

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR WEEKLY

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

— MARY BAKER EDDY

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A consequential American moment

As the Monitor's reporters worked on this week's magazine, with our look at the first year of Donald Trump's second term, a biblical phrase popped to my mind: "sow the wind, reap the whirlwind."

This was not for any partisan reason. Across the political spectrum, Americans are grappling with a highly polarized political environment – one that includes emotional questions around everything from immigration to whether the American dream is alive and well (and, if not, what can be done about it), as well as a technological revolution with artificial intelligence and ongoing upheaval in how people get and share information. Distrust of elites coincides with discomfort with rapid change.

In many ways, we have created a society ripe for division and populism. And some historians say it is not surprising that in individualist and entrepreneurial America, the current version of populism includes a billionaire in the White House.



BY MARK TRUMBULL
NATIONAL
NEWS EDITOR

This week's magazine offers both a review of the Trump presidency and a historical lens on populism, plus coverage of the United States' intervention in Venezuela. As we put it together, we realized that no single article could sum up the American political landscape.

On the one hand, President Trump has fulfilled public demand for stepped-up border security, imposed a course correction on some less-than-popular social-policy movements, and instigated what many see as a needed toughening of trade relations with China. On the other hand, his approach to wielding power has been testing the rule of law, stressing the constitu-

tional balance of powers, and altering foreign policy in a way that raises the prospect of a might-makes-right era.

We hope our coverage, collectively, helps put the news of the past year in useful perspective. Mr. Trump is no ordinary politician. The whirlwind we are in is no ordinary moment in time. Our goal is to serve you with fact-based and fair-minded reporting. We're not about telling you what to think. But if we're doing our job right, Monitor articles should help you think – and act, too – in the midst of the storm. ■

MIAMI

With Venezuela operation, an anti-communist diaspora takes center stage

By Whitney Eulich / Special correspondent

The United States' belligerence in South America is at a new high, with large-scale U.S. strikes in Venezuela and the capture of its authoritarian leader Nicolás Maduro this month. The operation marked a distinct shift in regional foreign policy from the anti-interventionism of recent decades.

Mr. Maduro faces federal charges in the U.S., including narco-terrorism conspiracy. Venezuela's interim president, Delcy Rodríguez, is part of the same strong-arm, leftist regime, but hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said she could "pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro" if she didn't bend to U.S. wishes, she announced Venezuela will cooperate with the American agenda.

While the operation took many by surprise worldwide, for one cohort in South Florida, it represented what they have been waiting for.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Many in the Cuban diaspora have welcomed the Trump administration's more aggressive approach to Latin America, epitomized by the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro. They see one of their own – Secretary of State Marco Rubio – as an architect of the policy shift.

Washington's new activism brandishes the U.S. presence and policies that Cuban Americans here have supported since fleeing their country following the arrival of Fidel Castro and his communist plans in 1959. To many, it stems from having one of their own, Cuban-immigrant-raised Marco Rubio, at the helm of U.S. international affairs. Mr. Rubio serves as both secretary of state and interim national security adviser, and many see him as the central force behind the administration's hard-line stance in Latin America this year.

"If I lived in Havana, and I was in the government, I would be concerned," Mr. Rubio said in a press conference after Mr. Maduro's capture on Jan. 3.

The Cold War ended 35 years ago, and U.S. foreign policy shifted to a focus on terrorism and drug trafficking. However, for many on the political right in Latin America, and within the Cuban diaspora in South Florida, the danger of "the left" and communism never went away. Mr. Rubio's rise has given broader reach to the Cuban diaspora's worldview, shaped by a historic loss of freedom, community, property, and human rights in their homeland.

"The U.S.'s new philosophy on foreign affairs reflects the perspectives of most of us inside the Cuban American community: To end the regime in Venezuela ... and of course, the one in Cuba," Miguel Cossio, chief operating officer of the American Museum of The Cuban Diaspora in Miami, told the Monitor in December before Mr. Maduro was captured.

For Rubio, an anti-Castro dream

Despite posted rules that prohibit yelling and using *malas palabras*, or bad words, players in Little Havana's Domino Park this past December break both codes of conduct within moments of sitting down together, quickly dissolving into hugs and laughter.

"There's sorrow in being lost and disconnected from Cuba, our land. But man, we'll find a good time anywhere," says Orlando Gutiérrez-Boronat, whose family fled in 1971, when he was 5 years old.

He describes the mindset of the Cuban diaspora in South Florida, with all the caveats that come with a 2 million-strong population, as patriotic, focused on family unity, prioritizing individual autonomy and freedom, thinking independently, and cherishing democracy.

In the 1950s, when the Castro brothers led a guerrilla campaign to overthrow dictator Fulgencio Batista, many in Cuba believed the struggle would return the island to democracy. But Fidel Castro and his supporters soon began carrying out indiscriminate arrests and executions, seizing private property, and turning to the Soviet Union for financial aid.

Mr. Rubio's parents left Cuba in 1956. He was born in Miami in 1971. Like many youngsters raised in South Florida by Cuban-born parents, Mr. Rubio grew up hearing how communism had destroyed lives there, and how the United States was uniquely positioned to bring about freedom on the island. As a child, he dreamed of leading an army of Cuban exiles to overthrow the Castro regime, he wrote in "An American Son: A Memoir," published in 2012.

Mr. Rubio rose politically in South Florida, working for the first Cuban American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and eventually winning election to the Florida House in 1999.

His decision last January to put the Cuban regime back on the list of state sponsors of terrorism illustrates Mr. Rubio's espousal of the diaspora's worldview, locals say.

"He understands what a communist regime is and the damage it can cause," says Mr. Cossio. "We're witnessing a philosophical shift in foreign policy."

A "Pink Tide" of leaders

The Cold War, which lasted from the late 1940s to the early 1990s, led to an ideological tug-of-war in Latin America between U.S.-backed anti-communism efforts and Soviet-supported leftist movements. The U.S. backed military coups in Guatemala and Chile, and supported authoritarian military dictatorships that saw leftist citizens as the enemy.

For the United States, a central threat was the prospect that communism could flourish in its backyard, says William LeoGrande, a Cuba expert at American University in Washington. "Apart from Cuba itself, pretty much all of what the U.S. saw as threats in the region went away" with the end of the Cold War. And so, too, did Washington's focus on the region.

But in 1998, members of the Cuban diaspora watched keenly as a bombastic former paratrooper was elected president of Venezuela, promising a new economic system that would forge a path between capitalism and communism. President Hugo Chávez's victory ushered in what was dubbed the "Pink Tide" of leftist, populist leaders across the region who promised an end to elitist politics.

The political opposition in places like Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina saw communism in these leftist victories. Most of these democratically elected leftists explicitly praised or had close ties with the Castro regime in Cuba. The U.S. mostly stayed on the sidelines.

Now, Venezuela

Today, from Mexico to Chile, it is common for leftist political candidates to be labeled communists by their opponents. Electorally, it's "very, very effective," says Dr. LeoGrande.

What appears to be shifting, however, is Washington's readiness to adopt a similar outlook. In November, President Donald Trump called the front-runner in Honduras' presidential election a "borderline communist," and he referred to New York City mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani as a "100% Communist Lunatic" the same month. In Florida, the state government introduced a new curriculum in public schools to teach the risks and realities of communism.

"What Mamdani is pushing is very similar to what Fidel Castro was pushing in communist Cuba. It's important that our students understand these policies and where they can end up," says Anastasios Kamoutsas, the Florida commissioner of education.

Mr. Trump's National Security Strategy, released in November, places the U.S.'s geopolitical focus squarely on the Americas. It frames Latin America as the source of some of the United States' most serious problems – drug trafficking, immigration, Chinese investment – and calls on the region as a whole to work toward U.S. goals.

In oil-rich Venezuela, all of these interests come together. The U.S. upped its military pressure in the fall, bombing suspected drug-running boats, in an effort to remove Mr. Chávez's successor, Mr. Maduro. Washington says it is engaged in "armed conflict" with drug cartels, but the legality of its strikes is in question, as is Mr. Maduro's removal.

Venezuela under Mr. Maduro has been propping Cuba up, says Adela Diez, outside a coffee window on Little Havana's Calle Ocho in early December. "They all need to fall. Marco Rubio and Donald Trump have the right idea."

The Cuban diaspora in Florida has grown and changed since the 1960s. The children and grandchildren of exiles are further removed from the upheaval that communism brought to the island, and new arrivals do not always see eye to eye with the old guard.

But, "one thing everyone agrees on is that communism is not good," says Guennady Rodríguez, who fled Cuba in 2013 and now runs a political podcast called "23yFlagler."

In 2023, an online news site accused him of being a prop for the Cuban regime, Mr. Rodríguez recalls, for promoting a policy of engagement with Cuba as a strategy for regime change. The loudest voices in the Cuban community here prefer an isolationist approach.

José Jasán Nieves Cárdenas, who was a journalist in Cuba before his exile to the United States in 2019, says resistance to communism is so strong that it serves as a conversation stopper. "Once you criticize certain mainstream ideas, you are a communist and you are banned from debate," says Mr. Nieves, editor in chief of *El Toque*, an online independent news site serving audiences mostly in Cuba.

He is not surprised that the diaspora is largely conservative and sees eye to eye with Mr. Rubio. But he says he is concerned that Cubans fled a "caudillo," or strongman, and now seem to defend similar behavior from the Trump administration. ■

Seizing Venezuela's Maduro, Trump implements his corollary to Monroe Doctrine

By Howard LaFranchi / Staff writer

In the National Security Strategy it released last month, the Trump administration declared that the United States will "assert and enforce a 'Trump Corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine" – a 21st-century addition to the 19th-century vision for hemispheric relations. Central to this approach is a more aggressive stance toward perceived national security threats in the region and a willingness to take military and other coercive actions in pursuit of U.S. interests.

This month's dramatic actions in Venezuela made it clear that President Donald Trump has started to implement this vision.

The capture of President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas in the early morning of Jan. 3 to face federal drug-trafficking charges in the U.S., and the deadly bombings of military installations and some civilian buildings across the country, were part of this. So were the president's repeated references to Venezuela's oil wealth and assertions that U.S. oil companies will return to revive the country's oil production and take back what he said the U.S. is owed.

For the administration, the "Trump Corollary" is a dusting off and updating of Monroe's 1904 Roosevelt Corollary, which asserts a U.S.

right to intervene in Latin America in cases of “chronic wrongdoing.”

Yet for some analysts, the developments of recent weeks are less about drugs and oil – although those factors are not negligible – than about a reasserting of American power.

“What has become clear over the past month of the new National Security Strategy and assertion of the Trump Corollary – the boat strikes and other military actions in the Caribbean, and now the actions inside Venezuela – is how this is all about power and the Trump administration reasserting that might makes right,” says Britta Crandall, a political scientist specializing in Latin American studies at Davidson College in North Carolina.

“Driving this escalation and emerging vision for the region is a worldview defined much less in terms of the strategic alliances built up over decades,” she adds, “and more by the exercise of power in the pursuit of U.S. national interests.”

Mr. Trump and other administration officials took the position that they had warned Mr. Maduro as they proclaimed U.S. hegemony in the region.

“The Monroe Doctrine is a big deal, but we’ve superseded it by a lot, by a real lot,” Mr. Trump told the press after the operation. “American dominance in the Western Hemisphere will never be questioned again.”

Assertions that, going forward, it will be “America’s interests first” in the hemisphere were underscored by administration officials on news shows after the operation.

Addressing Venezuela’s oil wealth and U.S. plans to take control of it to affect Venezuelan policy, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on ABC News’ “This Week,” “We’re hopeful ... that it does positive results for the people of Venezuela.” But, he added, that “ultimately, most importantly, [it would be] in the national interest of the United States.”

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem told “Fox News Sunday” that the United States would insist on leadership in Venezuela that will be “a partner that understands that we are going to protect America.” She said the U.S. is “not going to allow you to continue to subvert American influence and our need to have a free country ... to work with.”

The military intervention sent shock waves through Latin America.

“This action underscores that the U.S. is very blatantly looking to the countries to the south in the pursuit of resources and certain key minerals,” says Will Freeman, a fellow for Latin America studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. “The U.S. will be looking for the same ‘coerced obedience’ from the region, and especially from smaller countries, that it imposed in the case of tariffs.”

In terms of individual countries, Cuba (and its communist regime) could be the first to feel a real impact from the Venezuela intervention, some analysts say, suggesting that financially beneficial arrangements between the two countries, including state-to-state payments, are unlikely to last.

“If you consider the number of Cubans working in Venezuela who have been a significant source of hard currency for the island, it seems likely that this is going to hit hard and fast,” says Dr. Freeman.

Cuba has gradually reduced its dependency on Venezuelan oil over the past decade as production has declined. But a blow to income could further impair Cuba’s already strained services, especially electricity generation.

“If blackouts start to hit the capital,” Havana, Dr. Freeman says, “that could lead to huge demonstrations and political instability.”

