THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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

– MARY BAKER EDDY

WEEK OF JUNE 29, 2026 | VOLUME 118 – ISSUE 32

CONTENTS

A moment to reflect on America's ideals

America is at a pivotal moment. It's not just because the nation is marking 250 years since the Founders signed the Declaration of Independence in a Philadelphia hall.

It's also a moment in which many are deeply concerned about the direction of the country, its ideals, and how to best bring those out today.

Those concerns echo from the rugged mountains of the West to the marble halls of Congress, from the crisp Boundary Waters in Minnesota to the humid Gulf Coast of Texas. Monitor reporters have scribbled down such sentiments as they crisscrossed the country in recent years, covering everything from agriculture to immigration to election security and integrity. Those scribbles have served as a seismograph of sorts, tracing the inflection points and rising intensity of the national conversation.

Yet we often hear, in our travels as well as interviews with historians, that America has faced tough moments before. The Civil War. The Depression. The 1960s, with its social ferment and strife over the Vietnam War. Writer Victoria Hoffmann had such periods in mind as she searched for quotes about American ideals to highlight in this week's edition.

By Christa Case Bryant
Editor

"A good thing to help us move forward is to look back at where we've been and where we can go," says Victoria, who chose quotes ranging from political philosopher Thomas Paine to former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "This is just reminding everybody that we're all here for the same purpose."

As you flip through these pages, you might notice small American flags hidden throughout the magazine. Can you find all 18? Be sure to look for both a flag from America's founding and the flag we fly today. Check The Home Forum to see if you've found them all.

We hope this issue gives you a moment to pause and reflect on America's history and ideals, from letters between John and Abigail Adams to a portrait of rugged self-reliance in Kentucky harking back to 1776 to a tailor's work sewing reenactment costumes. In turn, we'd love to hear your reflections on this semiquincentennial year. ▪

Congress lets part of counterterrorism law lapse

At 12:01 a.m. on June 13, the federal government's authorization to monitor communications of noncitizens outside the country without a warrant – seen by some as a key counterterrorism tool – expired.

Congress did not renew Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) in part because of a standoff with President Donald Trump over filling the role of director of national intelligence. The expiration doesn't necessarily mean U.S. intelligence agencies no longer have that tool, because the provision was court-approved in March for another year.

But the expiration could still impact national security. Telecommunications companies, concerned about getting into legal trouble, might not want to provide information needed for that intelligence-gathering.

Section 702 has been the subject of extensive controversy, mainly because U.S. citizens who are communicating with foreign targets can get caught in that surveillance net.

Often, foreign-intelligence targets' text and phone communications pass through the United States – for example, if the person is using a U.S.-based provider like Google. FISA Section 702 allows the government to compel providers to assist in acquiring that information.

In April, Politico reported some telecommunications companies might choose not to cooperate with the government's surveillance requests after Section 702 expires. Some have privately expressed concerns they could be sued for handing over consumers' data if there's no longer a law on the books compelling them to do so.

It's unclear whether the government, without being able to cite Section 702, would be able to force these companies to obey if they push back.

Senators had been working toward a bipartisan extension of Section 702 until President Trump appointed Bill Pulte, the director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency, to be acting director of national intelligence. Mr. Pulte lacks national security experience and has said he would implement large-scale staff reductions at the president's request.

Democrats then refused to move forward with FISA unless the president backtracked. On June 11, President Trump nominated Jay Clayton, a U.S. attorney in New York, to be the permanent director of national intelligence. However, Democratic leaders are still demanding a guarantee that Mr. Pulte will not serve as interim director while Mr. Clayton's nomination proceeds.

A bipartisan compromise was expected to come with some reforms aimed at tackling privacy concerns, including a provision to narrow the definition of the type of company required to provide records to the government.

Congress could still vote to reestablish the provision. FISA is a big priority for many members, but Congress also faces a range of competing priorities before its August recess. House members are scheduled to be in their districts until June 23.

– Caitlin Babcock / Staff writer

Extreme heat is shifting how Indians think about AC

By the first week of April, Mohammad Asif could no longer sleep.

The ceiling fan in his rented room in Delhi whirred through the night, pushing hot air from one corner of the room to another. Even after midnight, the heat lingered.

"People had warned me about Delhi's summers, but I thought I would manage," he says. "Once the heat set in, it became unbearable."

An air conditioner was not in his budget. But as the heat intensified, he felt he had little choice. He took out a loan and bought an air conditioner for 30,000 rupees (about $314).

"It didn't feel like a luxury purchase," he says. "It felt like a necessity."

Across India, millions of households are reaching the same conclusion. As heat waves become more frequent and intense across South Asia, air conditioners are rapidly shifting from aspirational consumer goods to essential tools for coping with daily life. Yet access remains deeply unequal. While AC ownership is rising, only about 8% to 10% of India's roughly 300 million households currently own an air conditioner, leaving hundreds of millions of people exposed to dangerous heat – or turning to a fast-growing AC rental market.

Temperatures in Delhi and surrounding states have already touched 46 degrees Celsius (114.8 degrees Fahrenheit) this year, according to government data.

Across Delhi, hundreds of rental businesses now offer seasonal air conditioners, typically charging between 7,000 and 15,000 rupees ($73 to $157) for the summer, including installation and servicing.

While cooling Indian homes, the rattling window units rented out in shops across Delhi also release heat into the surrounding environment and place growing pressure on electricity networks. According to the International Energy Agency, India could have more than 1 billion air conditioners in operation by 2050, up from fewer than 50 million in 2020. The agency estimates that every 1 degree Celsius rise in outdoor temperature was associated with roughly a 7-gigawatt increase in India's peak electricity demand in 2024.

"India is caught in a classic, tragic climate paradox," says Harjeet Singh, founding director of Satat Sampada Climate Foundation, who made headlines in January after being detained for his climate activism. "We are largely using fossil fuel-powered energy to cool ourselves from the very warming that burning fossil fuels has caused."

Breaking the cycle will require cleaning up the power grid and rethinking urban design. In the meantime, "we cannot tell a family suffering in 47 degree Celsius [116.6 degrees Fahrenheit] heat that they shouldn't buy an AC because of emissions," he adds.

For the 90% of Indians who work in the informal sector, air conditioning is becoming an essential tool to earn a living.

18-year-old Soubit Kumar, who has been helping support his family since he was 12, no longer views air conditioning as a luxury.

"These days, it feels more important than food," he says.

– Aakash Hassan / Contributor

Flipped script: Syria is calm despite a stormy Middle East

While the rest of the Middle East has been seized by uncertainty over more than three months, due to the fallout from the U.S.-Iran war, Syrians are experiencing a calm hope.

Some are even calling it a "revival."

Water is plentiful, electricity is availablearound the clock. At night, the capital city and surrounding countryside are largely lit up, a far cry from the dark expanse that engulfed greater Damascus a few months ago.

The airport is busy once more. Ride-hailing apps summon Gen Z Syrian drivers at the wheel of brand-new luxury Chinese cars with refreshing air conditioning.

Western goods flood the market. Young people talk of starting businesses and private schools are opening up.

After 15 years of conflict and chaos that made Syria an island of acute turmoil in a regional sea of relative calm, Syrians are now living a Middle East in reverse.

"For the first time, we feel more safe than other countries in the Middle East," says Israa, a government worker from the Damascus countryside.

"But after years of suffering and being patient, it is now our turn in Syria to develop, progress, and step toward a better future," says Dia Dakkak, a shop manager.

Syria faces growing pains, including inflationary pressures, an unequal distribution of opportunity, and the legacy of decades of dictatorship that culminated in civil war. Job creation is sluggish, and large-scale reconstruction has yet to begin. Gulf countries have signed off on billions of dollars of investment, but help from Western governments has yet to arrive.

"The economy may be improving statistically while ordinary citizens experience little immediate improvement in their daily lives," says Yasser al-Mishal, vice dean of the Faculty of Economics at Damascus University, describing it as a "troubling paradox."

Multiple officials and analysts note that Syrians have so far shown patience, but it is unclear how long it will last.

The Syrian government has passed an investment law enacting sweeping incentives for foreign and local investors, strengthened its central bank, and is auditing its financial system to identify and fix compliance gaps.

In the meantime, Syria faces an array of exterior challenges that could limit its potential for growth.

The U.S. Congress has yet to drop Syria's designation in 1979 as a state sponsor of terrorism during the autocratic rule of Hafez al-Assad. These sanctions, combined with a large gray, cash-run economy, are scaring away most Western investors and are leading banks and financial institutions to classify the country as "high risk."

Wild fluctuations in the Syrian lira's exchange rate also prevent many young people from opening small businesses.

At a high-level U.N.-sponsored conference June 1 – the Syrian Private Sector Dialogue – no Western investor or U.S. official attended, to the disappointment of Syrian business and industry leaders.

Still Israa, the government worker, says young Syrians are finally "living a life stolen from us at childhood."

– Taylor Luck / Special correspondent

What Xi and Kim gained from their summit in North Korea

Chinese leader Xi Jinping hailed a "new historical starting point" in China's ties with North Korea during a rare state visit to Pyongyang in June, calling for stronger political and military exchanges between the Asian neighbors.

Mr. Xi's two-day summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is part of a diplomatic charm offensive China is waging to boost influence over its socialist ally. Beijing has watched warily as Pyongyang has drawn closer to Moscow, providing thousands of North Korean troops to fight for Russia in Ukraine in return for Russian technology.

