books. She plans to become an ancient Greek and Latin teacher. ■

BOOKS

An early naturalist who cast off the ‘chains of prejudice’

George Forster’s globe-trotting youth made him more tolerant of Indigenous peoples and customs than most of his peers, writes biographer Andrea Wulf.

By Danny Heitman / Contributor

When British explorer James Cook sailed from England in 1722 to seek out Antarctica, he brought 17-year-old naturalist George Forster along for the trip. Forster’s skill in documenting the wonders he witnessed made him a major cultural figure of his time. He is largely forgotten today, an oversight that Andrea Wulf aims to correct in “The Traveler: One Man’s Quest for Humanity From the South Seas to Revolutionary Paris.”

Forster made cameo appearances in two of Wulf’s earlier books: “Magnificent Rebels,” which traced the origins of the Romantic movement, and “The Invention of Nature,” her 2015 biography of German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. In “The Traveler,”

she recreates the sight, smell, and feel of that era in intimate detail. Here, she describes young George's arrival in London in 1766 after growing up in a part of Prussia that is now Poland:

George's new home town was boisterous, frenzied and dirty. One million people lived in the British metropolis and every time he stepped outside, the boy was confronted with carriages, chaises and carts that clogged the streets. Porters delivering goods and carrying luggage maneuvered through the crowds, pushing and crying "By your leave", and moving so fast that they regularly knocked pedestrians to the ground. Fiddlers played at the street corners and watchmen called out the hour of the day.

Such imagery helps ground Wulf's story, a welcome quality in a narrative that moves so quickly. From an early age, Forster was in a hurry, and as his biographer, Wulf must dash along, too. Readers learn that Forster's father, an aspiring naturalist, took him on a work trip to Russia when he was only age 10, and in short order, the boy collected some 700 specimens from the countryside. An avid reader, the younger Forster was fluent in German, French, English, and Russian. His work came to the attention of the Royal Society, Britain's eminent community of scientists, and Forster and his father were invited to join Cook's voyage.

Wulf brings to life the frigid days as Cook and his company navigate Antarctica, but "The Traveler" seems to bloom when the expedition's chief vessel, the Resolution, glides into warmer climes. In Tahiti, readers get an early glimpse of Forster's lyrical prose style, which would serve him well when he chronicled his adventures in "A Voyage Round the World," his popular travelogue:

The east-wind which had carried us so far, was entirely vanished, and a faint breeze only wafted a delicious perfume from the land, and curled the surface of the sea. The mountains, clothed with forests, rose majestic in various spiry forms, on which we already perceived the light of the rising sun.

Beyond his descriptive and artistic skills, Forster was a pioneer in ethnography; he was curious about languages and customs. "Few Europeans," Wulf writes, "approached indigenous people with such an open mind – most explorers viewed them through a lens of arrogance at best, and with brutal disgust at worst."

As Wulf explains it, Forster's eclectic background and globe-trotting youth "enabled him to think more expansively and be more tolerant than most of his contemporaries." She points to his tolerance as a beacon in our own fractious times.

Wulf's admiration for Forster can sometimes seem indulgent. His progressive views also included unbridled enthusiasm for the French Revolution, a passion that tended to blind him to its cruelty. Wulf notes some of those excesses, then quickly moves on.

She concedes Forster's weaknesses, but she holds up his better self as an example worth preserving. "He was far from perfect – he made mistakes and misjudged situations," she writes. "He was a product of his age, yet he shook off its chains of prejudice. He saw unity behind our diversity – not a sameness that made us all alike but a bond that should hold us together." ■

What makes people fall for romance scams?

A Spanish journalist probes the desire to connect that allows many fraud schemes to succeed. He also travels to Nigeria to learn the scammers' own stories.

By Mackenzie Farkus / Staff

It began with a swipe on the dating app Tinder. Silvia, a lonely single mother of three sons and owner of a successful dental clinic, matched with an American soldier named Brian, a handsome, divorced, 52-year-old on a mission in Syria in 2015. While his profile only had a few photos, his messages were passionate; Silvia found herself falling in love. But Brian's repeated, unfulfilled promises to visit her home country of Spain – as well as an avoidance of video calls – struck Silvia's sons as strange. As her relationship with Brian progressed rapidly, a surprising announcement came through: Brian had found gold bars in a "terrorist stash." Would Silvia like some?