WHY WE WROTE THIS

What was behind the seizure of Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro? The Trump administration’s hemispheric strategy recalls the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which asserts a U.S. right to intervene in Latin America in cases of “chronic wrongdoing.”

Others say Venezuela’s neighbor Colombia, led by leftist anti-Trump President Gustavo Petro, may also have something to worry about.

“Leaders in the Western Hemisphere are looking at the world differently today and realizing that the norms we’ve lived by have been eroded and changed,” says Dr. Crandall. “But I think at the top of the list of those concerned would have to be Petro,” especially after Mr. Trump warned him to “watch himself,” she says.

In remarks at his Mar-a-Lago resort, Mr. Trump repeated unfounded claims that Mr. Petro “has factories where he makes cocaine.” He also cited the fact that Colombian cocaine is being shipped to U.S. markets.

Beyond the hemisphere, analysts say the two key world leaders to watch for their response to the Venezuela intervention will be China’s Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“The big powers, and especially China and Russia, are likely to draw two very different lessons about the U.S. from all of this,” says Michael Desch, an international affairs professor at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

“First lesson is that America’s big stick is back, and so they are going to have to take America’s perception of outside malefactors in the region into account,” he says.

“But the alternative is that they see the U.S. applying a spheres-of-influence approach to relations with its near region,” he adds, “and they seize it as an opportunity to apply something similar” in their own spheres.

“Does this set the stage for a ‘Xi-roe’ doctrine that China applies to Taiwan and elsewhere in the region?” he quips. Or as others have speculated, does the arrest of Mr. Maduro encourage Mr. Putin to consider swooping into Kyiv to abduct Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy?

For many foreign policy analysts, Mr. Trump’s surprising declaration that the U.S. will “run” Venezuela raises questions about whether Mr. Trump, who came into office eschewing “forever wars,” is tempted to try his hand at nation-building.

After the setbacks and failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, would Mr. Trump want to demonstrate his prowess with nation-building 3.0?

In later TV interviews, Mr. Rubio appeared to back away from his boss’s vow to “run” Venezuela.

But benefiting Mr. Trump if he does choose that road is that Venezuela has a solid base of political and economic institutions to build upon, despite the deterioration under Mr. Maduro and his mentor and predecessor, Hugo Chávez.

“Venezuela is not Afghanistan,” Dr. Crandall says.

Others suggest that Mr. Trump is likely to lose interest in “running” Venezuela, especially as he realizes that the country’s dazzlingly vast oil reserves are not going to be tapped for billions in revenue anytime soon.

Dr. Desch, citing the president’s “track record” in Gaza and elsewhere, says, “I suspect that before long, the president will declare victory in Venezuela and move on to something else.” ■

Maduro's capture was dramatic, but was it legal?

4 questions.

By Henry Gass and Anna Mulrine Grobe / Staff writers

After the late-night capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, by the U.S. military at their home in Caracas, Secretary of State Marco Rubio asked the public to think of the operation in simple terms.

"This was an arrest of two indicted fugitives of American justice," he said during a press conference Jan. 3 at President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate.

The U.S. military, he added, "supported the Department of Justice in that job."

Within hours, the Justice Department unsealed a 2020 indictment and a superseding indictment listing Mr. Maduro and his wife, among several defendants, charging them with drug smuggling and gun possession crimes.

But is it that simple?

Experts in international and military law – including some who witnessed another controversial U.S. intervention in Latin America – say the situation is more complex.

Instead of a simple arrest of a runaway fugitive, this was an arrest, in his own country, of a de facto head of state. Under international law, heads of state generally have immunity from foreign criminal prosecution. Mr. Maduro was sworn in for a third term as president in January 2025 after an election widely considered to be fraudulent.

His arrest featured support from multiple branches of the U.S. military and months of preparation. President Trump and Mr. Rubio said prior notification of Congress about the military operation was not necessary due to its law enforcement nature. The 1973 War Powers Resolution directs a president to report to the legislative branch within 48 hours of deploying U.S. forces. It's an effort to divide authority to wage war between Congress and the president, as the U.S. Constitution ordains.

Mr. Maduro's legal journey will now follow the typical path toward a federal trial. One thing the courts will likely not scrutinize is how Mr. Maduro and his wife, the former president of Venezuela's National Assembly, came to be in U.S. custody. Once a defendant is on U.S. soil, courts have ruled that it doesn't matter how they got there.

Q: What legal justification has the administration provided for the arrest?

The Trump administration has not provided a specific legal reasoning for its actions during the early hours of Jan. 3. But experts believe that two strands of reasoning have emerged from officials' public comments. First, administration officials argue, President Trump's constitutional position as commander in chief gave him the authority to launch the military operation without notifying Congress.

Mr. Trump has claimed this authority in recent months as his administration has launched lethal airstrikes on alleged drug traffickers in international waters, killing over 100 people. America is in an armed conflict with Latin American drug cartels, the administration has argued.

Second, Secretary Rubio and other officials say that the operation was not a commitment to an armed conflict, but an effort to enforce U.S. domestic law on foreign soil.

There is a degree of legal precedent for this. When the United States invaded Panama in 1989, William Barr, then an assistant attorney general, wrote a controversial memo claiming that the FBI could legally arrest the country's dictator, Gen. Manuel Noriega,

because the U.S. can ignore treaties that have not become part of the domestic law.

Q: What are critics saying?

The administration says that Mr. Maduro's ouster did not require congressional approval since it "was not an extended military action," as Mr. Rubio argued on NBC News' "Meet the Press" on Jan. 4.

But critics see it differently.

The operation included roughly 150 military aircraft launched from 20 military bases, as well as dozens of U.S. Navy ships and the Army's Delta Force. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, a New York Democrat who serves as the House minority leader, says that the U.S. moves were an act of war.

At least 32 Cubans who serve in military and intelligence roles in Venezuela were killed in the operation, Cuban officials said. No U.S. troops were killed.

One reason some lawmakers weren't more forceful in demanding oversight is that Trump officials said the U.S. was not planning a regime change operation, says Katherine Yon Ebright, a counsel specializing in war powers at the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law.

The U.S. constitutional system and the War Powers Resolution are designed to compel presidents to "loop in Congress" and make public their cases for the use of military force, she adds. "None of that has happened here."

Trump supporters, including House Speaker Mike Johnson, have argued that the War Powers Resolution is unconstitutional. Yet even among lawmakers who support Mr. Maduro's ouster, there are concerns about how U.S. adversaries could interpret precedents that Mr. Trump is setting.

Rep. Don Bacon, a Nebraska Republican and retired Air Force brigadier general who sits on the House Armed Services Committee, said in a statement Jan. 3 that regardless of potential benefits for Venezuelans, "Dictators will try to exploit this to rationalize their selfish objectives."

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Q: What happened in Panama?

The U.S. strike in Venezuela came 36 years to the day after the U.S. removed another regional dictator.

For most of the 20th century, the U.S. had a sizable military presence in Panama, built up since the construction of the Panama Canal. By the late 1980s, about 10,000 personnel were stationed there. In December 1989, a U.S. serviceman was shot and killed in Panama City.

Citing Panama's declaration of war against the U.S. that week and the serviceman's killing, President George H.W. Bush ordered an invasion. Mr. Noriega eventually surrendered to U.S. forces, and in 1991, he was convicted of drug trafficking charges and sentenced to 40 years in prison.

Both Mr. Noriega and Mr. Maduro were de facto heads of state under indictment in the U.S. Both were accused of conspiring to traffic drugs to the U.S. Beyond that, however, the two apprehensions have little in common, says Geoffrey Corn, a law professor at Texas Tech University who was serving in the country at the time as an intelligence officer.

"We went into Panama out of legitimate concern that the lives of Americans were in danger," he adds. "We didn't invade a country to arrest somebody."

WHY WE WROTE THIS

The U.S. military's removal of Nicolás Maduro from Venezuela to face trial in a U.S. courtroom raises a host of questions about the legality of the Trump administration's actions. We look at what international law, domestic law, and historical precedent say about the legal rationale.

Q: What happens now?

Mr. Maduro and his wife appeared in court in New York City on Jan. 5. They both pleaded not guilty, with Mr. Maduro saying in Spanish that he was “captured.”

The DOJ indictment charges them with four counts related to drug trafficking and the possession of “machineguns and destructive devices.” It lists Mr. Maduro and his wife as co-defendants along with his son, two other Venezuelan government officials, and the leader of the Tren de Aragua gang.

According to the indictment, Mr. Maduro “sits atop a corrupt, illegitimate government that, for decades, has leveraged government power to protect and promote illegal activity, including drug trafficking.”

The government is accusing Mr. Maduro of using his official powers, since 1999 when he was in the National Assembly, to partner with drug cartels across Latin America and “distribute tons of cocaine to the United States.”

Mr. Maduro could make several pretrial arguments in future court hearings. Like Mr. Noriega, he could claim immunity from prosecution as a foreign head of state.

The courts approved of the prosecution of Mr. Noriega because the U.S. government did not recognize him as Panama’s legitimate leader. The same is true in the case of Mr. Maduro and Venezuela.

Mr. Maduro could also claim that his arrest was unlawful, but that argument appears to be foreclosed by legal precedent. Two U.S. Supreme Court decisions – known collectively as the Ker-Frisbie doctrine – held that courts have jurisdiction over criminal defendants even if they were not lawfully apprehended.

■ Staff writer Victoria Hoffmann contributed reporting from Boston.

SANYA, CHINA

Among palm trees and luxury malls, China launches an ambitious experiment

By Ann Scott Tyson / Staff writer

Turquoise waves from the South China Sea sweep along the southern tip of China’s Hainan Island, as tourists in flip-flops pose for photos under palms. Long a lonely place of exile for banished Chinese court officials, this tropical island of 10 million people has transformed in recent decades into a resort-studded vacation spot.

Now, Chinese leader Xi Jinping aims to turn Hainan into the world’s biggest free-trade port – leapfrogging ahead of the rest of the country in terms of economic openness and integration with the world.

On Dec. 18, this island the size of Belgium will officially become a separate customs zone from the rest of China, with tariffs eliminated on most imports. Coupled with low taxes and tax exemptions, the “systematic opening” of Hainan represents China’s “determination and courage to open up in today’s environment,” says Cai Qiang, director-general of the Hainan Provincial Department of Finance.

Yet Hainan’s free-trade development plan faces significant headwinds, making it an important test for China’s long-term economic reforms.

Amid a global wave of protectionism, many countries are increasing tariffs on China and prioritizing domestic industry. Hainan also remains relatively underdeveloped compared with established commercial powerhouses such as Shanghai. It’s heavily dependent upon tourism and natural resources, and ranks lower than most

Chinese provinces for gross domestic product per capita.

On top of these challenges, Mr. Xi’s prioritization of national security could offset the benefits of a free-trade hub, even as Hainan’s geographic isolation makes it a natural choice for piloting potentially risky reforms.

Hainan “provides a litmus test of the country’s willingness and actual commitment to explore liberalization and regional economic integration,” writes Scarlet Xu Ni, a researcher at the National University of Singapore’s Centre on Asia and Globalisation.

Expanding economic policies

At an oceanside aquarium in the southern city of Sanya, women in flowing mermaid suits dive among stingrays, whitespotted bamboo sharks, and hundreds of other marine species, wowing visitors. Hou Wen and her girlfriends, meanwhile, scout an upscale duty-free mall for deals on Gucci, Burberry, and other foreign luxury brands.

“We’re looking for backpacks, skin care products, and makeup,” says Ms. Hou, an office clerk making her first trip to Hainan from China’s eastern city of Suzhou. She plans to return with her family. Hotel service is top-notch, she says, and “the sunshine is great, too.”

Hainan’s duty-free zones have attracted large numbers of mainland shoppers in recent years, especially when foreign travel was curbed during the pandemic. The province is hopeful that turning the entire island into a free-trade entrepôt will attract new business investment, advanced industry, and commerce to Hainan.

Hainan’s separate customs zone will expand the categories of tariff-free imports from 1,900 to 6,600. These goods can circulate tax-free within the island, and some can flow tax-free into the mainland, as long as they have been processed in a way that adds value of more than 30%.

“This will help enterprises lower their costs,” says Mr. Cai.

Among the beneficiaries is Hainan Ausca International Oils and Grains Co. Ltd. In the northwestern city of Danzhou, their factory churns out big bottles of soybean, peanut, and other vegetable oils bound for the mainland.

“We were one of the first companies to set up in Hainan since the free-trade port project was announced” in 2020, says deputy general manager Cao Youhua. “Everything happened very fast.”

Local companies also benefit from Hainan’s relatively low tax burden. The general corporate tax in Hainan is 15%, compared with 25% in mainland China. For individuals, Hainan’s highest income tax rate is 15%, versus 45% in the mainland, according to Hainan officials.

The policies have already shown some success in boosting foreign investment and trade, which have grown faster in Hainan than the national average. Its proximity to Southeast Asia is yet another advantage.