China seeks above all to maintain stability on the Korean Peninsula, and it sees Mr. Putin's strategic pact with Mr. Kim – inked in 2024 – as potentially disruptive, experts say. Russia has accepted North Korea's status as a nuclear weapons power.

For his part, Mr. Kim seeks to bolster his international clout by giving a red-carpet welcome to Mr. Xi, replete with rows of soldiers mounted on white horses. Crowds of people lined streets, waving flowers and flags as Mr. Xi's motorcade arrived at Pyongyang's Kim Il Sung Square. Buildings were draped with huge portraits of both leaders and a red banner proclaiming, "Long live the unbreakable friendship and unity between China and North Korea!"

Mr. Xi's visit to small, isolated North Korea marked a diplomatic coup for Mr. Kim, who stressed it showed the "great importance" of the bilateral ties. North Korea depends on China for most of its imports, including food, fuel, and electronics – a lifeline that has grown more important as other countries have sanctioned Pyongyang over its nuclear weapons program.

Mr. Xi pledged to boost cooperation in agriculture and technology, and called for increasing flights to facilitate exchanges.

– Ann Scott Tyson / Staff writer

India's 'Cockroach' movement voices Gen Z protests

India's Cockroach Janta Party has kicked off a wave of youth protests, tapping into frustrations shared by young people across the country: repeated examination scandals, a shortage of jobs, and a growing sense that politicians are not listening. The movement – which takes its name from a disparaging comment made by the country's top judge in May about young, unemployed Indians – has attracted millions of followers online and is now attempting to translate that popularity into real-life political action.

Indeed, some have wondered whether India is next up in a wave of Generation Z protests that have led to concrete change – and even toppled governments – elsewhere in the world, including in neighboring Nepal and Bangladesh.

The crowds at the CJP's inaugural Delhi demonstration and other early protests were relatively modest, compared with the movement's online following, but they might grow. The movement comes at a moment of growing anxiety among India's young people. Despite the country's rapid economic growth, unemployment among people ages 15 to 29 remains around 15%, roughly three times the national rate. Competition for secure government jobs has become increasingly intense.

Student protests over jobs, recruitment exams, and educational policy have erupted across India in recent years, notes Apoorvanand, an expert in Indian political movements and professor of Hindi at the University of Delhi. (Apoorvanand, like many in India, uses a single name.) What has been missing is a common platform capable of stitching those grievances together. The question is now whether the CJP can unite a generation of Indians that remains deeply fragmented by dynamics of class, caste, and religion. "So far, we have seen an idea emerge," says Apoorvanand. "We have to see whether youth are ready to invest their time and energy."

CJP founder and recent Boston University graduate Abhijeet Dipke says the group's small core team is busy planning future protests and crafting a formal proposal for fixing India's education system.

Last month, authorities canceled the highly competitive national medical entrance examination, taken by more than 2 million students annually, after test questions were allegedly leaked. Scandals such as these have become a potent symbol of broader anxieties about education, fairness, and opportunity in India.

"People are not going to get jobs out of Hindu-Muslim politics," Mr. Dipke says, referring to the communal divisions Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government has been accused of exploiting. "Exams will not be fixed by that. The government's priorities have to change."

– Aakash Hassan / Contributor

US government grapples with AI oversight

The U.S. government is tiptoeing toward national regulation of artificial intelligence, sparking debate about which voices should be a part of that conversation.

As technology companies develop newer and more powerful AI tools, they've done so with little regulation from state governments and even less from the federal government. Competing visions have emerged from the White House, Congress, and AI companies over who will oversee the technology's use and what form that oversight will take.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order June 2 calling for major AI companies to voluntarily submit their cutting-edge models for a 30-day period of government review. It is a notable step for an administration that has taken a hands-off approach to AI, which it says allows the United States to stay competitive with countries like China. In the days following the order, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman built on that with a more detailed blueprint for AI regulation. President Trump also recently said he would like to meet with AI leaders to discuss giving the U.S. government equity stakes in major AI companies.

Congress has also weighed in: Republican Rep. Jay Obernolte of California and Democratic Rep. Lori Trahan of Massachusetts introduced a draft bill June 4 that would establish a high-level framework for AI, including requiring major AI companies to undergo mandatory audits and establishing protections for workers facing job loss.

But these visions have prompted backlash from people who

say they attempt to regulate AI without including the voices of the people who will be most impacted. The congressional draft bill, which was the institution's most ambitious bipartisan attempt yet at creating national AI regulation, was denounced by several Democratic lawmakers. They raised concern about the legislation's proposal to preempt – or supersede – many state-level laws.

The framework for AI regulation that prevails will affect everything from businesses seeking a competitive advantage to students using the technology in school.

"The decisions we make now, whether we choose to do something or choose not to do something, are going to affect the shape of our society for the next 20 to 30 years," says Suresh Venkatasubramanian, director of the Center for Technological Responsibility, Reimagination, and Redesign at Brown University. "So it's really important that we both act, but get it right."

– Caitlin Babcock / Staff writer

British police face accusations of 'two-tier' enforcement

Shocking images from a new police body-camera video have once again plunged Britain into a wrenching debate: Do British police go easier on migrant communities and liberal causes?

Critics on the far right point to examples of what they call a double standard of "two-tier policing." The most incendiary allegation is that police were loath to investigate ethnically South Asian gangs, which sexually abused young white girls from the mid-1990s to the 2010s, for concern of being thought culturally insensitive.

At the core of two-tier policing is the complaint that protests against migration are dealt with more harshly than protests for Palestinians or Black Lives Matter.

These accusations have exploded with the June 2 release of police footage in Southampton. It shows a young white man, Henry Nowak, being handcuffed on suspicion of racist abuse, even though he had been stabbed by his accuser, a British man of South Asian descent. He died within minutes. Another brazen knife attack in Belfast, Northern Ireland, June 8 – and subsequent riots – further charged the atmosphere around the issue.

The data presents an opposite picture. It suggests that minorities and migrant communities are much more likely than white Britons to experience police violence or be subject to search by authorities.

Experts dismiss the idea of two-tier policing. "To most criminologists, it is utter nonsense," says Peter Squires, a criminologist at the University of Brighton. "It's largely a political narrative."

But police in Britain are in a delicate situation. An investigation into the 1993 death of Stephen Lawrence, who was Black, revealed entrenched institutional racism. The more than 30 years since have been defined by comprehensive reform.

Now, the rise of a strong anti-migration movement means many of those new lessons are seen as "woke." This puts policing itself at the center of the political storm.

The real two-tier policing is based on class, not race, says Solat Chaudhry, a former police officer. "If we need to solve this issue, we have to address why white working classes are living like this."

– Mark Sappenfield / Staff writer

NASA's Artemis III crew announced

The next mission in NASA's effort to return humans to the moon by 2030 has a crew. Randy Bresnik will lead the mission; European Space Agency astronaut Luca Parmitano is the mission's pilot; mission specialists Andre Douglas and Frank Rubio round out the crew. With a launch scheduled for 2027, Artemis III aims to test, in low Earth orbit, the Orion spacecraft's ability to dock with lunar landing craft. The crew is experienced, logging more than 700 days in space between them. Mr. Bresnik has been an astronaut since 2004; Mr. Parmitano has completed two spacewalks.

– Henry Gass

Demographics could strain China's colleges

Millions of Chinese students sat for college entrance exams in June, as demographic shifts promise to challenge the country's university system in coming years. China's college-age population is expected to peak at about 91 million in 2034, but then plummet by 30% between 2035 and 2040, according to Caixin Global. Though a college degree is no longer seen as an automatic ticket to a white-collar job in China, universities are already coping with intensifying competition for spots. After 2035, some colleges – particularly vocational ones – could close.

– Ann Scott Tyson

"We are failing our children. Enough is enough."

That's how Marc Miller, Canada's culture minister, introduced a bill in Parliament to create new online safety standards to protect children. "We need basic protection in place," he added. The legislation would ban social media for kids under age 16 unless tech companies can show that their platforms are safe. It would also create regulations around AI applications. If the bill becomes law, Canada would join a growing list of countries that are implementing digital protections for children.

– Matthew Bell

Middle East conflict crimps plastic supply

Japan is running low on plastic gloves, bags, and other food-service supplies to which hygiene-conscious consumers have grown accustomed, The Guardian reports. Conflict in the Middle East has led to shortages of naphtha – a byproduct of crude oil and an essential ingredient for plastic – across East Asia. Some Japanese grocers are wrapping produce in newspaper, and many shops are asking customers to provide their own bags or bento boxes. Japan's annual plastic use exceeds 8 million metric tons, roughly one-third of it in the food sector.

– Lindsey McGinnis

RANDOLPH AND LEXINGTON, MASS.

A tale of two Revolutionary tailors

As celebrations for America's 250th gear up, reenactors seek out artisans with mastery of historic garments.

By Kendra Nordin Beato / Staff writer

It began with a button – and a loophole to the past.

Henry Cooke was a college student searching for his next adventure. In 1975, newly enlisted as a minuteman reenactor, he learned to fire a musket and spent weekends helping to "drive" the occupying British out of Boston during bicentennial commemorations.

These were the early days of the living-history movement in the United States. Enthusiasts devoted their weekends to depicting the people and events that had established the nation.

The bicentennial in 1976, celebrating 200 years of U.S. independence, offered an opportunity to revisit the valor of the nation's military history in the devastating wake of the Vietnam War and anti-war activism. President Gerald Ford kicked off celebrations at Boston's Old North Church on April 18, 1975. At the same time, social history – the study of the lives of ordinary people during extraordinary times – was a burgeoning field. As a result, the bicentennial spawned an army of self-taught reenactors, many too old or too young to have fought in Vietnam, who brought the earliest days of the nation off the pages of history books.