Alarmed at the proposal, one of Silvia's sons, journalist Carlos Barragán, traced the IP address of Brian's emails. The dashing soldier's missives weren't coming from Syria; they were being sent from Lagos, Nigeria. The gold bars and terrorist stash weren't real. Silvia had been targeted in a romance scam. Barragán's mother, heartbroken after being duped, deleted "Brian's" emails as well as all the dating apps on her phone.

Barragán wondered: "Why did she share her most private thoughts only with someone she had met online? Why did she open up so easily about our family history to a stranger?"

Years later, Barragán quit his job and embarked on a journey to Nigeria to find his mother's scammer. His reporting resulted in "The Yahoo Boys: Love, Deception, and the Real Lives of Nigeria's Romance Scammers," a nuanced, compelling look at the young men perpetrating romance scams, as well as their victims abroad – and the loneliness that unites them. According to the Federal Trade Commission, reported losses from romance scams in the United States reached \$1.3 billion in 2022.

Readers meet Biggy, a big spender and hopeful musician pretending to be a woman to scam men; Chibuike, who impersonates famed WWE wrestler Cody Rhodes to romance a single mother in Ireland; Azeez, a boy lured by the fast money of scamming in the face of extreme poverty; and Richie, a scammer haunted by what he believes to have been the death of one of his victims.

All are known as Yahoo Boys, a nod to the Yahoo email addresses scammers in Nigeria once used. In an increasingly digital world, their exploits have expanded to dating apps and social media. Rather than working in large criminal syndicates as many Westerners assume, Yahoo Boys typically work alone, asking victims for money – most often in the form of gift cards.

Some in Nigeria view Yahoo Boys as folk heroes, stealing money from white foreigners as a means of reparations for slavery and colonialism. Others, like Azeez's beloved mother and grandmother, view it as something to be ashamed of: a perpetuation of the infamous "Nigerian prince" scam, which targeted Westerners and promised great riches if the recipient sent a small advance fee. These fraud schemes impacted how foreigners viewed Nigeria.

For many of the Yahoo Boys, scamming is a means of escaping poverty. Azeez and his mother live in a small room with a dirt floor that floods when it rains; they are periodically evicted because of unsafe conditions. He begins scamming after peer pressure from older friends on the street. Biggy, too, lives with family, paying them a small percentage of what he earns through scamming. Chibuike's dream of joining the Nigerian navy requires post-secondary education that he can't afford, and he often shares money with people on the street. Richie's desire to become a journalist is set aside when he starts scamming to pay for tuition.

"No parent wants their son involved in internet scams, but putting food on the table is the priority," one father tells Barragán.

The voices of romance scam victims – or "magas," as they're known – are largely absent, save for their excerpted chat logs with Yahoo Boys. They represent a broad swath of economic backgrounds, but Barragán found that most victims were "people over forty-five ... often emotionally isolated. Many were inherently kind and naïve, unaware of online dangers."

While Barragán spends time with support groups dedicated to scam victims and recounts his mother's experiences with "Brian," only one chapter is devoted to a victim: Trisha, whose husband sends a photo of a closed casket to scammer Richie, who believes he is responsible. Barragán travels to Kentucky to confirm Trisha's passing, only to find out that she faked her death to stop Richie's scam. Other victims, knowing that they're being scammed, continue communicating with Yahoo Boys. In fact, most of Azeez's victims have been scammed multiple times.

In spite of the deceit, they are searching for love, understanding, and connection – someone to pay attention.

As one Yahoo Boy in Abuja tells Barragán, "I'm one hundred percent sure your mother told things to her scammer that you don't know. Things about her you've never imagined in your life. Her ambitions, her flaws, her broken dreams. They're looking for someone who will listen, period."■

HOME FORUM

On track to ride Amtrak's Quiet Car

For this traveler, a frantic sprint for a seat leads to a humorous breach of conduct.

There we were, my wife and I, in the middle of the bustling new Moynihan Train Hall, part of the New York City Penn Station complex. We were searching for an advance clue about which track our Amtrak train would be departing from. It was like the last part of that TV game show, "The Price Is Right," where you needed to guess which box had the best prizes.

The reason for this monumental decision? I was determined that we line up first to beat the competition to board Amtrak's specially designated Quiet Car. It is said to have achieved iconic status among the world's passenger train-riding population seeking refuge from the cacophony of modern-day life.