Hainan, which lies 200 miles from northeast Vietnam, saw bilateral trade with the 11 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations grow from 23 billion yuan (\$3.2 billion) in 2020 to 57 billion yuan (\$8 billion) in 2024, says Tian Tao, deputy director of customs for Hainan’s capital city.

Gateway to the world?

At Haikou Meilan International Airport, workers in orange vests perform maintenance tasks on an Airbus airliner inside a hangar. Hainan’s one-stop aircraft maintenance base has serviced more than 2,400 jets – including from Southeast Asia and the Middle

WHY WE WROTE THIS

A large tropical island off China’s southern coast gained independent customs status on Dec. 18, 2025 – a move Chinese leaders hope will jump-start development in Hainan and pioneer new levels of openness for the rest of the country, despite the rise of protectionism.

East – since it opened in 2022.

“This is our gateway to the Indian Ocean and Pacific,” says Wang Haiye, general manager at Haikou Airport Aircraft Engineering Co. Ltd. “We want Hainan to be a place where Chinese rules match with international rules,” she says, noting that the base has secured maintenance certificates from 17 countries.

To be sure, China’s Hainan experiment takes inspiration from places like Hong Kong and Singapore. Yet it lacks an independent legal system, convertible currency, and other key institutional features of these more established trade hubs.

“Unlike mature global free ports,” writes Ms. Xu, Hainan “faces the challenges of liberalizing ... while toeing the line of socialist mandates.”

Without systemic reforms in law and finance, Hainan “is unlikely to rival Hong Kong any time soon,” writes Zhang Xiaoyang, a law professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University, in a blog. He describes the Hainan Free Trade Port as “an ambitious experiment in controlled liberalization.”

But indeed, the signs of cultural and economic liberalization are there.

In recent years, Hainan’s entry policies have expanded to allow passport holders from more than 80 countries to visit visa-free. The island’s government also surprised Chinese fans by inviting once-banned U.S. rappers such as Kanye West to hold concerts here.

In another first for China, Hainan in 2023 allowed an overseas university – Germany’s Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences and Arts – to establish and operate a campus independently. Mr. Xi personally backed the plan, says Judith Peltz, vice president for personnel management and finance. “If you want to attract industry, you need to have a university to provide talent,” she says.

For China’s leaders, Hainan offers the opportunity to test more open economic policies while buffering the mainland against foreign influence.

“The more China opens its doors,” Mr. Xi said during a visit to Hainan in November, “the more important it is to balance development and security – and firmly safeguard the bottom line of security.” ■

THE EXPLAINER

What’s for dinner? If it’s beef, it’ll cost you.

If you have served roast beef for dinner lately, you no doubt experienced sticker shock at the grocery store. The same goes for steaks and hamburgers as beef prices hit record highs recently in the United States, rattling President Donald Trump, who has vowed to bring prices down.

The average price for ground beef hit \$6.30 a pound in September, up from \$5.50 at the start of 2025 – an increase of almost 15%. As recently as May 2023, ground beef retailed for less than \$5 per pound. Steak prices have risen even more sharply in recent months. Higher beef prices are squeezing margins at restaurant chains that have been reluctant to raise prices.

Mr. Trump signed an executive order on Dec. 6 to examine anti-competitive behavior in food supply chains, including beef production. The Justice Department also began an antitrust investigation into meatpacking companies.

Polling shows that voters upset about the cost of beef and other everyday items have soured on Mr. Trump’s economic management, even as he claims that he has “crushed” inflation that spiked under President Joe Biden. “They caused the high prices, and we’re

bringing them down,” he said in a speech in Pennsylvania on Dec. 9, referring to Democrats. A report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed inflation at 2.7% for November, above the Federal Reserve’s target of 2%.

Some ranchers are complaining about Mr. Trump’s trade policies, including his agreement to quadruple beef imports from Argentina and his on-off tariffs on Brazilian beef. The rollback of specific tariffs has been aimed at bringing down consumer prices. (The Brazilian tariff relief includes coffee, the price of which was up 41% in September compared with the previous year.) But most of the 28 billion pounds of beef consumed annually in the U.S., especially cuts of steak and roasts, is domestically produced.

Experts say the price of beef depends less on tweaks to the administration’s trade policy and more on lack of competition in the industry, which is a much knottier problem to fix and one that has eluded previous administrations. The upshot is that beef prices are likely to stay high for a while.

Q: Why are beef prices so high?

Simply put, it’s about a lack of supply. The number of cattle being raised for slaughter in the U.S. has fallen to the lowest level since the 1950s. Ranchers cut their herds during and after the pandemic amid prolonged droughts in states such as Texas and higher feedstock costs. The total herd of beef cattle was 28.7 million in July, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Beef producers can’t respond to higher prices as quickly as consumers may wish since it takes around two years for a newborn calf to reach maturity. “I expect prices are going to remain high until we start producing more cows,” says James MacDonald, a research professor at the University of Maryland’s College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. “It takes a long time to rebuild herds.”

The suspension of Mexican cattle imports in May after an outbreak of screwworm has further restricted supply. Reopening the border to Mexican cattle would boost supply, but would be risky unless the parasite is contained, says Professor MacDonald.

As U.S. beef production drops, the industry has been trying to produce more beef from the cattle it slaughters. “By historic standards, we’re still producing a lot of beef. We’re just doing it with fewer cows,” Glynn Tonsor, a professor of agricultural economics at Kansas State University, told NPR.

Demand for beef has largely held up, despite higher prices. Per capita consumption is forecast at 58.5 pounds for 2025, according to the USDA, down slightly from 2024.

Q: What is the Trump administration doing about the issue?

Mr. Trump has asked his senior advisers to find more policy levers he can pull to bring down beef prices, The Wall Street Journal reported. He has consulted with trade organizations, governors of farm states, and the meat industry. His executive order directs the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission to examine competition in U.S. food supply chains.

Ranchers, consumer groups, and farm-state lawmakers have complained for years about anticompetitive practices in beef processing. Four processors dominate the industry: Tyson Foods, Cargill, and two Brazil-based companies: JBS and Marfrig Global Foods. Together, they slaughter around 85% of grain-fattened cattle in the U.S.

In November, Mr. Trump alleged on social media, without providing details, that foreign-owned meatpackers were colluding to manipulate U.S. beef prices. During his first administration, the

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Eye-popping prices for steaks and burgers are mostly a supply problem, exacerbated by lack of competition in the meatpacking industry. The upshot is that beef is likely to remain expensive for a while.

Justice Department opened an investigation into the beef industry that continued into the Biden administration. That probe recently ended, but a new one has begun into potential anticompetitive behavior, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Responding to Mr. Trump's social media post, an industry group said in a statement that beef packers have been operating at a loss for the past year due to tight cattle supply. "U.S. beef processors welcome a fact-based discussion about beef affordability and how best to meet the needs of American consumers, who are the industry's most important stakeholders," Meat Institute President and CEO Julie Anna Potts said.

Q: Do meatpackers have a monopoly?

Meatpackers say larger economies of scale allow them to produce more animal protein cheaply and that lower consumer prices stimulate demand. Critics say consolidation hurts ranchers by reducing the number of buyers for their cattle, resulting in lower prices.

Before the pandemic, meatpackers had begun to increase their profits based on what they paid for cattle and wholesale beef prices. This spread "doubled or tripled after 2016," says Professor MacDonald, a former senior researcher at the USDA.

In December 2021, the Biden administration reported that the four largest meatpackers – of beef, chicken, and pork – had seen a 120% rise in gross profits since the pandemic began. (The companies disputed the finding.) President Biden then announced a \$1 billion plan to increase competition in the sector by supporting independent meatpackers with grants and loans.

This program has led to a "significant expansion" in beef-processing capacity at a time when herds of cattle are smaller, says Professor MacDonald. But the concentration of market power discourages cattle ranchers from investing because they worry about the price they'll receive at the slaughterhouse, says Austin Frerick, an advocate for food-industry reform and author of "Barons: Money, Power, and the Corruption of America's Food Industry." Coupled with persistent drought that has degraded pastures as well as rising feed prices, it's another reason for ranchers to hold back.

"We're not seeing normal herd expansion because farmers don't think [cattle] prices will be there, and that goes back to market dominance" among meatpackers, he says.

Q: What impact have tariffs had?

Relatively little. In July, Mr. Trump's imposition of additional 40% tariffs on Brazilian imports led to a rally in U.S. cattle futures. His decision to reverse that policy in November has, in turn, sparked anger among farm groups. Similarly, his plan to raise the quota for Argentine beef imports faced pushback from U.S. cattle ranchers.

But Argentina's higher quota would amount to only 0.6% of U.S. beef consumption. Similarly, imports from Brazil represent a fraction of what the U.S. imports from Canada and Mexico, which is why the screwworm outbreak has been more consequential for U.S. beef prices.

– **Simon Montlake** / Staff writer

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

THREE RIVERS, MICH.

Rural homelessness is on the rise. Volunteers are rallying to meet the moment.

By Scott Baldauf / Staff writer

Two years ago, Casey Tobias started to notice a phenomenon at the Sunoco station where she worked. Customers were struggling. At the end of the month, they were paying for gasoline with pocket change, the last money they had. The COVID-19 pandemic was receding, and hundreds of people were losing jobs in the local RV manufacturing industry.

Ms. Tobias started cooking big meals to bring to work. If she saw a customer who looked hungry, she would send them to her truck, where the food sat in carryout boxes. In time, Ms. Tobias left her job to found a nonprofit organization, Homeless Outreach Practiced Everyday (HOPE). Recently, HOPE took over an abandoned thrift store called the County Closet, where Ms. Tobias and a team of volunteers distribute donated clothing and other items to the most vulnerable people in Three Rivers.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

As tent encampments grow in rural areas, small-town volunteers are responding the best way they know how: with food, coats, and encouragement.

Ms. Tobias says she understands the stress that many homeless people feel. Last October, her doctor told her that she had a serious illness and needed treatment right away. She had just \$3,000 in savings.

"This is what people are facing all across the nation," Ms. Tobias says. "They are just one disaster away from losing everything. One disaster."

Across the heartland, rural homelessness has been growing sharply over the past five years – the product of failed businesses, stagnant wages, rising inflation, and shrinking housing supply. Many homeless people in rural areas couch surf at the homes of friends or family members, who themselves might be struggling to make ends meet. But as tent encampments grow in rural areas, small-town volunteers are responding the best way they know how: with food, coats, and encouragement.

"What we see in rural communities is deep family ties and friends and faith organizations, and they have no choice but to uphold their duty to take care of each other," says Mary Kenion, the chief equity officer of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, an advocacy group in Washington.

In theory, federal and state governments have created networks of service providers called "continuum of care" to meet the needs of rural people who live in places where affordable housing or skills-training programs don't exist. But Ms. Kenion says these programs are "grossly underfunded" after years of disinvestment.

"Rural communities have a strong capacity and will to do more with less," Ms. Kenion says. "People in rural communities deserve the same resources that we see in urban communities, but instead, they end up having to deal with the leftovers and to make that stretch."

At last count, 126,288 people were experiencing homelessness in rural areas of America, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2024 Point-in-Time Count data.

Rural homelessness increased by 12% between 2023 and 2024, the result of rising food and housing costs and stagnant wages, says Jonathan Harwitz, director of policy at the Housing Assistance Council, which studies rural homelessness.

WASHINGTON

Trump has shaken up everything. With what effect?

By Linda Feldmann / Staff writer

“Move fast and break things” – the Silicon Valley mantra – aptly describes the whirlwind start to President Donald Trump’s second term.

The president hit the ground running last January, issuing a flurry of executive orders, including pardons for most Jan. 6 defendants and the launch of the Department of Government Efficiency, Elon Musk’s effort to slash the federal government.

One year on, Mr. Musk is long gone, as is DOGE. And the impact of President Trump’s ambitious and aggressive efforts to reshape policy – indeed, America itself – is coming into focus. He has pushed the envelope on presidential power, issuing more executive orders in his first year back than in his entire first term. He has bypassed Congress and challenged the courts, invaded Venezuela and arrested its leader, exacted retribution on his perceived enemies, and transformed the White House itself with golden decor and a big planned ballroom.

Mr. Trump’s second term makes the first term look like a dress rehearsal. It’s almost as if he spent his first four years in office figuring out how much power he had, and came back determined to use every bit of it.

Fifty years from now, will historians be calling Mr. Trump a “transformational president”? Or will this period ultimately seem like a lot of tumult that added up

to little long-term change? Likely both. Every president leaves some sort of stamp on the office and the country. As always, the challenge is to separate the signal from the noise.

Mr. Trump has made plenty of promises (or threats) that have gone nowhere – from claiming he could end Russia’s war on Ukraine within 24 hours to saying he would turn the Gaza Strip into a luxury tourist destination.

But in many ways, Mr. Trump has already changed the United States profoundly, including its role in the world, in ways that may have lasting impact. America’s image in Europe as a steady ally has been torpedoed, as made clear in the president’s new National Security Strategy, which lauds Europe’s “patriotic” – i.e., nationalistic – parties. Mr. Trump’s new tariff regime has upended global trade, while his crackdown on illegal immigration cut off the flow of migrants at the border.