Mr. Cooke, then a budding scholar of social history with an eye for detail and a knack for needlework, embraced the challenge. Alongside a ragtag group of equally passionate friends, he pored over historical documents looking for clues to help them re-create Revolutionary-era clothing as authentically as possible.

Then the commemorative battles ended. What next?

Inspiration came in the form of a replica button, sold in gift shops as a bicentennial souvenir, believed to have been worn by a Massachusetts regiment in 1776. To most, it was a trinket. But to Mr. Cooke, it was the flint that ignited his passion. From the button, he re-created the regiment's coat. From the coat emerged a purpose. And from that purpose, a call to arms. In 1977, the 10th Regiment of Massachusetts marched again.

Now, a half-century later, the unit that emerged from a souvenir button is still going strong. And, as celebrations for America's 250th birthday build momentum across the country, a new generation of tailors and history enthusiasts is discovering the creative challenges of reenacting as a serious pursuit.

"The kind of person who becomes a reenactor, that thrives under this demand for historical accuracy, is [someone] who really loves history," says Chloe Chapin, a designer and scholar of early American men's fashion and author of the newly published book "Suitable: The Sartorial Revolution and the Fashioning of Modern Men." "There's also a hands-on element, too. The goal is not just going into the archive, finding the letter that explains the thing, but also, 'How do I make that thing?'"

A craft of the "highest standards"

Today, Mr. Cooke is a full-time historian and tailor, drawing on skills he learned from his mother, a dressmaker. He is, in every sense, a man of many hats – and shoes, and boxes of buckskin breeches and meticulously crafted American Revolutionary War coats. They fill a small room hung with bicentennial curtains in his 1835 house in Randolph, Massachusetts, waiting for repair or their next deployment.

He has used his talents to preserve, reconstruct, and authenticate historic clothing, such as an old suit found in an attic trunk on Long Island that turned out to be one worn by John Adams.

"We think of these figures as larger than life, as iconic. And yet, in their lifetimes, they were somebody's dad, they were somebody's grandpa," says Mr. Cooke. "They were ordinary human beings who were caught up in extraordinary circumstances."

By his estimates, he works on 50 to 60 pieces a year, mostly men's clothing, and participates in a couple of historic events or talks a month. He also serves as the vice president of the Brigade of the American Revolution, an international living history organization with more than 1,000 members.

"We want to make sure that we are presenting history to the highest standards," says Mr. Cooke.

With every passing year, as historical mysteries are solved, and documents and artifacts emerge from attics and museum archives, those representations become more accurate. The button that started it all? It turns out it was a replica of a souvenir button from the 1876 centennial and not historically accurate.

"For the 250th celebration, we are the benefactors of another 50 years of research," says Mr. Cooke, who likes to reminisce with friends he has known since the bicentennial about their fledgling efforts in outfits that cost $25.

Authenticity is the fuel that drives historical reenactors. For example, members of the Lexington Minute Men, a volunteer reenacting group, must appear historically accurate at a close distance. Their clothing must be cut and hand sewn to fit proper 18th-century styles. If there is any hint of another era than the one being portrayed – period inappropriate eyeglasses, a wristwatch, a cellphone – that person will not be allowed to participate.

Reenactors have a "different goal than someone who comes up with a Halloween costume at the last minute because they want to go to a party," says Dr. Chapin.

Today, a typical historic men's costume, consisting of a coat, vest, breeches, neckwear, and gaiters, can cost a reenactor around $3,000. Thanks to the internet, YouTube, and The History Channel, reenactors, along with the spectators who come to watch, are much more sophisticated and informed.

"When we wanted to learn what uniforms looked like, we had to write letters to people. Now, with a few keystrokes, you can sum up all kinds of information, and pictures, and 3D images that rotate," says Mr. Cooke.

"We have to make it here"

A one-minute march from the Lexington Battle Green, where the opening shots of the American Revolution were fired April 19, 1775, toils a tailor who once outfitted the greatest New England Patriot of all time: Tom Brady.

Provin Pariyar is the owner of Craft Cleaners & Tailor, a longstanding business in Lexington that he and his wife purchased in 2017, where a photo of Mr. Pariyar with the former NFL quarterback hangs behind the counter. At the back of the store, on a large cutting table, gold scissors rest next to a bolt of navy blue wool and a container of pewter buttons. A pair of white breeches is neatly

folded on a bench. Nearby, a row of white wool vests hangs on a rack.

Mr. Pariyar is one of the official tailors for the Lexington Minute Men. Next to the photo of Mr. Brady is a framed certificate stamped with a gold medallion honoring the tailor's work on the redesigned ceremonial dress uniforms for the entire reenacting company.

"It's very, very, very rare within the whole hobby that we allow a modern tailor to make our clothes because it's so different," says Steve Cole, who portrays the captain in the Lexington Minute Men.

Mr. Pariyar never intended to become a historical tailor. He came to the United States in 2004 to pursue a career in fashion after graduating from college in Nepal. He took a job at Newbury Tailoring in Boston, where he dressed Mr. Brady. But after the pandemic, he moved his tailoring business to Lexington.

"In Nepal, usually everything is custom-made," says Mr. Pariyar, who was first taught to make clothing by his mother, also a tailor. Through his work in Boston, he learned how to work on period clothing for theater productions. In Lexington, he met local Lexington Minute Men reenactors who brought in their uniforms for cleaning and alterations during the gamut of annual parades on Patriots' Day, Memorial Day, and Veterans Day.

"They would only wear their costume once a year, and bodies would change and [the uniforms] would need tailoring," says Mr. Pariyar.

Mr. Pariyar says he enjoys history, and the reenactment parades remind him of an annual military parade in Nepal held during the Hindu festival Dashain.

"In Nepal, we never [had] a revolution. We are a self-dependent country," says Mr. Pariyar, who became a U.S. citizen in 2019. When he hears the American national anthem, "it really touches my heart," he says.

He started outfitting the entire company with new uniforms for the 250th celebrations a year ago, replacing aging outfits and borrowed items with pieces made especially for each reenactor.

"When they fit it more, they look smart" and more powerful, he says. "And they feel like that."

As the 250th festivities get underway, the Lexington Minute Men make appearances at a variety of activities – including the ceremonial first pitch at a Red Sox game at Fenway Park – wearing their new 18th-century period clothing made by Mr. Pariyar.

"That makes me really proud," he says.

Each uniform takes three to four days to create. "The jacket takes almost two days, just working nonstop," he says. Using historic techniques to sew on buttons in just the right way can be a slow process. He's already made 28 uniforms, but he's not even close to being done. The 250th has attracted a new generation of young reenactors, and the company has swelled to 81 people, including women. He won't have all the uniforms completed for this year's celebration, but he now feels he is officially part of the fabric of Lexington.

"You can buy modern clothes anywhere," made in countries where labor is cheap, he says. "But this one, this uniform, we have to make it here." ▪

CALIFORNIA, KY.

In frontier Kentucky, American liberty spread its roots

The Declaration of Independence set forth an assertion of freedom that still inspires and challenges Americans in all their diversity.

By Scott Baldauf / Staff writer

Mark and Emily McCafferty aren't exactly the kind of people that bring to mind Daniel Boone. He's a percussionist and music professor at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. She writes a blog called "Accidental Hippies." Her latest post begins, "I hate mattress shopping." Their vibe is far more Northern California than California, Kentucky.

And yet, it is there, on a wooded hilltop in a close-knit community less than 25 miles up the Ohio River from Cincinnati, where they have made their stand. They cleared their own land, built a house from the cedars they felled, scratched out a vegetable garden, and planted some roots. A new shed holds the control systems and batteries that harness an array of solar panels.

"Nothing is more wonderful than the art of being free, but nothing is harder to learn how to use than freedom," wrote traveling French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville after passing through this region nearly 200 years ago – and to glimpse northern Kentucky today is to see that same promise and paradox at work.

"We've got that revolutionary spirit," Emily says. "I feel like there is a continuity, but we don't necessarily recognize it as such. It's just how we are."

One of the first states to enter the Union after the Revolution, Kentucky has a reputation that shaped how many Americans saw their country: sturdy, self-reliant, and resilient. To some extent, this region still lives with the echoes of 1776. Local politicians hark back to the earliest frontiersmen: "They could tame a rugged wilderness, they could prosper where others could not," wrote Kentucky Secretary of State Michael Adams in an annual report on the state's civic health a few years ago.

As in many pockets of America, however, the region's character today is rooted in a deep sense of place. Many here felt politicians nationally had become too invested in polarized debates over culture-war issues such as affirmative action and gender fluidity as opposed to being focused on local concerns. Yet they speak almost reverently about the right to disagree with each other and, like the McCaffertys and others interviewed for this story, their independent-mindedness defies attempts to neatly assign them political labels. Less a contradiction, these attitudes capture a continuity – a linkage between past and present that helps explain the shape of American democracy on its 250th anniversary.

"There's a strain, I think, of individualism going back to Kentucky's earliest history," says Melanie Beals Goan, a historian at the University of Kentucky. Today, "particularly in a region like Northern Kentucky, here you see this political identity is very much one of rural individualism: God, country, family-forward, and seeing their political opponents or opposing political parties as the antithesis and a threat to those values."