In the Quiet Car, which Amtrak started in 2001, conversa-

tions, cellphones, and the playing of music are strictly prohibited. The space is hushed as if it's a public library or a church during silent prayer.

You could call me the Quiet Czar, the gatekeeper if you will, who – if circumstances warrant – always wants to help the folks at Amtrak ensure that the Quiet Car lives up to its name. That its passengers really must obey the rules, or there could be trouble.

I became a Quiet Car commissar based on previous Amtrak trips, listening for three hours and 45 minutes to cellphone conversations and chitter-chatter between passengers from New York to Washington. Not that people shouldn't ever be allowed to talk. But in the Quiet Car, Amtrak conductors use a stern, no-nonsense tone when they suggest, "If you want to talk, move to another car." A few moments later, if the disturbance continues, they'll repeat the warning. By the conductors' rather intimidating intonation, you wouldn't want to know what they'd do with anyone who violates the rule.

Philosophers view staying quiet as a powerful tool for achieving peace and personal growth. By obeying the quiet rule in the Quiet Car, could passengers feel more calm? Or would they depart the train feeling stoic for having been forced to not say anything for so long? They certainly could feel more at peace not having to listen to other people's loud conversations. Who knows, that could translate into the passengers becoming almost speechless about how good they feel about themselves and the world.

Amtrak has 21 tracks at this New York station for arrivals and departures. You can only take a wild guess about which track to choose from before boarding crunch time.

On this particular morning, I was torn between choosing Track 13 or 14, based on where the previous Amtrak trains had departed for Washington. My wife pointed out that a woman with several badges swinging from her neck looked like an official who could help. Rather than standing in the dark, why not ask her to shed a little light on the situation?

She looked hassled. Not wanting to make her job more difficult, I approached trying to act cool and collected. At 45 minutes before our train was scheduled to leave, she advised it was too early to know the track number. But she was very willing to help. Stick close by, she said, and when the time came, she'd tell us where to go.

People suddenly materialized from all parts of the Train Hall. After our Amtrak official kindly directed us to Track 5, passengers heading for Washington raced to line up behind us. It's called the bandwagon effect. Or herd mentality. They must have figured we knew something they didn't. Then, the gate opened. It was a free-for-all race to the Quiet Car. If we hadn't been in such a hurry, we would have asked our Amtrak friend for her real name to give her a 10 out of 10 customer satisfaction rating.

As our train was about to leave the station, my wife congratulated me for successfully claiming our seats aboard the Quiet Car.

"I know how much this means to you," she said.

I thought she sounded a little sarcastic, implying that I might prefer living in a tyrannical police state. Not letting the comment bother me, I blurted out, "If it hadn't been for that nice lady from Amtrak, who knows what would have happened?"

Right then, a fellow sitting across the aisle, who had somehow beaten us in the race to the Quiet Car, gave me a disapproving stare. He put a finger to his lips and whispered, "Shhh."

I nodded. You had to admire this guy. Maybe he was even more zealous than I was about the rules of the railroad. If conversing hadn't been absolutely prohibited, I would have apologized, "my bad," vowing to never again breach the Quiet Car code of silence.

— Eric Green

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Authentic Truth

Who would have predicted the mental environment humanity would find itself in today? Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing how we receive information. Knowing how to discern deepfakes, manipulated images or video, challenges society. And the question, What is authentic truth? has become urgent for everyone to consider.

When I asked a child what truth is, he said, "It's what you say when it isn't a lie." Another child added that everyone knows what's true and what's not, even if they sometimes lie. How did the kids know that? Is knowing truth inherent in everyone? This week's Bible lesson from the Christian Science Quarterly on the subject of "Truth" shines light on these questions.

In "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," Mary Baker Eddy writes, "The time for thinkers has come. Truth, independent of doctrines and time-honored systems, knocks at the portal of humanity. Contentment with the past and the cold conventionality of materialism are crumbling away" (p. vii). Far above what humans create, God, divine Truth, is spiritual, ever-present intelligence. This Truth is knowable and practical, including to meet our needs for discernment today.

To consider Truth in this context, Christian Science highlights its use as a biblical synonym for God, in the same way Spirit, Life, and Love are used.

God's truth acts as permanent law, as knowable as math. Searching for a knowable, universal truth led me to Christian Science. Its basic proposition was logical to me – that God is divine intelligence, the wholly good, infinite Spirit that creates man spiritually in His likeness. But I wrestled with the question: So what is this material body? Then, while on vacation, I collapsed unexpectedly, losing my sight and the ability to speak or move, and I was in great discomfort.