He’s also shrunk and reshaped parts of the U.S. government, including eliminating “diversity, equity, and inclusion” as a priority. The departments and agencies that Mr. Trump gutted, such as the Education Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, will be hard to reconstitute, even if a future president wants to do so. In all this, and perhaps most important, he has reset the bar for using executive power.

“Previous presidents have been criticized for using executive orders and trying to act unilaterally, but he’s taken it to a different level,” says Matthew Dickinson, a presidential scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont. “It’s going to be hard to put that genie back in the bottle.”

In a year of upheaval, one notable aspect of Trump 2.0 has been the loyalty and stability of his team. Unlike Year 1 of his first term,

COVID-era relief packages that provided stipends and rental assistance were a big help, Mr. Harwitz says. But when those relief packages expired, small towns and volunteer networks had to pool whatever resources they had to help those in need.

From homeless to helping out

In Three Rivers, Tiffany Sweitzer says she had been living on the streets for several months, sometimes sleeping in the back of cars, but more often under the open sky. With winter fast approaching, Ms. Sweitzer needed warmer clothes – and a place to stay.

She found her way to the County Closet, and Ms. Tobias pointed her toward some brand-new coats, recent arrivals from a clothing drive.

“She could tell I was struggling, and it was getting worse,” Ms. Sweitzer says in a phone interview. “It was a blessing in a time of need. I was wanting to change my life around. She inspired me to do better with my life.”

From that first encounter that started with a warm jacket, Ms. Sweitzer says she has now become a HOPE volunteer herself, to help friends who are still out on the streets. She recently started volunteering at the County Closet. HOPE, in turn, sponsored Ms. Sweitzer’s stay at a rehabilitation center for 90 days, where she hoped to learn how to control her addictions.

“Local workers who have lived experiences of homelessness can be incredibly helpful, because they know or can identify who else is also vulnerable,” says Hsun-Ta Hsu, an associate professor of social work, data science, and society at the University of North Carolina. “Besides providing emergency services such as food, volunteers can also connect the most vulnerable with other services, such as health, and transportation, and shelter.”

In some places, however, the influx of newly arrived people can be so great that simply providing food can exhaust a community’s capacity to respond.

In Kalamazoo, about a 35-minute drive north of Three Rivers, volunteers from Kalamazoo Together for the Unhoused gather supplies for the growing number of homeless people coming into the city for relief.

By day, team members collect donations of season-appropriate clothing, wool blankets, drinks, and food. At night, Judy Lowery and a few volunteers – some of whom are homeless themselves – drive to local encampments in Kalamazoo and to surrounding rural areas. On an average night, the group feeds 80 people.

The strain on small communities

In Battle Creek, about 25 miles east of Kalamazoo, the small network of service providers and shelters for homeless people that had grown over the years was rapidly overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the new arrivals now come from rural areas, says Kathy Antaya, a volunteer coordinator for the SHARE Center, a nonprofit that cares for vulnerable seniors, veterans, families, and individuals experiencing homelessness.

“We have seen a huge influx in people from other communities,” says Ms. Antaya, who has volunteered at the center for seven years. “We heard a rumor that a soup kitchen shut down in a town outside of Battle Creek. That afternoon, a bus pulled up, and a bunch of people with backpacks showed up. They told us they were put on a bus and told, ‘Here’s a place that can feed you. Good luck.’”

Ms. Antaya says organizations such as the SHARE Center are doing what they can to meet the need – but they’re struggling.

“I think we just don’t realize how many unhoused people we have in our rural communities,” she says. “When people in a small community fall on hard times, that puts stress on the small community and its ability to support the unhoused.” ■

when the president rapidly cycled through top aides in key spots – including his chief of staff, press secretary, and chief political strategist – this year has seen little staff turnover. “Let Trump be Trump” appears to be the guiding philosophy of Term 2.

Looking ahead, Mr. Trump’s power might get a real check after the fall midterm elections, if Democrats retake the House of Representatives. Signs of “lame duckery” are already appearing, as some Republicans start pushing back on his policies and approach. Still, he has a year to go with the current Congress – and that’s a lifetime in Trump time. ■

The economy saw modest growth, despite tariffs that stirred predictions of a recession.

By Simon Montlake / Staff writer

President Trump won reelection on a promise to bring economic growth back to its prepandemic highs from his first term. The centerpiece of his plan was to levy higher tariffs on imported goods, thereby cutting the trade deficit, boosting U.S. manufacturing, and collecting higher revenues.

In April, Mr. Trump sent the stock market into a temporary nosedive when he announced sweeping tariffs on nearly all countries, particularly penalizing nations that ran trade surpluses with the U.S. Before these “Liberation Day” tariffs, which were almost immediately paused to allow for negotiations, the administration had raised levies on China, as well as on Mexico and Canada, which are among America’s largest trading partners. Subsequent deals have led to lower tariff rates for many countries, while importers have successfully sought exemptions. Still, the effective tariff rate on imported goods now averages 11.2%, up from 2.5%, according to the Tax Foundation.

Inflation beats dire predictions

Economists say uncertainty over tariffs has been a drag on the economy, with annual growth projected to come in near 2% for the 2025 calendar year. But, so far, predictions that Mr. Trump’s tariffs would drive up inflation and send the economy into recession have not been borne out. Prices of imported goods have risen, but inflation, while above the Federal Reserve’s target level, hasn’t spiked. Still, the full impact may just be delayed: Many companies built up pretariff inventories, and gyrating tariff rates make it tricky for retailers to set prices.

At the same time, there’s no sign of a manufacturing renaissance – indeed, manufacturing employment has fallen, not risen, under Mr. Trump. Some companies have announced plans to build or expand U.S. factories, but construction can take years and in some cases might never happen.

What is certain is that tariffs are raising more revenue: The U.S. collected \$195 billion in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, more than double the previous year. Based on current tariff rates, revenue could hit \$247 billion in 2026, while the trade deficit has narrowed to a five-year low. But if imports fall further, because of either high prices or the reshoring of manufacturing, that would result in lower tariff revenue. The Supreme Court could also upend things with a ruling on the legality of Mr. Trump’s tariffs.

The stock market has been strong overall, and home prices also remain high – buoying homeowners, but keeping other Americans

out of the housing market. Only 21% of homebuyers in 2025 were first-time buyers, a record low in tracking that goes back to 1981. Expect to hear more about affordability in the coming year. ■

Universities faced a federal funding freeze over alleged antisemitism and DEI policies. Some cut deals; Harvard sued.

By Simon Montlake / Staff writer

President Trump waged a sustained campaign last year against America’s top universities, ostensibly over how they handled incidents of antisemitism during campus protests over Israel’s war in Gaza. In response, some universities acknowledged shortcomings on antisemitism and promised steps to foster ideological diversity. Others have balked at Mr. Trump’s demands as a violation of their autonomy. Harvard, one of his biggest targets, has fought back in court.

Mr. Trump’s efforts began last January with an executive order on combating antisemitism that singled out colleges and universities. Later, he moved to freeze federal research grants to several universities accused of violating antidiscrimination laws, sending a message to higher education as a whole. Conservatives argue that many colleges have become bastions of left-wing indoctrination and are failing to properly educate the next generation.

Pressing colleges to cut deals

The administration has demanded a dismantling of diversity programs on campuses and stricter enforcement of merit-based admissions. By freezing billions of dollars in grants to Harvard, Columbia, Brown, and other research universities, Mr. Trump found an effective way to pressure private universities into changing how they operate.

Another pressure point is foreign students. The Trump administration threatened to stop issuing student visas for Harvard, which enrolls large numbers of students from abroad. New international student enrollment has fallen by 17% in the current academic year, amid uncertainty over visa issuance, according to the Institute of International Education.

In July, Columbia paid more than \$200 million to settle an anti-discrimination investigation and restart research funding. Brown, Cornell, Northwestern, and the University of Pennsylvania have also signed agreements accepting varying conditions; all have insisted that academic freedom hasn’t been compromised.

Harvard has pushed back on Mr. Trump’s demands. It successfully argued in federal court that the administration’s cuts to its research funding were unconstitutional. That case is now under appeal, while Harvard faces investigations on other fronts and demands to turn over more admissions data.

Colleges also face higher taxes on endowments because of Mr. Trump’s One Big Beautiful Bill from July. What had been a flat 1.4% excise tax on private colleges and universities over a certain size will become a tiered system with a top tax rate of 8%. That is aimed squarely at elite universities. ■

A foreign policy about-face has rebuffed longtime allies and put new focus on the Western Hemisphere.

By Howard LaFranchi / Staff writer

Last year, the world got its first real taste of what President Trump's "America First" foreign policy would entail.

The new coins of the realm are transactionalism, tariffs, big-power politics that include bullying of allies like Canada and Israel, and – perhaps most significant – a spheres-of-influence vision of the world reminiscent of the 19th century.

A view of the Western Hemisphere as America's exclusive zone of interest was starkly on display with a Caribbean power buildup that culminated in a Jan. 3 military operation in Venezuela that seized President Nicolás Maduro to face drug trafficking charges in the U.S.

Out, or at least downplayed in Mr. Trump's foreign policy playbook, are the military and economic alliances and U.S.-led international institutions born from the ashes of World War II. The idea that America enhances its own prosperity and security by building and leading communities of democratic nations has been supplanted by the view that America is strong and prosperous when it puts America first.

In his first term, Mr. Trump's foreign policy was hindered by a lack of preparation for implementing a radically different vision of American global leadership.

But the architects of the Trump 2.0 foreign policy, including deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller, had a four-year interregnum to prepare for this term's muscular, nationalist, America-centric approach. The arrival of this approach is seen in the evolution of Secretary of State Marco Rubio, as the former Trump critic has adapted his promotion of democracies and human rights to the America First vision.

2025 brought a deepening estrangement from European allies and more collegial relations with strongman leaders, from Russia's Vladimir Putin to Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman.

Mr. Trump has bombed Iran's nuclear facilities, sought to use tariffs as leverage in America's rivalry with China, and spurred negotiations to end the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine. But the road toward peace in those regions remains uncertain.

The most striking application of Mr. Trump's foreign policy came in the Western Hemisphere, where his Monroe Doctrine 2.0 includes justifying the use of force in the region to secure U.S. interests.

In the first weeks of his return, Mr. Trump threatened to retake the Panama Canal, spoke of acquiring Greenland, and belittled Canada as the 51st state.

Then came the military strikes in the Caribbean on suspected drug-smuggling boats and what the administration described as a blockade to stop sanctioned oil tankers from exporting Venezuelan oil.

They put pressure on Mr. Maduro, whom Mr. Trump had already labeled a narco-terrorist. But the blockade and ultimately Mr. Maduro's capture were also seen to be directed at China, which has extensive economic and political ties across Latin America.

To Beijing, the message is this: In this new age of spheres of influence, the Western Hemisphere is America's domain. ■

Blasting the left for weaponizing justice, Trump has responded in kind.

By Henry Gass / Staff writer

The first year of this second Trump administration has challenged long-standing norms in the criminal justice system. Having criticized the justice system as unfairly targeting him, Mr. Trump appears to be trying to use the system in a similar fashion.

He has pushed for prosecutions of his political adversaries and issued pardons for allies. He has personally criticized lower court judges who ruled against his administration, while one of his top aides has railed against "judicial tyranny." Presidents have traditionally refrained from direct criticism like this out of respect for the judiciary's independence and to uphold public confidence in the courts. Amid Mr. Trump's attacks, violent threats against federal judges rose.

In September, Mr. Trump called for two adversaries – former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James – to be prosecuted. Indictments quickly followed – against Mr. Comey on charges of lying to Congress, and against Ms. James on charges of mortgage fraud. Both deny charges, and both cases have since been dismissed on procedural grounds. Susie Wiles, Mr. Trump's chief of staff, told Vanity Fair that the James case "might be the one [example of] retribution." She added, "I don't think he wakes up thinking about retribution. But when there's an opportunity, he will go for it."

Meanwhile, Mr. Trump has used the presidential pardon power to reward his supporters and potential allies. On his first day in office, he issued pardons to more than 1,500 people convicted or charged for their participation in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, including hundreds charged with violent felonies. ■

On immigration, Trump has kept pledges, but stirred controversy and disapproval.

By Sarah Matusek / Staff writer

In Year 1, President Trump oversaw an avalanche of anti-immigrant policies – while creating exceptions for some immigrants who are white or rich. From borderlands to urban centers, his administration targeted illegal immigration and lawful pathways alike. He condemned many migrants, generally, as criminals. He called some, specifically, "garbage."

Invoking a rare wartime law – and disputed gang ties – the Department of Homeland Security sent more than 100 Venezuelans to a notorious Salvadoran prison in March. A federal judge has asked the administration to address due process violations, while the government dismisses former detainees' claims of abuse.