Emily sums up the independent spirit she sees in Kentucky with a smile. "You won't tell me what to do. We still care very much about

our neighbors, and it's just a question of whose policy do you think is going to enable you to do that the best."

Ours by choice

Following the Revolution, Kentucky became an early symbol of this American spirit. Even before the war began, settlers such as Daniel Boone had begun exploring what was then known as America's northwest territories, generally an area north of Kentucky, for opportunity.

Waves of migration – primarily German Catholics arriving in the mid-to-late 19th century – and Ronald Reagan's transformation of the Republican Party in the 1980s might have done more to shape the state's current mindset than some 18th- and 19th-century pioneers, says Professor Goan.

When Republicans in this part of Kentucky voted to unseat incumbent Rep. Thomas Massie in the May 19 primary, the meaning in the narrative wasn't wholly clear. A seven-term congressman with a reputation for challenging his own party's president, he appeared to personify his constituents' penchant for going their own way.

Were feisty voters pragmatically replacing a politician who had lost touch with his district? Or were they responding to pressure from President Donald Trump to jettison one of the few House Republicans independent enough to oppose him on key issues?

One thing, however, might have felt very familiar to Tocqueville: The individuals in line to vote, whether for or against Mr. Massie, were confident of their own choice – and of their right to be doing the choosing.

Deanna Kiernan, a campaign volunteer, stood outside the Kenton Public Library in Erlanger on primary day, waving as people went by. "We are not all going to agree about everything, but we have to respect each other's opinions, but also try to get our point across."

What Kentuckians want

The southern bank of the Ohio River connects by bridge to Cincinnati. That economic hub is where the jobs are, so commuters from Covington, Erlanger, Newport, and other northern Kentucky towns inch their way northward in the mornings and southward back home in the afternoons.

Cincinnati is also a big city with big-city problems, including higher crime rates, aging streets, and surging homelessness. Many northern Kentuckians are grateful they live in the quieter suburbs.

Tracy Stanley, a retired employee for the IRS, showed up at the polls wearing a Pink Floyd hat and an American flag T-shirt. She says she never voted before the 2016 election, but with the arrival of then-candidate Donald Trump, "now, I'm all in."

"There's too much going on right now," she says. "I just want to go back to the 70s, when I was growing up."

Shane Noem, the chairman of the Kenton County Republican Party, assesses the election results a few days after the primary at a swanky Covington hotel on the banks of the Ohio River, with lovely views of the Cincinnati skyline.

Northern Kentucky is not like other parts of the state, he says, and its citizens are not so easy to define. Six northern counties that make up part of the 4th Congressional District are a mixture of urban, suburban, and rural, each with its own list of priorities.

"We're traditional Republicans, some moderate, some very conservative," Mr. Noem says. "I have pro-LGBTQ Republicans that vote in Covington, I have suburban voters that are purple and they swing back and forth. And then I've got [conservative] rural voters in the southern part that say, 'Get off my lawn.'"

A sense of responsibility

The city of Dry Ridge, in the rolling agricultural lands of Grant County, is well outside the economic pull of Cincinnati. Here, the closest major attraction is the Ark Encounter, a life-size, timber-constructed replica of Noah's Ark 10 minutes away in Williamstown.

In Beans Cafe & Bakery, a popular destination in Dry Ridge, Christian contemporary music plays on the sound system, and the café's owner, Richard Hayhoe, sponsors monthly gatherings for Christians interested in public policy and local government.

For a time during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Hayhoe attracted national attention during his legal battles with the state over its business restrictions for restaurants such as his.

Mr. Hayhoe defied orders for businesses to close, and he says that Representative Massie posted his support of the café on X and Facebook. Between early November 2020 and Christmas that year, Mr. Hayhoe lost and regained his food license as pandemic restrictions were imposed and lifted. Throughout, customers flocked to the café to show support, and Mr. Hayhoe says their support largely reflected shared values.

Those values are based on what Mr. Hayhoe calls a "biblical worldview."

With that, he says, "comes responsibility of ownership, of looking after yourself, of responsibility towards my staff, towards my vendors, and towards the economy at large," he says. "Maybe [the customers] lived vicariously through what we did to the government, by staying open. People were tired of being told what they could do."

Back on the homestead

In the McCafferty's living room, 16-inch cordwood walls keep out the early morning chill of a cloudy Kentucky hilltop morning. Mark says his family's motives for moving out into the countryside and living off the grid were mainly ecological, reducing their carbon footprint and unnecessary consumerism. Emily says their lives are more modern than one might think.

"We get water from the rain, and it goes into a cistern. But I have an electric pump that brings it up into the house," she says.

The family has an Xbox gaming console that their son, Anthony, uses to play Fortnite with his friends. And Mark – a professor at Mount St. Joseph, a Catholic university in Cincinnati – uses a large Apple computer with big speakers to compose music. "I feel very spoiled by what we do have."

Being independent-minded and having hostility toward government are two different things, of course, and Emily says she avoids politics in her blog about off-grid life, choosing it to be a safe place for all perspectives.

"I'll have everybody from, like, people on the far left who want to start a hippie commune with their friends and be totally off the grid," she says. "And then I've got super right-wing people who are burying their ammo in the yard, and preparing for World War III."

As Mark leaves for his 40-minute commute to work, Emily says she has found a strong sense of community with other families who have adopted a rural lifestyle.

She says she feels blessed to live in her corner of Kentucky. She can give her son all the important amenities and advantages of 21st-century life, while grasping for something that feels two centuries older.

"You know, the settlers who came in the 1800s had that independence mindset," she says. "And we've still got that revolutionary spirit." ▪

ATLANTA

The next 250? A revival of civic virtues may hold the key.

Democracy requires civic engagement – and it can seem to be falling short. But the seeds of renewal are visible, from potluck dinners to youth programs.

By Patrik Jonsson / Staff writer

Like the rapid-fire beats, growling lyrics, and spinning guitar licks that define his band's death metal sound, guitarist George Morris' outlook might be mistaken as angry, even nihilistic.

Consider his band's name: Abandoned in the Abyss.

Though the name is meant to reflect a broader feeling of loss and frustration, the Idaho-based musician isn't feeling particularly hopeless.

Determined to create a social movement, he co-founded a nonprofit called Innerbeast, focused in part on promoting independent music, but also on hosting free cooking and art classes.

Mr. Morris says he was homeless for several years in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Part of his desire to engage now came from those days on the streets when his prospects had nearly evaporated.

"When you're broken and you feel like all hope is going, and some random act of kindness is given upon you, it keeps your heart warm and on fire," says Mr. Morris.

Many citizens see America at her 250th birthday as struggling to express civic ideals amid weakened institutions and tribal politics that elevate differences over commonalities. And the nation's founders foresaw that, whether in good times or bad, the prosperity of the United States would depend on the active virtues of its citizens. "A republic, if you can keep it," Benjamin Franklin told Philadelphians after helping to frame the U.S. Constitution in 1787.

In that light, Innerbeast might be one small part of America's stubborn "civic genius," as Eboo Patel, founder of Interfaith America, calls it. It is also part of a building movement by many Americans to traverse new civic frontiers.

"There is a kind of growing local appetite for countering the divisiveness – that you don't have to agree on everything to cooperate on some things," says Arlie Russell Hochschild, author of "Strangers in Their Own Land" (2016) and "Stolen Pride" (2024).

Today, technology and political upheaval have weakened many of the institutions that provided a sense of civic stability – from labor unions to newspapers, and from churches to the Rotary Club.

But even as institutions have become more fragile, civic participation has grown in some venues, from voting stations in Atlanta to food banks in New Mexico. Nationwide, voting rates are at near-record levels for the modern era – exceeding 65% of the eligible population in 2020 and 63% in 2024. And after years of missing recruiting goals, the past two years have seen the Army and other military branches meet their recruitment quotas.

Living in a "civic desert"

Yet, by some measures, today's civic energy is more inward-looking and subjective, defined partly by a growing sense of loneliness and despair. Dwindling economic prospects in some areas have fueled those emotions. Polls find that Americans feel less connected to their communities than they did a decade or more ago.

"Part of the loss leads to social desertification," says Dr. Hochschild. In places where in-person social connections have faltered, researchers say it becomes more common for people to also disengage from politics, current affairs, volunteering, or even helping their neighbors.

And unlike 50 years ago, many Americans today find it difficult to weave a common national narrative. That's evidenced by struggles in Washington over how best to commemorate the 250th.

"In some ways, we're all living in a civic desert. People respond pretty well to interacting with members of the other party. The problem is they don't do it," says Peter Levine, author of "We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America."

In addition to changes in technology, media, and politics, some experts say it's significant that many school systems have pared back on civics education over time, whether driven by a focus on academic basics or worry about political sensitivities.

"We've seen the removal of the language of citizenship from institutions like schools, and it has created a kind of silence about the civic ferment," says Harry Boyte, head of the Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg University in Minneapolis.

"There's a tragedy when mainstream groups like local school systems abandon the connection with the good things in the American story," he says. "You also see the field of patriotism ceded to hard-liners and conflict entrepreneurs. But there's also now a great hunger where people are sick of nasty and toxic partisan attack politics. They are hungry for a different understanding of American identity."

In the shadow of the Florida Mountains in Luna County, New Mexico, Jan Millis has seen the promise and the tensions firsthand.

The food bank she founded – Project Comunidad – processes and delivers 40,000 pounds of food each month to hundreds of families. Over a dozen people volunteer. And while poor and rural, the area is not a complete civic desert. Yet she says the kind of divides so apparent at the national level play out locally, too.