Frightened and not knowing what to do, my husband began reading to me from the book he was grappling with, Science and Health. Then I heard clearly in thought, "This is the truth you have been looking for." In a few moments, all symptoms completely left. I was grateful to be alive, but even more grateful to realize that God, Spirit, was present and speaking directly to me. The threatening material conditions disappeared in that palpable spiritual reality (see Suzanne Riedel, "Easter's message of regeneration," Christian Science Sentinel, April 6, 2023).

Universal Truth is dynamic in consciousness, as Jesus described it when he said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Truth does something!

As humanity learns more of the spiritual reality that Jesus taught, God's messages of truth are heard, felt, and understood. Nurturing that spiritually inspired awareness leads to new views, more intelligent insights, and more inspired solutions.

— Suzanne Riedel

■ Learn more about the Christian Science Quarterly Bible Lesson at biblelesson.com.

IN PICTURES

Get your tire kicks on Route 66

Story by Harry Bruinius / Staff writer

KIRKWOOD, MO.

The old cars arrived polished for display but alive with use: hoods lifted, engines explained, owners leaning over fenders as if over family albums. The eighth annual Route 66 Cars and Guitars Festival, held in the Mother Road's centennial year, turned a few blocks of town into a rolling theater of memory – a reunion with an America that once imagined itself most clearly through a windshield on the open highway.

Ron Feldman of St. Peters, Missouri, stood beside his 1957 Chevrolet Nomad, a rare two-door model – just 6,103 made that year. His first car, at 16, was also a '57 Chevy wagon. Mr. Feldman has had this one for 10 years and restored almost all of it himself, doing the interior with his mother. The hobby, he says, became "total passion." But he is quick to resist treating the Nomad as a museum piece. "I built this car to drive it," he says.

As live music played – the "guitars" part of the festival – that was the spirit up and down the street. For Stephanie Campbell of Webster Groves, Missouri, her 1955 Buick Roadmaster carried a family story in its gleaming chrome lines. When she was 15 years old, her father unexpectedly came home in a Roadmaster that became the car she and her brothers drove for years. After it was gone, she missed it enough to spend "probably a decade" looking for another one that felt right. Now, she drives this one whenever she can. "I'm driving the value right out of it," she says with a chuckle.

Route 66 has always amplified this American habit of investing machines with longing. A car could be a parent's surprise, a first taste of adulthood, a prewar dream or postwar promise. It could be a way out, or a way back.

Bob Worrall, who grew up in Kirkwood, still owns the 1968 Shelby Mustang GT350 he bought in 1969 before being sent to Vietnam. He remembers falling "head over heels in love with it." He has collected around 20 vintage cars over the years – "I'm a gearhead!" he says – but this Mustang carries a special meaning for him.

A hundred years after Route 66 was first envisioned and built to cross the nation's heartland, the highway's great promise is no longer powerful engines and the open road. Its promise is recognition: that memory still has chrome, that freedom sometimes has whitewalls, and that the past, if carefully tended, can still turn over and run. ■

Crossword

ACROSS

1. It may be tidy or paltry
4. Said, as a farewell
8. Like a chrome-dome
12. Loneliest number
13. Uppermost point
14. La Scala highlight
15. Pitcher's statistic
16. Gained (from)
18. Try to learn
20. Emulated Humpty Dumpty
21. Broadcasts
24. Some tidal periods
28. Speedo® wear
32. East Timor's capital
33. Highland boy
34. Trojan beauty