The president kept campaign promises as he sought to "seal" the southern border. Border Patrol apprehensions, a proxy for illegal crossings, sank to their lowest level since 1970. A surge of armed forces to the border included the creation of new military zones. In the interior, controversial waves of immigrant arrests – many targeting people without criminal records – at times ensnared U.S. citizens. Even as the administration withholds certain data, it reports deporting over 600,000 people. Mr. Trump also limited legal immi-

gration, including of refugees, while prioritizing Afrikaners from South Africa. As foreigners from 39 countries face entry bans, Mr. Trump is offering “gold card” residency for \$1 million per person.

Heading into Year 2, polling suggests the public has soured on his immigration agenda. What to watch: whether the Supreme Court lets the president end the constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship. ■

On race and gender, a White House reversal of liberal policies spans from government contracts to school sports.

By Story Hinckley / Staff writer

President Trump has taken a number of steps in office aimed at defeating “woke” ideology – including dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs that he said illegally discriminated against white people.

On his first day in office, Mr. Trump signed an executive order instructing government agencies and departments to terminate all DEI offices and positions, “equity action” plans, and DEI performance requirements.

A direct answer to Biden actions

This order was a direct response to the first executive order President Joe Biden signed after his own inauguration, instructing agency heads to assess the equity of agency policies and actions. Another Trump executive order rescinded affirmative action requirements for federal contractors. U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi issued a memo instructing the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division to investigate illegal DEI mandates in the private sector and in educational institutions that receive federal funds.

Shifts at U.S. corporations

In response, major U.S. companies from Walmart to Meta scrapped diversity goals and training programs. And hundreds of colleges and universities have ended programs that promoted DEI on campus or focused on LGBTQ+ or minority students.

Mr. Trump moved to undo protections for transgender people, making it federal policy to only recognize two genders and rescinding federal funds from schools that allow biological males to compete in women’s sports. After Mr. Trump revoked Mr. Biden’s executive order that allowed transgender troops to serve openly in the military, the Department of Defense issued a ban on transgender service members, which the Supreme Court has upheld. His Department of Health and Human Services in December proposed a sweeping set of new rules that would dramatically restrict access to gender-transition treatments for minors.

Mr. Trump has also tried to shift American culture in a more conservative direction. He has instructed the Smithsonian museums to root out what he calls anti-American propaganda in their exhibits. He took over the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, appointing a new board that tapped him as its chair, eliminating “woke” programming, and adding his name to the building’s exterior. ■

DOGE caused turmoil but didn’t save nearly as much taxpayer money as promised.

By Story Hinckley / Staff writer

Remaking the federal bureaucracy began on President Trump’s first day in office, when he created the Department of Government Efficiency.

Under the leadership of Mr. Trump’s billionaire benefactor Elon Musk, DOGE became synonymous with the president’s effort to dislodge what he calls the “deep state” and slash a “bloated” federal government. Mr. Musk set a goal of cutting \$2 trillion from the country’s \$7 trillion budget. By its own accounting, DOGE – which disbanded eight months ahead of schedule – only achieved about 10% of its cost-cutting goal; media investigations and conservative think tanks suggest the true savings were roughly half that, at best.

Still, cuts were widespread across the government: The U.S. Agency for International Development was shuttered entirely, and the Education Department saw its workforce cut by almost 50%. The departments of Defense, Treasury, and Agriculture each lost at least 20,000 employees. DOGE’s total impact on government staffing remains unclear, however – in part because of rehires, court-mandated or otherwise.

The Office of Personnel Management says it achieved Mr. Trump’s goal of four reductions for every new hire, with 317,000 employees leaving the federal government in 2025 and 68,000 new ones joining. But Rachel Augustine Potter, a politics professor at the University of Virginia who has looked closely at available data, puts the total workforce reduction at less than 6%, going from 2.27 million workers to 2.14 million. Either estimate is modest compared with President Bill Clinton’s federal workforce cut of about 17% in the 1990s.

Laid-off federal workers have described last year as traumatic, while some who are still employed say the turmoil has undermined their ability to do their jobs. Many workers with private sector opportunities took buyouts, leading to a draining of strong employees. That, along with the administration’s undermining of federal workers, may damage future recruitment.

Mr. Trump also signed executive orders to allow for more politically appointed positions – a “sharp departure,” Dr. Potter says, from “the meritocratic foundations of the U.S. bureaucracy.” If courts uphold these changes, she writes, it could make it difficult for America to return to a less politicized, expertise-based civil service. ■

America's (new) populist moment

Trump's populism is not the first to challenge the U.S. status quo.

In many ways, America has been here before. At the opening of the 20th century, a Nebraska lawyer named William Jennings Bryan drew crowds totaling millions as he traveled around the country, railing against East Coast elites.

It was the tail end of the Gilded Age, a time when the country's prosperity was booming but the lived experience of workers diverged dramatically from the bankers and railroad barons whose lifestyles grew ever more opulent. Bryan broke all the sedate norms of political campaigns, inventing the whistle-stop tour to speak directly to the public, not the press, and with the emotional force of a religious revival.

This was the previous peak of American populism. And it launched decades of lasting change.

Bryan earned the Democratic presidential nomination three times, never winning the office. But his agenda thrived. He promoted many once-extreme ideas that eventually became law, including the progressive income tax and the election of U.S. senators directly by voters rather than having state legislators choose them. Many of his radical demands became the mainstream reforms of the progressive movement in the early 20th century.

Populism is a battle cry that has once again risen to a high pitch in America. And President Donald Trump is the undisputed master of the modern populist style, with perfect pitch for the grievances that are driving it.

Populism is a recurring template that casts corrupt, greedy elites against wholesome, hardworking common people. It usually involves a strong personal leader. It is always polarized and polarizing. Us against them. Populist stances are framed as a crusade of good versus evil, not as a practical negotiation of win-win policy outcomes. It's a zero-sum game; when someone wins, someone else loses.

At its most effective, populism can shake a nation awake to concerns that elites often thought were settled or didn't even perceive as problems, such as a sense of being left behind by the economy or feeling like a backward stranger in your own culture.

At its most risky, populism can unravel institutions – from the rule of law to international alliances – that can take generations to rebuild.

This is the populist path of President Andrew Jackson, who fired thousands of federal employees and handed out their jobs to allies and supporters. “To the victor go the spoils,” were the words by which Jackson governed. It took more than 50 years before lawmakers restored a merit-based system for civil servants. Jackson also closed down the nation's central bank, leading to nearly 80 years of high volatility and frequent financial panics, until Woodrow Wilson created the Federal Reserve in 1913.

During his Christmas address, Mr. Trump sounded what might have been one of the most starkly populist holiday greetings in recent memory. “For the last four years,” he said, “the United States was ruled by politicians who fought only for



BY MARSHALL
INGWERSEN
SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

insiders, illegal aliens, career criminals, corporate lobbyists, prisoners, terrorists, and above all, foreign nations, which took advantage of us at levels never seen before.

“Now, you have a president who fights for the law-abiding, hardworking people of our country – the ones who make this nation run.”

Unlikely times for populism?

On the surface, these seem like unlikely times for populism to flourish in America.

The country remains at the pinnacle of global wealth and power. The past decade has had the lowest average joblessness – even with the pandemic spike – of any decade over the past 50 years. Inflation has been at or below a modest 3% for nearly two years. The median wage has been rising faster than the overall cost of living. And the net worth of the average millennial, even after adjusting for inflation, is higher than that of their parents or grandparents at the same age.

Not exactly the stuff revolutions are made of.

Even as millions of jobs were created over the past decade, the total number of jobs that don't require a college degree has dropped by 1.2 million. Non-college-educated young people are seeing their opportunities narrow.

They also see the rising population of “tech-bros” and hedge-fund billionaires. For 90% of Americans, income equality has held its own since the early 2000s. The poorest in particular have made stronger gains than other income groups. But in that time, the top 0.1% has doubled its already stratospheric share of national income. The very, very rich are pulling even further away from the field.

Rising housing costs don't much affect the millions of families who already own a house and have a low mortgage rate. But over the past two decades, the price of the median house in America has risen more than 50% and average mortgage rates by even more. Many well-paid young people don't see how they can ever climb those barriers to homeownership.

A recent National Association of Realtors survey put the average age of a first-time homebuyer at 40. Ten years ago, it was 31. That's in part a sign of young people delaying getting married and starting a family. But it might also be a reason for the delay.

Many young people feel that life is not quite working out the way it did for their baby boomer or Generation X parents.

In the heyday of American optimism, President John F. Kennedy is often credited with delivering the famous phrase that captured the all-in-it-together worldview of egalitarian growth: “A rising tide lifts all boats.” That worldview has since lost ground. A recent study of more than 20,000 Americans found it being increasingly displaced by a zero-sum mindset of limited good.

This assumption, or fear, that gains for one group come at the expense of others is more dominant among young adults than for older generations and is stronger among Democrats than Republicans. It tends to be a low-trust perspective. And social trust, especially trust in institutions, has been falling since the 1960s. These outlooks are tied further to a sense of grievance or unfairness.

The latest global report from the Edelman Trust Barometer finds that a sense of grievance now shapes the worldview of 6 in 10 people across 26 countries.

“Those with a high sense of grievance are more likely to hold a zero-sum mindset towards people with different politics, with 53% saying others' gains come at their expense compared to only 23% of those with low grievance.”

The grievances, no doubt, are varied, but many Americans feel left out of the nation's general prosperity.

Left behind

At the extreme of disconnection from society, a Financial Times analysis of U.S. census data found that nearly 1 in 10 young adults between the ages of 20 and 24 are not in a job, not seeking work, not in school, and not raising a child. That number is 50% higher than 25 years ago.

The feeling of being left behind is even stronger among rural white Americans. Arlie Russell Hochschild, a sociologist, spent five years in the early 2000s talking to working-class, white tea party supporters in rural Louisiana for her book “Strangers in Their Own Land.” She described people who felt like they were waiting in a long, slow-moving line to get to the American dream, but the liberal elites who control the line keep letting so-called marginalized groups cut in ahead of them. They feel cheated.

Left-wing populism is also finding traction, especially among younger Americans. The victory of democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani in the New York City mayoral election points to this. What it might continue to sound like: “Every billionaire is a policy failure,” a slogan coined by an aide to Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, implying that such concentrated wealth could and should be spread to others.

But populism is being driven by more than economics.

American culture has moved considerably left in recent decades. Whether one dismisses Mr. Trump’s MAGA movement as a foggy nostalgia for an America before the Beatles or sees an invigorating return to Western civilization’s first principles, many want a course correction.

Few Americans want to roll back the major benchmarks of inclusivity. Support for interracial marriage, for instance, is virtually universal among Americans, at 94% to 96%. In 1958, it was 4%. Women are now well over 50% of the graduates of law and medical schools, 10 times the share in 1960. Strong majorities support the outcome of more women becoming doctors and lawyers.

But there is an argument that the progressive march overshot the national consensus. And it rolled on largely outside of the political process – driven instead by court decisions, executive orders, or policymakers in public and private institutions.

The rights that feel most “settled” in the minds of Americans are those that went through the grueling political process of legislation. Rights established primarily through the courts (such as abortion or, to a lesser extent, affirmative action) are often viewed by opponents as undemocratic, handed down by elites.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, for instance, was hard-fought legislation. It outlawed racial segregation and discrimination, and, eventually, Americans widely came to accept its ideals of equality. But majorities have never supported racial preferences or other race-conscious remedies for past discrimination, much less the “algebra is white supremacy” level of racial doctrine. Whatever their merits, few of these went through a process that involved voting.

The long march of women’s rights involved a rich mix of legislative battles – including Title IX establishing gender equity in education – and court victories. Same-sex marriage was established largely in court but affirmed in 2022 by national legislation. It enjoys strong majority support today. On the other hand, hot-button transgender issues such as trans women playing on women’s sports teams or medically transitioning minors have not been subject to political process and have drawn major pushback.

Vast majorities of Americans also hold positive views of immigrants and their contribution to society. Equally high majorities say immigration was too high and too uncontrolled before Mr. Trump took office. Legislative action regarding immigration has been stymied for the past 35 years, leaving policy to executive orders.

Populism as a corrective

In surfacing these issues, populism can be something of a corrective to liberal democracy. Cas Mudde, a leading expert on populism and a political scientist at the University of Georgia, calls populism “an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism.”

In other words, when judges, experts, or other elites decide issues from the courts or the bureaucracy, that is essentially undemocratic – even in a representative democracy such as America’s, where voters at times face the frustration that simple majorities can’t dictate outcomes.

The populist response is emotion-driven pushback that is often illiberal – unconcerned or even antagonistic to checks and balances, the rule of law, or the rights of minorities. As Dr. Mudde explains, “Populists don’t have political opponents; they have enemies.”

By tapping into these grievances, Mr. Trump is breaking the norms of political behavior. It’s his defining signature as a public figure.