"There's a lot of judgment right now," says Ms. Millis, whose whole family gets involved by making cooking videos for clients, whom pantry staff refer to as "the neighbors." "You'll hear someone say, 'Oh, did you see the [nice] cars that were in that line?' But I had a person in tears because she had to borrow a car to get their food. It's easy to sit back and critique. It's hard to get out there and show compassion."

The patriotism of participation

Some Americans are also working to invoke a patriotism less weighted with ideology and more with the power of participation.

In that vein, Mr. Patel's organization, Interfaith America, has created America's Potluck, a project promoting community dinners. Since 2021, potluck participation has gone up by 22%, according to the National Civic Life Study. "Potluck" is a word that was part of the American lexicon at the founding.

"It's a way of imagining the nation as a place where people of different ethnicities and races and religions and beliefs bring their best dish ... to a common space," says Mr. Patel, author of "We Need to Build: Field Notes for a Diverse Democracy." "And that common space has to be what you all take responsibility for. It's got to be safe, clean, and have enough forks and plates, which creates the opportunity for creative combinations and enriching conversation."

There's some evidence of such participation persisting or even rising. A Census-AmeriCorps study from 2023 found that 54% of Americans did things such as lending tools to neighbors or helping them run errands, up from 52% in 2019. And most people do talk to their neighbors, even if the frequency has declined.

The oil patch town of Kilgore, Texas, has emerged as a national example of the power of civic acts.

It's one of the top host towns for a project called the American Exchange Project, which pays for high school seniors to travel after graduation to places in the U.S. where they might never go on their own. So city kids from New England turn up in places like Kilgore, which, in turn, sends some of its teens to places like Berkeley, California.

Usually, the visitors and locals are perplexed by each other when they first meet, says Kilgore Mayor Ronnie Spradlin. But it doesn't take long for them to bond over activities such as touring the oil history museum, shooting guns, or riding horses.

For her part, Dr. Hochschild describes how the characters in her 2024 book, in Pikeville, Kentucky, gathered a few months back out of a simple notion. Their appearance in a book illustrating harsh American divides led them to believe that perhaps they are also part of the solution – by getting together.

"We have to take it as our job to address the understandable desire to retreat," says Dr. Hochschild, professor emeritus of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. "Once you get the bridge half-built, you'll be surprised at the number of people who are bringing concrete to build the other half of it." ▪

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

860,754

The number of fireworks that will be ignited in the 250th anniversary celebration on July 4 in Washington. The 40-minute show, which will feature red, white, and blue fireworks, is predicted to break world records for the largest fireworks display.

$1.6
MILLION

The estimated cost of the 250th anniversary fireworks show in Washington. The elaborate display, which will cost more than five times as much as what is usually spent, is being funded by entry fees to national parks.

8,685

The percentage increase in the United States population from 3.9 million people, recorded in the country's first census in 1790, to 342.6 million people in 2026, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

30,000
TONS

The amount of explosives ignited each year in the United States to celebrate Independence Day. Missouri launches the most, with enough for each Missourian to set off seven fireworks.

150
MILLION

The number of hot dogs that are consumed in the United States on the Fourth of July, according to the National Hot Dog and Sausage Council. End to end, they would stretch from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles more than five times.

– Olivia Fletcher, Kelenna Onukwugha, Medara Udoekong, and Emily Staunton
Staff writers

Sources: The Hill, The Washington Post, U.S. Census Bureau, American Geographical Society, National Hot Dog and Sausage Council

TOLUCA, MEXICO

Trade deadline prompts N. American bid for unity

For decades, free trade and shared prosperity have shaped a U.S.-Canada-Mexico relationship that might now be going off the rails.

By Whitney Eulich / Special correspondent
and Sara Llana / Staff writer

When the United States hosted the World Cup for the first time in 1994, it was not just a celebration of sport but of a newly integrated North America.

The North American Free Trade Agreement between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico went into effect Jan. 1 that year. "NAFTA will tear down trade barriers between our three nations," President Bill Clinton said at the signing ceremony in Washington.

That summer, fans poured into U.S. stadiums. The tournament remains the most attended World Cup in history, drawing 3.6 million spectators. Commentators dubbed it the "NAFTA World Cup."

Thirty-two years later, World Cup matches are being played in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. It is the first time FIFA has awarded hosting rights to three countries, making it a truly continental World Cup. On the surface, it suggests hemispheric harmony.

Instead, North America faces a moment of profound strain. President Donald Trump has imposed tariffs on Canada and Mexico, mused about making Canada the "51st state," and threatened military action against Mexican drug cartels. The tension also comes as the three countries approach a July 1 deadline to review their trilateral trade agreement.

Officials still promote the tournament as a catalyst for regional cooperation. José Pablo Ampudia, who manages Mexican government engagement for this year's World Cup, said at a recent Atlantic Council event that soccer is providing an "excuse for the three governments to align."

Yet hopes that the summer of 2026 might strengthen a shared North American identity have faded, at a time when many observers argue it's needed more than ever.

"If the result of the [trade] negotiations is for things to remain the way they already are today, many business people say that's a relief," says Arturo Sarukhán, a former Mexican ambassador to the United States. It's a reflection, he says, of "instead of North America

aiming high and missing, we aim low and hit."

In some ways, North America is economically stronger than ever. And no place embodies that more than the Canada Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) railway station in the industrial city of Toluca, some 8,700 feet above sea level in the mountains of central Mexico.

Train conductor Ariel Murguia Cervantes, whose family has worked on Mexican railways for three generations, goes through paperwork for an upcoming voyage. His train, No. MJ28902, will be carrying sandwich bread to the northern Mexican city of Monterrey, linoleum to Bensenville, Illinois, near Chicago, and car parts to Edmonton, Alberta, in western Canada.

It wasn't until three years ago that these trains seamlessly hauled goods between all three countries.

Canada Pacific, founded in 1881, and Kansas City Southern, founded in 1887, merged in 2023 to form CPKC, the only single-line rail network spanning the continent, 20,000 miles total from the Port of Vancouver in British Columbia to Mexican ports in Lázaro Cárdenas and Veracruz.

It's the "backbone of North American integration," says Oscar Del Cueto, president and executive representative of CPKC de México.

Trade between the three countries has grown by more than 400% since NAFTA was signed. Mexico is now the United States' largest trading partner. Trade between the two countries alone grew from about $81 billion in 1993 to nearly $800 billion in 2023.

Cargo crossing the Mexico-U.S. border by rail has doubled in volume since NAFTA began, says Mr. del Cueto, calling himself a "true believer" in the potential of a united North America.

"Mutually beneficial" or "worst ever"?

While countries in the European Union spent decades building governing institutions and student exchanges to forge a sense of shared identity, North America's integration has been woven into supply chains, factories, and freight corridors.

"The idea of North America was always an elite-driven project," says Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute and author of "Vanishing Frontiers: The Forces Driving Mexico and the United States Together." "What really exists today are two very intense relationships between neighbors. But there isn't an equally strong relationship between Canada and Mexico, or an attempt to create a broader North American identity."

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan addressed Canada's Parliament, asking its members to imagine a region connected by "mutually beneficial exchange," all the way from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America.

But Canada entered the NAFTA negotiations reluctantly. It had already secured a bilateral free trade agreement with the U.S. in 1988 and initially saw little advantage in expanding the arrangement to include Mexico. Since then, Canada's relationship with Mexico has remained ambivalent.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has called for middle powers to realign as an insurance against an unpredictable U.S., but hasn't made a special effort to align more closely with Mexico.

In the last year, Mr. Carney, Mr. Trump, and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo have not spent much time in the same room. In fact, their only private trilateral meeting took place on Dec. 5 for the final World Cup draw in Washington.

During his first term, Mr. Trump called NAFTA "the worst trade deal ever made" and threatened to withdraw from it altogether. Ultimately, the three countries renegotiated NAFTA under a new name, what Washington now refers to as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA. It preserves the basic framework of continental free trade, but the negotiations to get there were fraught.

"I think the idea of the Mexican-American-Canadian grouping is in some ways a shallow idea," says Asa McKercher, a historian specializing in Canadian foreign policy and Canada-U.S. relations at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia.

But even if "North America" is a construct created by a trade deal, it's become more real over time. Dr. Selee ended his book, published in 2018, arguing that the "frontiers that once separated us will continue to vanish as forces stronger and more dynamic than any presidential order or trade agreement continue to bring us closer together."

"There will always be a reason to be cooperating," says Paul Samson, who worked in the Canadian government's finance department during the first renegotiation of NAFTA and is currently president of the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

A looming trade deadline

On a recent afternoon outside Toluca, at CPKC's Puerta México intermodal station, Sergio Mirasol dons a reflective vest and white hard hat and steps into the tight choreography of cranes, trucks, and freight containers. As operations manager, he oversees the loading and unloading of about 200 rail cars each day. Some head for customs inspections, while others move north by rail or on semitrucks, ready to restock local big-box stores.

Unlike many of his colleagues, Mr. Mirasol did not inherit this career. He grew up in Chinicuila, Michoacán, where construction work was the family trade. But his own path reflects some of the economic opportunities that NAFTA helped create.

The first person in his family to attend college, he earned a degree in business administration and later joined CPKC's predecessor. "It's given me a life that's less limited," he says. His children are all in school, and his eldest is in college hoping to pursue an international career.