36. Swabby's swabber

37. Brought to maturity

39. Single singers

41. Billy goat feature

43. Yodeler Whitman

44. Family's pronoun

46. Bar on the PC

50. Fragrant mixture of flower petals

55. Annoying buzzer

56. "We wove ____": Charlotte Brontë

57. Aquarium clapper

58. Eggs laid during spawning

59. Work's antithesis

60. Boldly unconventional

61. Not right

DOWN

1. Miss Piggy et al.

2. Minute or mile

3. Diner's preoccupation

4. Immature

5. Dian Fossey subject

6. Cubs' home

7. Former flames

8. Set, as a trap

9. Picasso's field

10. Be positioned

11. Remote controller, perhaps

17. Team supporter

19. Power tool?

22. Is repentant

23. Prairie towers

25. Ambitions

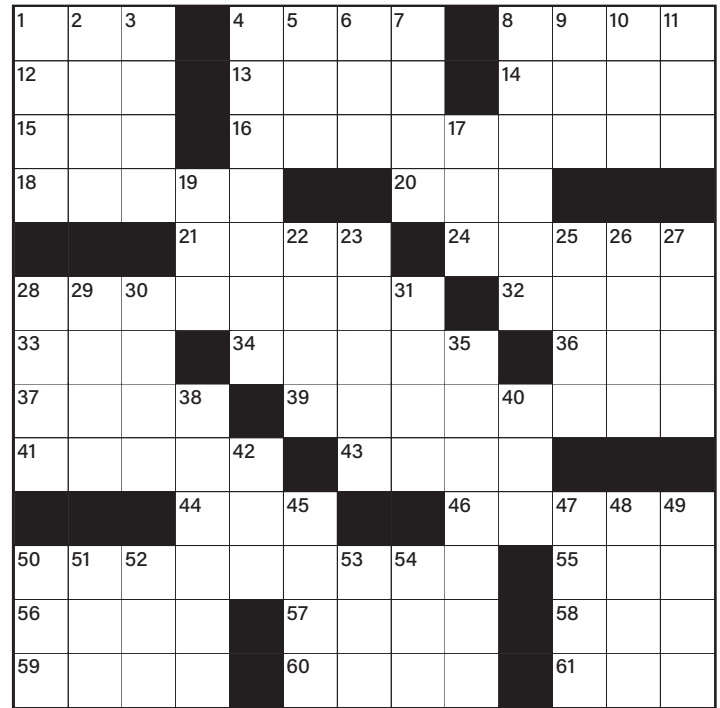
26. Novel creation?

27. Samples soup

28. Chunk or hunk

29. Living thing?

30. Light bulb, figuratively



© Lovatts Puzzles

31. "William ____ Overture"

35. With clamor

38. Visit

40. Bratty child

42. Quartet minus two

45. Machination

47. Natural coif

48. Lump of clay

49. Watched warily

50. Father, to Huck Finn

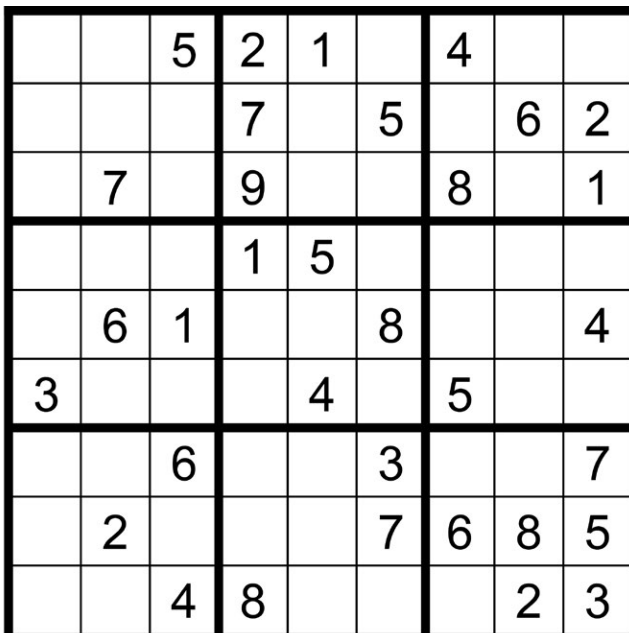
51. Bird that gives a hoot

52. Ceylon Black, e.g.

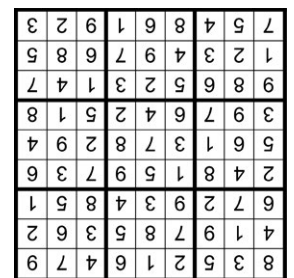
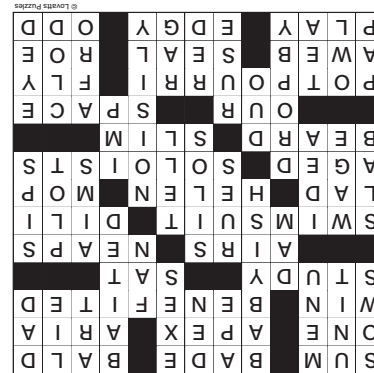
53. Elmo's color

54. Scrap of cloth

Sudoku difficulty: ★☆☆☆☆



Crossword and Sudoku solutions



How to do Sudoku

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