Historically, though, his violations are neither the first nor the worst.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first president to violate the “sacred tradition” of the two-term limit, winning election four times. He also attempted to expand the Supreme Court by as many as six seats to create majority support for his programs.

Jackson blatantly ignored a major Supreme Court decision, leading to the “Trail of Tears” as Native American tribes were ousted from the southeastern U.S.

Richard Nixon secretly used the IRS to harass people on his “enemies list.”

President Trump’s norm-breaking might be as thrilling a counterattack on the “deep state” and undemocratic liberalism for some as it is terrifying to those who fear for the very structure of American democracy under unchecked presidential power.

Mr. Trump’s populist style seems to be intuitive rather than studied or acquired. But it also could have come directly from the populist playbook of Saul Alinsky, a 1960s left-wing community organizer who dubbed himself “the Machiavelli of the poor.” He wrote “Rules for Radicals” on how to crack loose the grip of the wealthy and powerful by violating the polite norms of civility and order.

Mr. Alinsky’s Rule 5: “Ridicule is man’s most potent weapon. There is no defense.”

Rule 13: “Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.”

When economic growth was slipping last year, Mr. Trump laid blame on the Federal Reserve by targeting board Chairman Jerome Powell (a Trump appointee), calling him a “numbskull,” “a Trump Hater,” and “Mr. Too Late.”

As affordability concerns continue to rise, Mr. Trump has kept Mr. Powell front and center. “When the Fed makes a mistake that costs people their homes, they shouldn’t be able to hide behind a title. We need a Chairman who listens to the people, not just the spreadsheets,” the president wrote in a December social media post.

But Mr. Alinsky also had a Rule 12: “The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative.”

Populism is about the battle. Governing is about delivering growth and progress – that people feel includes them. It’s hard, slow work that must ultimately bring people together. And it’s happening all the time.

■ *Marshall Ingwersen was editor of the Monitor from 2014 to 2017.*

1.4 MILLION

The decrease in the number of immigrants living in the United States between January 2025 and June 2025, the first decline in the foreign-born population since the 1960s. Deportations and restrictions on asylum applications contributed to the drop.

57

Percentage of U.S. adults who reported using generative artificial intelligence for personal purposes. Roughly 1 in 5 employ AI in work settings, with greater usage among adults with higher education.

10.5

Percentage of American light vehicle sales that were electric in the third quarter of 2025 – a record high. Analysts wonder if the end of federal subsidies will change the trend.

225

Number of executive orders President Donald Trump signed in 2025. That's more than any president in a single year since 1942, during the wartime and post-Depression presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

216

Items of legislation passed as of Jan. 5 by the current Congress. Even allowing for this being just halfway into a two-year term, that's far below typical pace. (The first two years of the Biden and first Trump administrations each saw more than 1,000.)

– Compiled by staff

Sources: Pew Research Center; Brookings Institution; CarEdge; Federal Register; GovTrack

PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

An alternative path for Trump's revolution

The president's assertion of full authority over the executive branch may find better models in the states.

Over the course of the first year of his second term in the White House, Donald Trump's attempts to assert presidential authority over the whole executive branch might well be his defining legacy. If his actions prevail, they would bring a massive reshaping of America's democratic republic.

He has fired officials from agencies or government positions long presumed to be independent in decision-making. And because Mr. Trump's actions have brought lawsuits, a conservative-leaning

Supreme Court seems poised to rule soon that the separation of powers between the three branches of government does allow such a "unitary" – or powerful – president.

Election mandate?

To many Americans who voted for him, Mr. Trump is making good on his electoral legitimacy to fulfill campaign promises. He is altering the policies of an administrative state that has grown unwieldy by removing "unaccountable" government workers deemed to be opposed to the chief executive's vision. A few previous presidents, from Andrew Jackson to Franklin D. Roosevelt to Richard Nixon, have assumed similar authority.

Such a maximal use of the presidency is seen by Trump backers as a type of accountability to democracy's ultimate sovereignty: the will of the people as expressed through elections. The Constitution states the United States president is solely charged to "take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed."

"A feeble Executive implies a feeble execution of the government," wrote Alexander Hamilton.

Checks on civil servants

To the opponents of a unitary executive, however, both Congress and the courts have historically put necessary checks on a president's ability to fire career civil servants or meddle in regulatory agencies set up by Congress to tap professional expertise in solving today's complex, long-term problems.

Agencies also have some internal accountability. The law often requires that they provide reasoned justifications for their decisions and solicit public input – and not necessarily from a president who may be self-serving or acts by whim.

State reforms that improve service

There is also a third way, one that is now being practiced in some state governments that have leaned toward allowing stronger governors to shape agency behavior while improving the lines of accountability.

According to a report last year by the conservative-leaning Manhattan Institute, about 20 states have made reforms since the 1990s that have decentralized hiring capabilities and the resolution of grievances to agency managers, allowed variation in pay-based performance, and made many or almost all civil servants to be employed at will.

"Most observers and researchers agree that state reforms' effects have been either positive or, at worst, neutral," says the report, *Radical Civil Service Reform Is Not Radical*. "There have been general reports of improved performance with little evidence of politicization."

In Indiana, for example, reforms led to fewer complaints by state employees and "[a]gency performance [was] up in almost every category, including customer service and teamwork."

Fear as hindrance to better government

Rather than being punished or removed, civil servants in any government can be given incentives to change and allowed to face mistakes honestly and learn from failures. Through deliberation and consensus, elected leaders can help career officials through regeneration, not retribution. Fear can be a hindrance to the listening and learning needed to align government into harmonious action. At its best, political accountability can often rely on the use of humility and patience, rather than assertions of moral superiority or automatic punishment.

"Gubernatorial administration emerges as a promising vehicle for efficacious governing and a new source of state resilience," wrote Miriam Seifter, a law professor at the University of Wisconsin, in a 2017 *Harvard Law Review* article.

States have long been laboratories for new ideas in governance.

Yet, “despite the decades of evidence, states’ reforms have had remarkably little impact on the conversation about the federal civil service,” said the Manhattan Institute report. “The federal government can and should learn from them.” ■

THE MONITOR’S VIEW

An opening for Venezuelans’ intrinsic sovereignty

The American capture of Venezuelan strongman Nicolás Maduro as an alleged fugitive from U.S. justice has opened a vigorous, global debate about its legality. Is unilateral intervention justified to protect what a foreign power defines as its core security interests or when a failing authoritarian state commits atrocities at home?

Yet for millions of Venezuelans – experiencing both joy and some uncertainty after the autocrat’s exit – the question is less about international law than about their quest for the very basis of law: the freedom of sovereign individuals to choose their government and maintain a shared civic identity.

“The time has come for popular sovereignty and national sovereignty to prevail,” Venezuelan opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate María Corina Machado declared in a message after the Maduro capture.

“In a free republic the only sovereign is the people,” she pointed out in a “Freedom Manifesto” published in November.

“Freedom is not a privilege that is bestowed by a government; rather, it is an inherent right,” the manifesto stated. “No regime, political system, or tyranny has the power to rob us of what is divinely ours: the right to live with dignity, speak freely, create, dream, and prosper as individuals.”

As Ms. Machado’s ally, Edmundo González Urrutia – whom the United States and Europe recognized as the rightful winner of the country’s 2024 presidential vote – noted last month, “The sovereign mandate of the Venezuelan people in favor of a profound change has already been issued.”

Acknowledging the intrinsic dignity and sovereignty of individuals can help both Venezuela and the U.S. better navigate the political uncertainties ahead. Many of the estimated 8 million Venezuelans who have fled the country are hopeful – but still hesitant about returning. It is unclear if Mr. Maduro’s deputies and his military officials, who disregarded Mr. González’s victory at the polls, will cede power.

And President Donald Trump’s intention for the U.S. to “run the country” has sown confusion – and concern. Writing in *The Free Press*, former Trump envoy Elliott Abrams questioned whether the U.S. will help Venezuelans recover freedom “or try to ‘run’ Venezuela with the ... discredited regime.”

In rebuilding its economy, reuniting families, and respecting self-government, the country that produced Latin America’s first republican constitution in 1811 faces challenges. As its famed independence leader Simón Bolívar reportedly said, it can be “harder to maintain the balance of liberty than to endure the weight of tyranny.”

“Freedom requires moral, spiritual, and physical strength,” Ms. Machado acknowledged in a speech broadcast at a forum in Barcelona, Spain, last October. “And we have it,” she affirmed. ■

READERS WRITE

Courageous reporting

I am touched beyond belief by the resilience of the human spirit after reading Ghada Abdulfattah’s courageous on-the-ground reporting from Gaza, in the Dec. 8 Monitor Weekly report, “In Gaza, a music teacher sings above the din of war.” Even with the noise of drones hovering above, music teacher Ahmed Abu Amsha tells students to keep their voices steady. In doing so, they connect with their eternal nature, however they may name or define it.

A long time ago, I spent a high school year in Israel, not far from the Gaza border. I knew little of the restricted lives those on the other side were subject to. Meanwhile, I met Palestinians working in Israel who lived in Gaza. It breaks my heart to think of what might have happened to them, or to their children. I am saddened by the binary nature of our politics, which presses people to think they can only stand with one side.

I am heartened by the indomitable spirit of Mr. Abu Amsha, and hope, with him and his students, that this terrible war will truly end.

ROBERTA WERDINGER
San Rafael, California

GLOBAL NEWSSTAND

THE GUARDIAN / LAGOS, NIGERIA

US intervention signals cooperation

“The [Dec. 25] military airstrike by the United States on terrorists in Nigeria is a positive step,” states an editorial. “... The attack is an initial culmination of the launching of a Joint Working Group between the country and the United States, which provides a potential for effectively tackling the terrorism scourge. ... For the first time in years, Nigeria has a structured, institutionalised mechanism to coordinate with a global power on security threats. In a region where crises spill across borders with ease, structured cooperation is not optional – it is essential. ... Still, the [working group] is not a silver bullet. ... Without reforms in Nigeria’s security architecture, no volume of foreign support will deliver lasting peace.”

THE GUARDIAN / LONDON

Foster a love of reading in the new year

“Reading to children from a young age leads to greater happiness, educational success, empathy and social mobility,” states an editorial. “... Reading, like storytelling itself, is a gift handed from generation to generation. ... This is where initiatives like the National Year of Reading 2026 – which will distribute 72,000 new books to children with the greatest need for them – come in. ... Any initiative to foster new readers is a cause for celebration. But warm words must be backed up with action and funding. ... Every primary school [should have] a library. This should be a given, along with trained librarians, less overstretched teachers, improved provision for children with special educational needs and support for new parents and babies. ... We owe it to children to give them this.”

Syria is on the road to recovery

"It has been [more than 13 months] since ... the stunning and swift fall of former president Bashar Al Assad," states an editorial. "... Rebuilding a flattened nation is a ... long-term project. ... But even as the challenges are vast, so is the potential of the country. ... In as little as a year, there have been several silver linings. ... Financial investment from the Gulf, the US and Europe is entering the country, and sanctions may soon be a hurdle of the past. ... Worthy attempts are being made to plug the country back into the global economic and financial system. ... The interim government [must press] ahead with rehabilitating the country. ... Even Rome was not built in a day."

NIKKEI ASIA / TOKYO

Nepal's youth protests stir hopes of economic renewal

"Nepal announced in September it would hold elections on March 5, 2026, following a week of [youth-led protest]," writes Brabim Karki, a businessman. "... This protest was ... a call for democratic renewal and reinvention. ... Reforms [could] trigger a tech boom. ... [The young people] didn't just demand accountability, they articulated visions of a 'Digital Nepal.' Protests morphed into policy forums, where students debated AI ethics and blockchain for transparent governance. ... Imagine a post-2026 government, buoyed by Gen Z-backed candidates from parties enacting policies to digitalize education, expanding coding bootcamps and partnering with Japanese firms for scholarships. ... In this electoral crucible, Gen Z's fire could forge a resilient economy."

CALGARY HERALD / CALGARY, ALBERTA

Calgary's strength is in its diversity

"More than one-third of [Calgary] residents are foreign-born, from over 240 ethnic backgrounds," writes Malinda Smith, a political scientist. "... Alberta's history shows that the [democratic, social, and economic returns] from this ... diversity is not automatic. It has been built through uneven struggles for rights and recognition, led by ordinary people who exemplified the power of inclusion. ... Chinese and Japanese settlers endured head taxes, internment and immigration bans, yet built businesses and neighbourhood institutions. ... Black Albertans confronted segregation directly. ... Women's rights advanced through similar persistence. ... When communities can participate fully, ... social trust deepens, polarization eases, and economies grow."

– Compiled by staff

Celestial light on trash night

When the world's worries weigh down this city girl, she steps out and looks up.

I wouldn't have gone outside if it hadn't been garbage night. It was dark, and it was cold. I was feeling cranky about the cold. I could have thrown on a jacket, but sometimes it's easier and more satisfying to grumble. I was also feeling grouchy about the state of the world, which is not at all following the script I wrote for it.