After 15 years with the company, Mr. Mirasol traveled to Canada for the first time last October, part of a weeklong recognition trip awarded to the Puerta México team for its safety record. "Sometimes, it feels like Canada wants us to have their work culture. A culture of efficiency. It will take time," he says. But, "with this fusion of cultures, we haven't stopped learning."

Gordon Giffin, a former U.S. ambassador to Canada who has argued for even deeper economic integration, says that this North American railway is a symbol of the way "things should evolve, so the three economies are working more efficiently together."

"We just have to make sure we have the rules ... that make the trains [run] on time, euphemistically," he says.

By July 1, the three countries will need to decide whether to extend their current trilateral deal for another 16 years, or move toward annual reviews for the next decade.

Mr. Sarukhán, the former Mexican ambassador, says that kind of uncertainty is not just an economic problem but also a geopolitical one. "The United States needs to understand that for its recalibration with China to succeed, Canada and Mexico have to be part of that paradigm," he says. "The risk is three countries that end up turning their backs on one another."

Outside the promotional buzz, the World Cup might fall short of convincing Americans, Canadians, and Mexicans that they share a common North American identity. But in some ways, it could bring down to earth the connections that have been forged since NAFTA went into effect. When fans travel between countries for

soccer matches, they'll find similar banking systems, airline experiences, and transit rules. That mirrors the North American railway, says Adolfo Soto Ferro, a CPKC engineer and trainer in Mexico.

"The train is the same – here or there. We're dedicated to the same thing." ▪

AMERICA AT 250: BOOKS

Five histories take stock of the American Revolution

The anniversary of the founding of the United States brings a bounty of books assessing the period's ideals and figures. It's a robust, compelling collection.

By Barbara Spindel / Contributor

As Americans commemorate the nation's semiquincentennial on July 4, history buffs have much to celebrate. Recent months have seen the publication of dozens of new books on the Revolutionary era, pegged to the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The five we spotlight here are compelling chronicles of the past, and, as most edifying histories do, they illuminate our current moment as well.

A terrific book for readers seeking an exhaustive account of the nation's founding is "The American Revolution: An Intimate History," the companion text to documentarian Ken Burns' six-part PBS series. Co-written by Burns and his frequent collaborator Geoffrey C. Ward, the volume presents the war in its multiple dimensions. It was "a bloody struggle that would engage more than two dozen nations, European as well as Native American," the authors write, "that also somehow came to be about the noblest aspirations of humankind."

Ward and Burns highlight the fact that the Revolution deeply divided the colonists, with as many as one-fifth remaining loyal to the crown. Indigenous nations were also divided, but many aligned with the British in the hopes of blocking the colonists' westward expansion. Finally, some enslaved people sought freedom by siding with the Patriots, while others were promised emancipation by the British forces.

The massive book covers the conflict's roots, its Enlightenment underpinnings, its extreme brutality, and its global repercussions. Six stand-alone essays by historians, including Maya Jasanoff, Vincent Brown, and Philip J. Deloria, add scholarly heft. Finally, "The American Revolution" is sumptuously illustrated with hundreds of paintings, maps, and photographs of museum artifacts, making it a visual feast not unlike, say, a Ken Burns documentary.

July 4, 2026, marks not only the 250th anniversary of the declaration's signing, but also the 200th anniversary of the deaths of two of America's founders: Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. "A Perfect Coincidence" is Jim Rasenberger's engaging dual biography of Jefferson and Adams, covering their individual accomplishments as well as their complex relationship, which spanned friendship, rivalry, estrangement, and, finally, reconciliation.

The readable narrative explores the men's virtues and flaws and captures their contrasting personalities. Of the Southern aristocrat Jefferson – author of the declaration and enslaver, over his lifetime, of approximately 600 people – Rasenberger writes, "No American was ever more idealistic than Jefferson, and no American more at war with his own ideals." Meanwhile, the vain, combative Adams, an ardent revolutionary and the nation's first vice president and second president, "never met a high sentiment he did not question."

Rasenberger gives the near-simultaneous 1826 deaths of Jefferson and Adams fascinating context, demonstrating that in its time, the astonishing coincidence was seen as miraculous evidence of America's divine favor. Until then, "it had been mainly a matter of faith and interpretation that Divine Providence took a special interest in the United States," the author writes. "Here now was incontrovertible proof." The sign was welcomed by a populace seeking reassurance as fierce arguments over slavery strained the bonds of union.

Of course, one could fill a library with biographies of the Founding Fathers. Other worthy new ones include H.W. Brands' life of George Washington, "American Patriarch," and Jack Kelly's "Tom Paine's War," about the author of the galvanizing 1776 pamphlet "Common Sense" (whom Rasenberger dubs "an honorary Founder"). Two excellent recent biographies set during the Revolution spotlight little-known figures whose lives provide important insight into the era.

"Hamilton" fans might quibble with the characterization of the Schuyler sisters as "little-known." They feature prominently in Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical: Its subject, Alexander Hamilton, the first treasury secretary, was married to Eliza Schuyler and had an intense attachment to her sister, Angelica. Amanda Vaill's vivid, elegant "Pride and Pleasure," winner of the Pulitzer Prize in biography, gives the story of the formidable sisters epic sweep.

The family patriarch, Philip Schuyler, was a major general in the Continental Army and later a U.S. senator; their elite background afforded the sisters access to early America's key figures, even if their own power derived from their proximity to powerful men. The author elucidates Angelica's desire to be, in Vaill's words, "an actor in the drama taking place around her, not a passive observer." She charts how Eliza, more understated than her sister, aided Hamilton in his work and then acted to preserve his legacy after his 1804 death. Vaill notes that women like the Schuyler sisters are often eclipsed by men; after all, they "signed no declarations, negotiated no treaties, enacted no laws." Her deeply researched – and deeply enjoyable – account of the women's lives makes our understanding of the period fuller and richer.

David George's life was as eventful as that of any celebrated figure of the Revolutionary era. As Gregory E. O'Malley's "The Escapes of David George" documents, George was born enslaved on a Virginia tobacco plantation in 1742. At age 19, he escaped his brutal enslaver and fled to the Carolina backcountry. (At a time when there were no free states, the author points out that George had no obvious destination to run to.) He was held captive in Creek and Natchez communities before being sold by his Indigenous captors to a fur trader, leading to a decade of re-enslavement on a South Carolina plantation. During those years, George converted to Christianity and started what is likely the world's first Black Baptist church.

During the Revolution, the British promised emancipation to slaves fleeing "rebel" masters. George organized a mass escape to British lines, fleeing with 50 men, women, and children. At the end of the war, he relocated with white Loyalists and other newly emancipated Black people to Nova Scotia. In 1792, he moved with his family a final time to Britain's experimental antislavery colony

in Sierra Leone. In addition to being an extraordinary story, the book highlights what O'Malley calls a "bitter irony": that "rights to 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness' describe perfectly what David George and thousands of other Black refugees pursued by fleeing the American Revolution rather than joining it."

O'Malley notes that throughout American history, men and women have fought for equality, writing that "in modern conflicts over voting rights, racialized incarceration rates, and pathways to citizens for immigrants, ... struggles over inclusion and exclusion in American democracy continue." Those who wish to ponder these struggles on July 4 will be participating in a distinguished tradition. In "The Long Revolution," Nathan Perl-Rosenthal explains that before it became associated with fireworks and barbecues, the Fourth was a day for contemplating the national experiment in self-government. For the first century after the Revolutionary War, the holiday had as its centerpiece a public oration assessing the health of the country's founding principles.

Using 2,500 surviving speeches as source material, Perl-Rosenthal demonstrates that early generations of Americans viewed the Revolution as fragile and incomplete. Earlier speeches tended to focus on external threats to the republic, such as those that culminated in the War of 1812. Afterward, the orations turned to internal divisions, particularly those related to slavery. He cites abolitionist Frederick Douglass' 1852 address as a masterpiece of the form, with Douglass insisting, in the author's words, that "the work of the Revolution was not done so long as slavery survived."

In 2026, official celebrations have taken a triumphalist approach to America's founding. There is no shortage of triumph in these books: The colonists overcame a superior military power to prevail in a war fought in the name of universal human liberty. But there's also tragedy, not least in the nation's failure to live up to its exalted ideals. In Perl-Rosenthal's view, the American Revolution "was as much an idea as an event," and as such, it "has no natural ending point" until its goals have been fulfilled for all. Two hundred fifty years on, the quest for "a more perfect union" continues. ▪

The path to 'Independency': An intimate portrait

John Adams and his wife, Abigail Smith Adams, exchanged over 1,100 letters between 1762 and 1801. These two letters from 1776 reflect the waiting, the war's impact on the domestic scene around Boston, the strong desire by women to be included in the new laws of liberty, and the optimism once the Declaration of Independence had been signed.

The letters are courtesy of the Adams Editorial Papers Project at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Excerpt, Abigail Adams to John Adams, Braintree, Mass., March 31, 1776

I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for Liberty cannot be Eaquelly Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs. Of this I am certain that it is not founded upon that generous and christian principal of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us.

... I feel very differently at the approach of spring to what I did a month ago. We knew not then whether we could plant or sow with safety, whether when we had toild we could reap the fruits of our own industery, whether we could rest in our own Cottages, or whether we should not be driven from the sea coasts to seek shelter in the wilderness, but now we feel as if we might sit under our own vine and eat the good of the land.

... I long to hear that you have declared an independency – and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticuliar care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebelion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend.

Excerpt, John Adams to Abigail Adams, Philadelphia, July 3, 1776

Had a Declaration of Independency been made seven Months ago, it would have been attended with many great and glorious Effects. ... We might before this Hour, have formed Alliances with foreign States. ...

But on the other Hand, the Delay of this Declaration to this Time, has many great Advantages attending it. – The Hopes of Reconciliation, which were fondly entertained by Multitudes of honest and well meaning tho weak and mistaken People, have

been gradually and at last totally extinguished. – Time has been given for the whole People, maturely to consider the great Question of Independence and to ripen their judgments, dissipate their Fears, and allure their Hopes, by discussing it in News Papers and Pamphletts, by debating it, in Assemblies, Conventions, Committees of Safety and Inspection, in Town and County Meetings, as well as in private Conversations, so that the whole People in every Colony of the 13, have now adopted it, as their own Act. – This will cement the Union, and avoid those Heats and perhaps Convulsions which might have been occasioned, by such a Declaration Six Months ago.

But the Day is past. The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America.

I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.

You will think me transported with Enthusiasm but I am not. – I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. – Yet through all the Gloom I can see the Rays of ravishing Light and Glory. I can see that the End is more than worth all the Means. And that Posterity will tryumph in that Days Transaction, even altho We should rue it, which I trust in God We shall not.

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

The law of divine Truth maintains our lives

Around the globe, people are seeking a deeper understanding of the nature and source of true health or wholeness. "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26), a verse from the Scriptures says. This verse affirms not only that divine Spirit, a scriptural name for God, is the divine source of health, but that He maintains and sustains health, too.

Mary Baker Eddy is the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science and the author of the Christian Science textbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures." In her work titled "Retrospection and Introspection," Mrs. Eddy says of her discovery of Christian Science, "I named it *Christian,* because it is compassionate, helpful, and spiritual" (p. 25).

The New Testament includes the account of a woman who'd had an issue of blood for 12 years being healed when she touched the border of Christ Jesus' garment – when she came in contact with the Christ, the spiritual idea of God (see Luke 8:43-48). The many healing works of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, provide evidence that God is "the Lord that healeth thee." Christian Science teaches that the divine laws of Truth and Life, as demonstrated by Jesus and his disciples, continue to operate today as an eternal, demonstrable Science.

Recently, I was dealing with symptoms of influenza and a sore throat. These persisted when I awoke the following day, and although I was feeling uncomfortable, I began preparing for the work I needed to do that day. I felt confident that I could be healed by turning to God in quiet, expectant prayer as I had done many times before.

I considered the Lord's Prayer and its spiritual interpretation in the chapter titled "Prayer" in Science and Health. These lines were most helpful:

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;
And God leadeth us not into temptation, but delivereth us from sin, disease, and death.
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
For God is infinite, all-power, all Life, Truth, Love, over all, and All" (p. 17).

I perceived that the Lord's Prayer is a profound affirmation of God's love and care for us. This prayer shifted my thought from seeing myself as susceptible to disease, to an understanding of man's spiritual immunity from disease. Our true nature, or selfhood, is created by Spirit and is wholly loved, complete, and sound. It's in the discovery of this spiritual identity that we find true health and holiness.

I was soon free from all flu symptoms. I gave thanks to God for His unchanging goodness.

An understanding of the all-encompassing law of Spirit, operating in our lives, brings salvation, bountiful joy, and a deeper understanding of our wholeness as sons and daughters of God.

– Alistair Budd

NEWS: GLOBAL CURRENTS

ST. LOUIS

This river stirs something in us. It's telling a new tale now.

The muddy Mississippi, meticulously managed to ensure the flow of a nation's commerce, still captures the American imagination.

By Harry Bruinius / Staff writer

The Mississippi is well worth reading about. It is not a commonplace river, but on the contrary is in all ways remarkable.

– Mark Twain

Before the Mississippi River became Joan Stemler's life's work, it was the geography of a child's curiosity.

She was raised on a farm in Columbia, Illinois, behind a levee, in a place where the Mississippi River was not so much scenery as a force of nature – a force that explained why earth needed to be piled against water, why fields of grain needed protection, and why adults paid so much attention to rain, seepage, and the look of the sky.

Her father farmed grain along the bottomlands near Colum-

bia, in the broad flood plain the Mississippi River spent millennia claiming and reclaiming as its own. When the river rose, the Army Corps of Engineers would come and push back the levees, and she would go with her father to watch.

"I really didn't know what it meant until I got older," says Ms. Stemler, now the chief of water control for the Corps' St. Louis District, just miles from where she grew up.

Today, few know the ebbs and flows of the Mississippi more than she does, from its headwaters near Lake Itasca in Minnesota to the great deltas of Louisiana. "Water management, it's like, in your blood. That's what you do. That's the way you know."

Her way of knowing, however, moves beyond the great river's lore.

To follow Route 66 west is to travel one of America's great remembered corridors of motion – the Mother Road, built for cars, migration, reinvention. But here in St. Louis, that highway meets a river that is much more central to the American story.

Crossing the Mississippi still feels like an event. Travelers who have done it a hundred times will tell you: The moment the bridge clears the banks and the river opens up below, something shifts.

There is a reason the Gateway Arch stands on its western shore. There is a reason Mark Twain could never let it go. The Mississippi is not just a river. It is the highway before highways, the supply chain before anyone used that phrase.

The Mississippi divided empires, helped decide a civil war, and nurtured a distinct culture of river towns and port cities. It fed the steamboat age, carried the Delta blues north, and gave American literature one of its central landscapes.

Yet the river Americans see in their minds is not quite the river Ms. Stemler manages. Her river is the nation's primary logistical corridor for exporting hundreds of millions of dollars of American goods to the rest of the world. Her team's job is, essentially: Keep it moving as efficiently as possible.

Under a congressional mandate, the Corps must maintain a corridor to accommodate the unceasing tows of barges that bring American exports to the Gulf of Mexico.

But in recent years, the Mississippi has been critically low, again and again, forcing the Corps into a more constant effort to keep America's oldest freight corridor open.

That effort, Ms. Stemler says, has ushered in "a new world" in managing the Mississippi. "The last few years we've done everything in our power to keep enough water in the river."

The stakes are enormous. Today, some 655 million tons of American products, including roughly 60% of American grain exports, move through the Mississippi system via long tows of barges every year. All said, the river generates over $500 billion for the United States economy, according to federal data, and supports more than 1.5 million jobs across the country.

When the river is critically low, towboat operators, grain exporters, and a range of American industries need to know what she knows. Low water means they need to load lighter – and that costs millions. High water can make it dangerously difficult to navigate.

"When I call them … they know there's something up," Ms. Stemler says from the water control room in the St. Louis office. "During low water, it's a lot more work because we go to 24-hour ops and stuff to constantly monitor and make changes as needed."

But this is the Mississippi. The waters of a continent – west from the Rockies and east from the Appalachians – pour into it, sometimes violently, sometimes placidly. So the work never ends.

▪ ▪ ▪

Since the 1930s, the Army Corps of Engineers has maintained what some call a "staircase of water" above St. Louis: a series of locks and dams that help hold the upper Mississippi deep enough for commercial navigation.

The mandate is deceptively simple. In the St. Louis District, the Corps must maintain a navigation channel 300 feet wide and 9 feet deep along roughly 300 miles of the Mississippi, from Saverton, Missouri, to Cairo, Illinois.

When the water is too low, the Corps dredges. When a pool is too high or too low, operators adjust gates. When drought tightens the channel, water managers, dredge crews, and lock operators must communicate with towboat companies and shippers nearly every moment.

In an average year, the St. Louis District might dredge 3 million to 4 million cubic yards of river bottom. During the 2022-23 drought, it moved about 9 million cubic yards from 70 locations – a record-setting effort to keep the channel open.

For Andy Schimpf, chief of operations for the Corps' St. Louis District, the stakes are measured in both water depth and freight economics. A standard tow on the upper Mississippi, he says, is a line boat pushing 15 barges, typically about 1,200 feet long. One tow can carry the equivalent of roughly 1,100 semitrucks.

"When they know they're going to have enough water, they can load these barges – you're talking about 20 or 30% more commodity for the same crew," Mr. Schimpf says.

That is one reason Jennifer Carpenter, president and CEO of American Waterways Operators, calls the Mississippi "the maritime Main Street of America."

Ms. Carpenter grew up in St. Louis but says she had to move to Washington to understand the industry that had been operating in the background of her childhood. Most Americans, she says, experience trucks, trains, and planes directly. Barges move beyond ordinary view.

"People don't have the kinds of everyday experiences with the marine mode of transportation as they do with say, trucking or aviation or even rail," she says. "Nobody ever got tailgated by a barge."

Yet the very system Ms. Carpenter defends is also the subject of deep criticism.

Robert Criss, professor emeritus of earth, environmental, and planetary sciences at Washington University in St. Louis, has spent decades studying rivers and flood risk. He does not dispute the Mississippi's historic importance.

But to Mr. Criss, the modern navigation system is less a marvel than a distortion – an old river economy kept alive by public engineering and public money.

"River transport is the most highly subsidized form of transport there is," he says. Barges pay a 29-cent-per-gallon fuel tax into the Inland Waterways Trust Fund for major capital improvements. But ordinary operations and maintenance of the navigation channel are federally funded.

Mr. Criss' complaint is blunt: Railroads must own their right of way, maintain their tracks, and pay property taxes, while barge companies move on a river the government has engineered for them. "The toll is zero," he says. "Zero." American taxpayers pay for it all.