And I was feeling grumpy about the garbage. I always think I should have no garbage. I've failed my standards if I fill the can. Most of it is plastic. It's hard to avoid. Sometimes, you just want to buy shelf-stable gnocchi in the little plastic bag, and some days it doesn't seem like there's much one person can do (or can do without) to really make a difference.

I thumped my little plastic garbage sack into the little plastic garbage can and resolved to go back inside where it was warm. Fossil fuels contribute to my comfort, but I try not to think about that.

It's exhausting to be of my political bent. I can't quit caring, but I could use an intervention. Because if you let yourself, you can feel like you have let down the universe if you're not constantly outraged.

I huffed a sour cloud into the chilly air, hunched against the cold, and started to grump my way back into the house, when something made me look up. A message. A bright bolt. A giant celestial "Hey, there!"

Venus! She *will* have her way with us.

I'm a city girl. But I've seen it before, the stars strewn across the sky like spilled treasure, crazy and loud with light. And if some of them seem to be winking at us, well? Maybe they are. *Relax, sweet pea, they say. You're never alone. Don't be afraid to be meek. We've got you.*

We don't see a lot of stars here. There's too much artificial light, and in the summertime too much haze, and in the winter, too many clouds. But the cold, clear air I was hunching against holds much less moisture, and starlight has an easier time punching through. I was riveted and immobilized, suddenly tuned in to the unfathomable beyond. I'm no astronomer, but I knew I had some serious planets here. Four: Venus. Mars, for sure. How could it actually still gleam red from 250 million miles away? And Jupiter. And another player the internet later told me was Saturn.

They were powerful, crisp, assertive. And there were actual stars, too, Orion's being the most prominent. We all know Orion, with his belt, his shield, and his sword. We amateurs appreciate the Hunter for being so recognizable, but it's just a matter of point of view, as everything is. If we were somewhere else (say, Mars), the very same stars would not resolve into a hunter. Some other demigod, maybe. They would be Orion the Space Wombat, or whatever they have on Mars.

Perspective changes everything.

I miss stars. But here in the city, I can walk to almost anything I need, and what I can't walk to I can bicycle to. The city is a good way for a lot of people to live together efficiently – it's a trade-off, and I'm fine with it. I do know all the stars I can see are in our own galaxy, and only our nearest neighbors at that. I know our galaxy is rather small as these things go. I know the universe is unimaginably vast.

But what has me rooted here, looking up from my little gar-

bage can at the curb, is a transfusion of beauty into a faltering spirit. I am so very grateful to be reminded of how small I am. I'll fight the good fight tomorrow. I'll still monitor my garbage as though I'm an accountant, but no pocket protector can mute my thumping heart. I'm not going inside just yet. I'm plenty warm now.

– Murr Brewster

PAUSE FOR POETRY

WINTER ALCHEMY

*Stone-cold, dawn seeps silent
into being revealing a shrouded
world; dead leaves litter forest
floors.*

*Even the birds are mute, clinging,
stiff as sticks to frozen wires.*

From where is our help to come?

*Lift your eyes to see sun touch
the tiptop of trees, twigs dipped
in amber, not the thin light of noon,
but thick, sweet, succulent, flowing
like honey in slow descent, turning
everything it touches, branch, trunk,
even the shriveled leaf, into gold.*

– Sarah Rossiter

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

The force that moves us to good

Once received news that my parked car had been hit by a large vehicle. It was a hit-and-run. But a man who witnessed the incident ran after the driver on foot. He caught up with them at a stop sign and said they needed to turn around. When the driver took off, all hope seemed lost – but in what seemed like a miracle, the driver turned back around to later meet me in the parking lot and assess the damage.

A police report was filed, insurance cards were exchanged, and the deep dent in my car was eventually fixed some weeks later. But I couldn't get over the fact that a stranger had *run after the driver!*

"If that was my car, I would have wanted someone to do the same for me," he explained. I don't know this individual's religious background, but I certainly appreciated that he went to such lengths to practice the Golden Rule to treat others the way we'd like to be treated, which is one of the rules for living that Jesus preached. I was in awe and truly touched that someone would go out of their way like that.

And even the person who had made the mistake – the fact that this driver had ultimately turned around to make it right seemed amazing to me. I thanked them both in the end for helping me work out the details of the situation.

It seemed clear that something had impelled them both to do the right thing, that the grace and goodwill each had expressed was a result of their listening to something innate to them.

Christian Science refers to that force that moves us to good as "Christ." The Bible talks about Christ as bringing "on earth

peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14) – giving grace to humanity. The discoverer of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, writes, "Christ is the true idea voicing good, the divine message from God to men speaking to the human consciousness" ("Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," p. 332).

Why would following Christ be innate to someone? The Bible talks about man – a term that includes all of us – coming from God, who is good. If we come from good, then all that comes with that goodness – goodwill, love, peace, etc. – makes us what we really are as God's spiritual offspring. Christ communicates this truth to us. We are inherently able to hear these inspired messages of good because God is right here with us, just as Jesus said.

God has made us spiritually, and God-given spiritual gifts, or qualities, are native to us. Because God is Love and we are children of that Love, qualities like grace and goodwill are part of us. So what may seem like a miracle is actually divinely natural. As Science and Health puts it, "The miracle of grace is no miracle to Love" (p. 494).

Christ is a powerful force, inspiring us to do the will of God, good, through selfless acts of grace – including righting wrongs. The more we listen to that "true idea voicing good," the more grace we find.

– Tessa Parmenter

ARTS AND CULTURE

SAN DIEGO

Finding paths to lead in the Latino Christian church: 'We're still pioneering'

By Sophie Hills / Staff writer

"Women are God's 'Plan B,' the backup in case men don't take the lead." That's the teaching Selene Gutierrez grew up with in the Latino Christian churches of her childhood. When she was 18 years old, Ms. Gutierrez ministered in a men's prison – something she had been told was a man's job. "I thought, 'OK, when men go, I'll stop going,'" she says.

Two decades later, now a pastor, she sees her ongoing contributions as of equal importance to the church as those of her male colleagues. "All along, [working in the prison] was my training," she says. "That was my boot camp for me in ministry, and that has ... allowed me to have a ministry where I can relate to men at any level and be respected."

As an ordained minister, she has held leadership roles in nondenominational Christian churches – though it's often a tough path, and she's surrounded by few other female leaders to help show the way.

When it comes to gender parity in the Latino church, the tide seems to be turning the most among the youngest generations, she says. Many won't put up with inequality and will leave instead. "Our church cultures are responsible right now for what the future culture will look like, because if we just find ourselves as churches encouraging [only] men, then we're just going to be in that same

WHY WE WROTE THIS

While traditional male hierarchies persist in some Latino Christian churches in the United States, more women are emerging into leadership roles. In this installment of our occasional series on women of faith, a pastor explains how she remains grounded in her love of God and in the community.

cycle again,” Pastor Gutierrez says.

Role of women in Latino churches

Many Christian denominations have long grappled with diverging views over the roles of women in ministry. And while women are leaving other denominations at higher rates than in the past, that’s not the case for Latino evangelical churches, many of which have roots in the Pentecostal tradition that emphasizes divine healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues.

But Latino churches still face many of the same questions about the roles of women. The Monitor has been speaking with women of various backgrounds to understand more about their spiritual beliefs and decisions, and what about their religion’s teachings keeps them coming back.

Women in Latino churches face “paradoxical domesticity,” says Gastón Espinosa, a religion professor at Claremont McKenna College. “They’re called to be strong women ... but they’re also called to be good wives.”

“There are a lot of glass ceilings,” he adds, although women can be ordained. For example, the International Assemblies of God Fellowship, a collection of churches with Pentecostal roots – through which Pastor Gutierrez was ordained – has elevated women to ministry since at least 1916, he says. Women usually serve as pastors when they’re the wife of the lead male pastor.

Navigating the changes takes a lot of wisdom from women, Pastor Gutierrez says. “Too vocal” is one way a senior male pastor described various women in a previous church.

While Pastor Gutierrez has held formal church roles in the past, at the moment she views herself as a community pastor, working in and out of her church. “I’m a leader in my church, and I’m a leader in the community,” she says. “Whether it’s doing a food bank station or whether I’m called ... to go to the [immigration] court and be present as a minister, I’ll do that,” she says.

From her immigrant roots

Pastor Gutierrez is an immigrant herself, and her faith has been her guide through years of separation from family members. She immigrated to California from Mexico with her family when she was a child, but in 2009, they were deported and she remained.

Alone, she stayed in the country without authorization until 2012, when she turned herself in to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. She was able to remain under an immigration policy from the Obama administration known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA.

“You really feel like a citizen,” she says. “You just don’t know anything else. You just don’t know any different. I don’t remember much of Mexico.” Still, she missed her mother and sister and struggled with whether to follow them to Mexico. “I’m not going to be like those families that do not see their moms for 20 years,” she recalls thinking. “I said, in one year, if God doesn’t do anything, I’m leaving [the U.S.]”

Her pastor encouraged her to pray, and a few days later, while she was sitting in her car, a Bible verse from the Book of Matthew popped into her head: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.”

She heard a message that she felt was from God, saying, “It’s not your will, but it’s what I’m asking of you; to stay.”

She parked the car and cried, overwhelmed by the thought of remaining away from her mother and sister. But she decided to put her faith in that message, and remembers saying to God, “If I stay, you’re going to take care of me.”

And she has stayed in the United States since, although it hasn’t been easy. “But I’ve found that He’s been faithful,” she says, adding that her mom lives back in the U.S. now. Her sister was not able to get permanent residency and now lives in the Czech Republic with her husband and children.

Challenges to her faith

It has been challenging, at times, for Pastor Gutierrez to remain in church. There have been moments when, so discouraged by dismissiveness toward women, she has either withdrawn to attend church online for a short time or moved to a different church. But the organizational issues don’t shake her faith in a higher power, she says.

“One of the things that has kept me in the faith has been my own personal experience and relationship with God, just knowing that whatever culture has been represented from the church, it’s not who Jesus is,” says Pastor Gutierrez. “It’s not what He intended to be. And that is soothing, and that brings hope and peace.”

“Many Latino churches, organizations, and traditions see women as the foundation of their ministry efforts, managing prayer groups, discipleship, hospitality,” and more, says Gretchen Ávila-Torres, a professor of theology, in an email to the Monitor.

“There’s an ongoing conversation about how to elevate this informal leadership into formal, visible roles where women can preach, teach, and lead at various levels,” says Dr. Ávila-Torres, who also co-directs the Hispanic Ministries Program at Western Theological Seminary.

Pastor Gutierrez hasn’t left the faith, or the church. “But have I been frustrated? Yes,” she says.

That’s similar to what Dr. Espinosa from Claremont McKenna College has seen throughout his field research. Religious affiliation may be declining overall in America, but he doesn’t see the same trend among Latinos. When women leave the church, he says, it’s usually a particular church, not leaving the faith or God. And many find a new church.

“Usually, the losses are replenished by people converting to the [Pentecostal] movement,” he says.

Giving women space to lead

Women held leadership roles in the early church centuries ago, Dr. Ávila-Torres points out. But today, partially because culture plays a role in defining organizational structures, women are often still denied a role.

“Many Latino churches mirror family and social hierarchies where leadership has traditionally been male, and these patterns often persist in church life without conscious challenge,” she writes in her email. “Over time, cultural norms can become as authoritative as doctrine, even though Scripture itself offers a broader perspective.”

When the culture within a church doesn’t allow space for women, or when male leaders aren’t “confident enough to give women space,” it can feel like running up against a wall, Pastor Gutierrez says.

“Those moments have been very frustrating, and I have been just kind of like, ‘I just need to leave,’” she says. But, in those moments, she turns to prayer and looks to mentors, and a path forward emerges – whether at that church or a new one.

She mentions Christine Caine, who founded Propel Women, a Christian organization that provides women with leadership training. Together with her husband, a pastor, she establishes churches in Europe and leads a campaign against human trafficking. Examples like Ms. Caine, who is the face of her own ministry and whose husband supports her in that, are encouraging to Pastor Gutierrez.

In addition to Ms. Caine, many women Bible scholars and pastors are among the first in their fields, and the number is always growing, says Pastor Gutierrez.

“We’re still pioneering.” ■

A woman takes the helm, saving ship and crew

Over two months, Mary Ann Patten guided her husband's clipper through perilous waters.

By Barbara Spindel / Contributor

Before the transatlantic telegraph cable, the transcontinental railroad, and the advent of flight, most of the world's business was conducted by ship – and captaining ships was a man's business. Women rarely traveled on the fast-moving sailing ships, known as clippers, that powered the 19th-century global economy. A clipper captain transporting cargo might agree to carry passengers, and women were occasionally among them. In addition, a captain might be accompanied by his wife.

If a wife were aboard the ship, Tilar J. Mazzeo explains in her gripping new book, *"The Sea Captain's Wife,"* she was allowed only in the staterooms and on the vessel's quarterdeck; she was permitted to speak only to her husband, their steward, the ship's first mate, and any passengers on board. This context helps explain how extraordinary a position 19-year-old Mary Ann Patten was in when, in 1856, her husband, Captain Joshua Patten, fell ill as their ship was headed for Drake's Passage, the perilous body of water between South America and Antarctica. The book tells the story, well-known in its time, of how she took command of the vessel, becoming the first woman to captain a merchant clipper.

Mary Ann had previously accompanied Joshua on the same ship, *Neptune's Car*, on a 15-month circumnavigation of the world. The newlyweds, young and in love, didn't want to be separated. (When they married in 1853, Joshua was 25 and Mary Ann was just 15.) The trip's first leg, from New York to San Francisco, required sailing around the southernmost tip of South America; the Panama Canal, which greatly shortened the route, wouldn't open until 1914. From California they traveled to Hong Kong and Britain before returning to America.

Joshua had worked at sea since he was a teenager. Mary Ann grew up poor in Boston, but, unusual for a girl of her social class, she had learned to read and write and do basic mathematics. On that first circumnavigation, Mazzeo writes, "she passed the long hours looking up calculations in the nautical almanac and scribbling sums in pencil on a bit of paper until she had mastered the art of celestial navigation." When several crew members were injured while repairing a broken mast, Mary Ann, consulting the ship's medical books, nursed them to health. These experiences would serve her well on the calamitous 1856 voyage when Joshua, feverish and delirious, was unable to captain the vessel.

Mazzeo, a historian and an experienced sailor herself, deftly explains the mechanics of the impressive clippers, which commonly measured 200 feet from bow to stern and contained up to 10,000 square feet of canvas sail. The author also effectively conveys the cultural position of the clipper captains, whom she calls "the rock stars and elite athletes of the mid-nineteenth century." Captains were well-compensated for their dangerous work – shipwrecks were not unexceptional – and they received bonuses for speedy arrivals at port. They also participated in lucrative races with other clipper captains, which garnered widespread newspaper coverage and were wagered on by the public.

A few successful circumnavigations could secure a captain's financial future. This was the Pattens' hope – what the author calls "a simple and lovely dream" – as they set out on their second ex-

tended voyage together in 1856. If Joshua earned enough money to retire early, they would build a waterfront farm in his native Maine.

Mazzeo's narrative slowly builds toward an action-packed climax. (One quibble is that it perhaps builds too slowly: We are well into the book's second half by the time we reach the heart of the drama.) Joshua, before becoming incapacitated, has placed the treacherous and mutinous first mate of *Neptune's Car* below deck, in shackles. The second mate is illiterate and thus unable to navigate the ship. On Sept. 5, 1856, Mary Ann, who has discovered during the journey that she is pregnant, asks the crew to accept her as their captain. The men, many of whom are aware of her keen navigational skills and some of whom are veterans of the previous voyage, during which she cared for the injured, cheer and call out "Captain Patten." "The younger seamen later recounted how the old salts among them had tears in their eyes," Mazzeo writes. From there, Mary Ann leads *Neptune's Car* around Cape Horn through an 18-day gale before arriving, two months later, in San Francisco.

Word of Mary Ann's heroics spread in California and then across America and throughout the world. Newspapers breathlessly reported her story. She was the subject of an epic poem, and "Uncle Tom's Cabin" author Harriet Beecher Stowe paid tribute to her in writing. "It is difficult to overstate ... the fame of Mary Ann Patten in the late 1850s and into the 1860s," Mazzeo writes.

That fame couldn't protect Mary Ann from tragedies that continued to befall her upon her return home. But it at least ensured that she would be remembered among mariners. Mazzeo reports that a building at the United States Merchant Marine Academy is named after her and that cadets there still learn about her achievement. Now, thanks to Mazzeo, that reach can be extended to history buffs and, indeed, to anyone who enjoys a good sea story. ■

Is there a downside to 'progress'? That depends on your definition.

A historian argues that ever-increasing expansion has led to looming ecological disaster.

By Terry W. Hartle / Contributor

Human progress is assumed to be a good thing; countless peoples and cultures seek it. But what if the unrelenting pursuit of progress has a massive downside? That is the provocative hypothesis advanced by British historian Samuel Miller McDonald in *"Progress: How One Idea Built Civilization and Now Threatens To Destroy It."*

In an impressive recounting of history, McDonald examines how societies have interpreted the idea of "progress." Time and again, one society's progress involved the conquest of other peoples, lands, and resources.

He traces this pattern back to Mesopotamia around 3,000 B.C.E., when market economies and empires emerged. To maintain and expand their societies, the Mesopotamians organized warfare, subjugated other peoples, engaged in "intense ecological harvesting," and expanded their footprint.

The ever-increasing need to amass more territory is seen as a major factor in the downfall of these societies, he writes.

Consider Rome. Around 500 B.C.E., Romans overthrew the monarchy that had ruled their city-state and established the republic. As the boundaries of the republic expanded, they developed a large army, won battles, and captured slaves. After 500 years, they had

conquered the Italian Peninsula and become an imperial power. Expansion continued, and extensive colonies were established.

Exploitation – mostly in the form of high taxes and slavery – followed conquest. Over time, economic decline, social unrest, political instability, and an inability to defend its borders led to Rome’s fall. To McDonald, it is the overexpansion and the unsustainable exploitation of its colonies that made this outcome inevitable.

The author finds similar patterns when he considers, among others, the Vikings, the Spanish conquest of the Americas, the westward expansion of the United States, fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism-Maoism. Interestingly, McDonald has far less to say about the British Empire.

The idea of “progress” became synonymous with “economic growth” in the last century. This led societies to prioritize economic expansion and the measurement of gross domestic product as their most important social indicators. Within this system, economic growth was seen as an unalloyed positive – and the greater the growth in GDP, the better.

McDonald argues that the pressure to boost GDP has brought us to the brink of an ecological catastrophe that demands immediate and comprehensive action.

The book is both fascinating and frustrating. Fascinating because it provides a rich and broad view of history connected by one basic idea. Frustrating because the author’s political biases come to the fore when he discusses the present day. For example, he suggests that the U.S. intelligence community could be viewed as “a terroristic force.”

Also, the solutions he proposes would strike many observers as too broad and unrealistic: return millions of hectares of land “to the people from whom they were taken” (he’s talking about Native Americans and Indigenous tribes); set aside space for wildlife (including predators) and reintroduce that wildlife to urban, suburban, and rural areas; break up large farms; implement a universal basic income; and accept lower standards of growth.

McDonald does a good job laying out the ways that the pursuit of “progress” has contributed to the dire climate situation facing humankind. But even if we accept his analysis, the solutions remain elusive. ■

IN PICTURES

In Hawaii, it’s the height of delight

Story by Jackie Valley / Staff writer

HONOLULU

As dawn turns to sunrise, hikers arrive at Diamond Head State Monument. There’s a toddler sporting tiny Nike shoes, an older couple gently holding a railing, and even two dogs nestled in carriers worn by their owners. They’re all here to traverse the 0.8-mile trail leading to the summit of what many consider Hawaii’s most recognizable landmark.

Diamond Head is a volcanic tuff cone formed some 300,000 years ago during an eruption. Inside lies a crater that stretches more than half a mile wide. The hike, in fact, begins on the crater floor. From there, visitors follow a gradually inclining – and then steep – path up 560 feet. Some pause sporadically to catch their breath, take in the view, or snap the all-important selfie.

Decades ago, Diamond Head served as a coastal defense system, hence the tunnels, bunkers, and lookout stations carved into the volcanic crater. Today, it’s a National Natural Landmark.

Melissa McElroy and Crystal Croteau, visiting from Florida, are among those who rest partway up the trail as their dogs peek out of identical carriers. It was the first hike of their vacation.

“We don’t get elevation at home,” Ms. McElroy says, acknowledging the challenging trek.

Gentle trade winds offer respite at the peak. Multiple languages drift through the air as triumphant visitors admire the panoramic view of Oahu.

“Can you give me a hug?” a father asks his young daughter. “You made it!” ■

SUDOKU

Sudoku difficulty: ★☆☆☆

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

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.

Crossword and Sudoku solutions

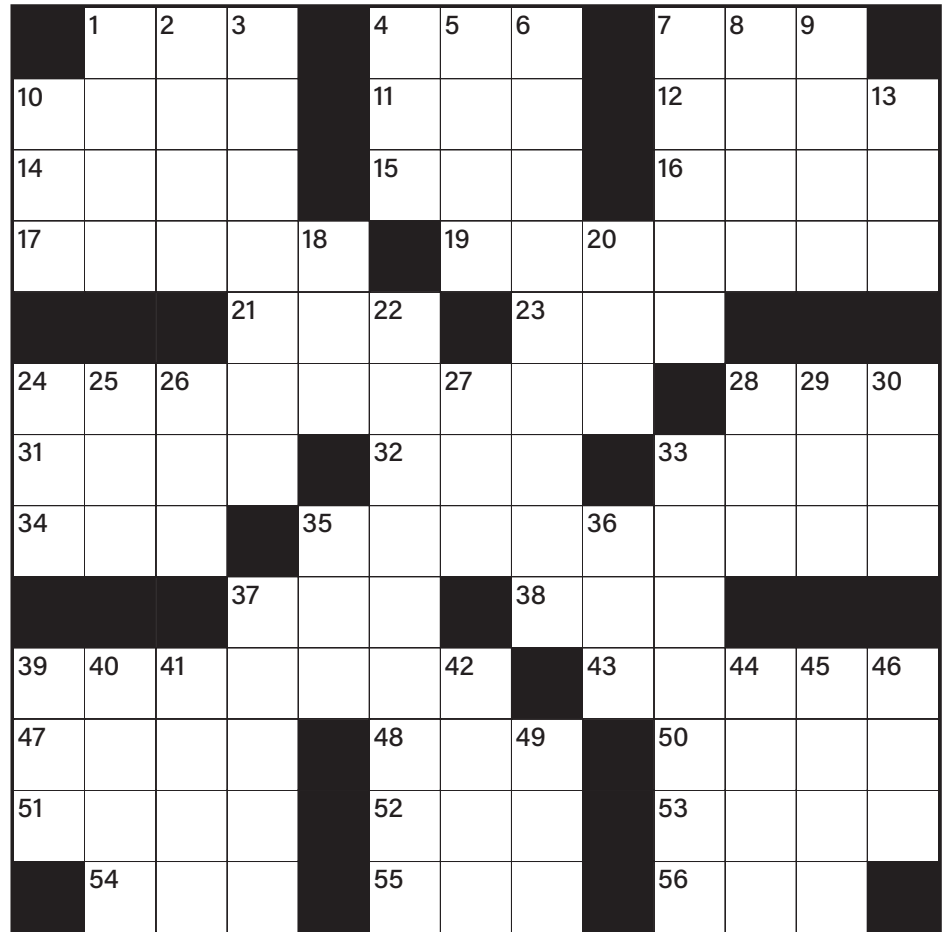
© 2025 The Christian Science Monitor	N	D	T	G	M	T	A	T	
N	E	E		N	E		S	T	W
E	H		S	I	T		O	B	O
M		S	C	R	A	M			W
E	C	N	A	L	P	A	P	E	E
E			W	I	R	E			S
			W	A	G				U
E	E	L	O	R	A	P		S	N
E									S
S									A
									L
W	O	R							C

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

Crossword

Across

1. Container of fresh milk
4. Titian work
7. Coxswain's command
10. Mrs. Alfred Hitchcock
11. Green land?
12. Flower painted by van Gogh
14. Brought an action against
15. Bluto, for one
16. Facial expression
17. Really thrills
19. Recent release?
21. Tupperware item
23. Neither hide ___ hair
24. Old-style theater guide
28. Funny sort
31. Not baring one's sole?
32. Wisconsin's ___ Claire
33. Phone line
34. Scan
35. Range or dishwasher, e.g.
37. "Au revoir!"
38. Behind
39. Cramped quarters
43. Hightail
47. English horn cousin
48. "___ Now Or Never"
50. Main Web page
51. Spritzes
52. Originally known as
53. Creation location
54. Create knotted lace
55. Greenwich time zone, briefly
56. Sofa spud site



© Lovatts Puzzles

Down

1. Red herring, maybe
2. Red sky, to sailors
3. Walked awkwardly
4. Short elevation
5. Haul in
6. Hairy spider
7. Attention to detail
8. Like most testimony
9. Rub dry
10. Balaam had one in the Bible
13. Part of WYSIWYG
18. "To ___, With Love"
20. Type of deer
22. Becoming less shallow
24. Make productive
25. Like many a wallflower
26. Break new ground?
27. Dance like Gene Kelly
28. Team's goal
29. Bow section
30. Capital of Greenland?
33. Observed
35. Yachtsman's "yes"
36. What-___
37. French city twinned with Denver
39. Knock the socks off
40. Help badly?
41. Duty schedule
42. Shut off
44. Went for a spin
45. Sermon punctuator
46. Eliot's "The Hollow ___"
49. Fix firmly