His critique is ecological as well as economic. The river, he argues, has been narrowed, dredged, and simplified for navigation. Islands and shallow-water habitat have disappeared. What many Americans imagine as a wild river is, in places, something more controlled.

"You just got a channel," he says. "It's like a canal."

The Corps and the maritime industry see the system differently: as a fuel-efficient, economically essential corridor that keeps enormous volumes of freight off highways and supports thousands of American workers.

And it's true: The Mississippi River that moves modern commerce is not simply a natural phenomenon or an iconic American waterway. It is managed, it is maintained, it is argued about. And it is worked every day.

▪ ▪ ▪

It is a quiet morning at the largest – and last – lock facility on the upper Mississippi. After the Melvin Price, the river flows south without another lock all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

During harvest season, long tows enter its 1,200-foot chamber carrying grain toward New Orleans. Other barges move fertilizer, coal, petroleum, cement, and steel. But today, the great lock is being used for something much smaller.

A single kayak is trying to get downstream.

Mike Maedge, the lockmaster, is on the phone with Matt Dunham, the shift chief in the control tower. Out on the wall, a lockkeeper is trying to guide the kayaker into position.

"That guy is just paddling in circles out there," Mr. Maedge says. "He needs to come in, 'cuz if something else calls, now we gotta hold him up."

From the tower, Mr. Dunham opens the 250-ton chamber gate. The kayaker – small as a thumb from the dam wall – eases inside. The gate closes behind him. Then Mr. Dunham opens the valves, just as he would for a 1,200-foot tow, and 15 feet of Mississippi River begins to drain from the chamber by gravity alone.

Later, Mr. Dunham laughs about the range of craft that pass through the lock. "We process everything you can imagine, including a single canoe," he says. "We've seen homemade crafts, last fall there were two pirate ships, or depictions of Christopher Columbus's ships."

A military veteran, Mr. Dunham has worked as a lock and dam operator for nearly 20 years. He started as a lockkeeper working the walls. Now, as shift chief, he is part of the two-person crew that keeps Melvin Price operating.

"Nights, days, Christmas, there's always two of us here," he says.

Mr. Maedge has been lockmaster for about a year and a half. Before that, he spent about six years on a Corps service crew doing large-scale maintenance across the lock-and-dam system. As the kayaker drops slowly toward the lower river, Mr. Maedge explains the Tainter gates that help regulate the pool above the dam. Operators can adjust them by small increments, he says, sometimes after a call or text from water control.

"We can go as little as half a foot," he says. "We just raise and lower these as we need to let out X amount of water. We'll get a phone call from water control, or they'll text us and say, 'We need to open five feet.'"

A few weeks earlier, he says, the river was "open river" – all the gates lifted out of the water, holding nothing back.

"That's, of course, to keep everything from flooding up. You'd be surprised at how little a change on one of these gates can affect that pool."

Mr. Maedge grew up in Staunton, Illinois, a major stop on old Route 66. Now, he works on an older corridor of American movement, one where national commerce depends on half-foot gate changes, midnight shifts, dredging forecasts, and people most Americans will never see.

He says he feels lucky to be part of it.

"There's definitely a sense of pride that we get to be a part of this much bigger enterprise," Mr. Maedge says. "Just the part of the American economy that comes through here is pretty important."

"We are working for the country, literally." ▪

REPORTERS ON THE JOB

BOSTON

Laurent Belsie

Face-to-face interviews are journalism gold. You pick up the nuances of a shrug or a glance, the nonverbal cues you miss on the phone or even on Zoom. Such interactions are increasingly rare. One venue where it still exists is the trade show, like the Robotics Summit & Expo I attended in Boston in late May. Experts talk about their industry. More importantly, they stick around afterward to meet the crowd. After each session, I stood in line for 90 seconds of face-to-face time. I got a lot: quotes for my story on humanoid robots, grist for future articles, and new contacts who, when they remember our time in person, may return my phone calls in the future. ▪

COLDWATER, KAN.

Sarah Matusek

Patience on the Great Plains. That's what I found in Kansas in June, waiting to interview a man still in jail. I was there to speak with Joe Ceballos, a former small-town mayor who admitted to voting in past elections despite not being a U.S. citizen. While he bonded out, I waited five days. And I recalled how free time in a new town is a gift. I got documents at the courthouse I couldn't find online. Snapped a photo of his portrait at his old high school. Watched his teenage grandson feed the cows. When I finally spoke with the man, my questions had improved – informed by a dozen interviews with family and friends. ▪

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Melanie Stetson Freeman

Every time I have an outdoor photo shoot, I think about the weather. Will it rain? Will it be too sunny? If I'm photographing in the middle of the day, with the sun overhead, it casts deep shadows on faces. But, if it's early or late in the day, the sun is my ally, giving me beautiful, directional light. I usually don't get to decide the time of day I'm working. During a recent photo shoot of an outdoor all-day dance festival, I was rewarded with an overcast sky. The clouds create a big softbox, the kind of light studio photographers create artificially with strobes covered in fabric to diffuse light. This time, nature provided the best lighting design. ▪

KINGSTON UPON HULL, ENGLAND

Mark Sappenfield

To understand the evolution of Brits' attitudes on Brexit, Mark Sappenfield traveled to the same city I went to a decade ago as the Monitor's European correspondent. When journalists tell a story about a place like Hull, we look for characters who have a unique understanding of it. I seek out artists and writers; Mark historians. That's how Mark met the poet Russ Litten, from a piece I wrote in 2017. He talked about the influence of the

English poet Philip Larkin on the town's psyche. So Mark picked up some of Larkin's poetry. This kind of reporting doesn't make it into our pages. But "history, poetry, it informs your understanding," says Mark. "All the stuff that doesn't get into the story really changes the tone and tenor and even what we choose to emphasize." ▪

– Sara Miller Llana / International editor

THE EXPLAINER

BOSTON

They can walk. They can talk. How soon will humanlike robots be working beside us?

Humanoid machines, powered by AI, are expected to play a big role in the future of automation.

By Laurent Belsie / Staff writer

Humanoid robots walk like people. Carry things like people. Even dance with moves that look human. But can they grow up to do real work on an industrial scale?

That's a question the robotics industry is struggling with as it looks to build a blue-collar workforce for the 21st century. Industry optimists point to a surge of interest from industry, faced with a potential labor shortage. Pessimists tick off the numerous challenges facing the makers of general-purpose humanoids, while more specific robot arms, hands, and delivery platforms are already doing more specialized, limited tasks in factories and distribution centers around the world.

The optimism and the skepticism were on display in late May at the Boston Robotics Summit, where a handful of humanlike machines, powered by artificial intelligence, vied for attention with the many specialized robots on display at vendors' booths.

"Humanoid robots can be deployed, play a role, and work at the level of reliability that they're doing useful work," Pras Velagapudi, chief technology officer of Agility Robotics, told conferees here at the summit. Its Digit humanoid has been tested in commercial facilities at various companies, including Amazon, an investor in Agility. "Now, we're expanding that out," he added.

In December, Agility signed an agreement with Mercado Libre, a commerce and fintech company, to use Digit at its fulfillment center in San Antonio. In February, Toyota Canada signed on to pilot the humanoid at its assembly operations, with plans to deploy it if the pilot succeeds.

Q: What's the positive outlook for humanoids?

One of the advantages of humanoids is that they are general purpose, able to move around an existing facility and do various jobs, as opposed to more traditional moving robots, which have more limited capabilities and often require a factory to be reconfigured. This flexibility could allow companies to move automation beyond very big assembly lines.

"Except on the very few applications that have very large and stable scale, the norm is that almost all jobs are one of a kind," said Alberto Rodriguez, director of robot behavior for Boston Dynamics' new humanoid, Atlas. "What's driving our road map is building the technology that is necessary to solve that general-purpose case."

The potential for humanoids is huge. Morgan Stanley forecast last year that the market could reach $5 trillion by 2050, with nearly 1 billion such robots in operation. Venture capital funding is flooding into startups around the world building lifelike machines and the components to make them work.

Q: What's the pessimistic view?

Even optimists concede that many technical challenges remain. Walking robots need loads of sensors because cameras alone might not see a tripping hazard ahead. They need powerful computers to allow them to move and work in an unstructured environment. The electric power needs are so great that it's hard for humanoids to work long periods at a time.

Safety, the ability to work with humans without wounding them or falling on them, is paramount and is not yet proven, especially for machines with legs, robotics experts say. Then, there's the cost factor. If traditional robots can accomplish a specific problem at a fraction of the cost, will companies employ humanoids instead?

Eventually, the industry is likely to overcome these obstacles. But a big disagreement is over when that might occur. Serial entrepreneur Elon Musk said in January that he expected his Tesla company would start selling humanoid robots by the end of next year. That same month, by contrast, Rodney Brooks, one of the world's premier robot scientists, predicted that robot dexterity would still prove "pathetic compared to human hands beyond 2036." Thus, he predicted, the successful humanoid robots of the future will be more limited in what they can do than what's being hyped today.

Q: What is the industry predicting?

So far, the industry is banking on traditional robots. The $54 billion global industrial robotics market will double over the next five years, forecasts Mordor Intelligence. Humanoids represent only about $2 billion to $3 billion of that at present, Barclays Investment Bank calculates. That could surge to $200 billion or more, it adds, but that's over a 10-year time frame that is hard to predict.

"There are some markets for humanoids that make a lot of sense," David Galati, chief technology officer of Titan Robotics, told the conferees here. "But we are in a place where custom-built, purpose-built robots make more sense." ▪

EDITORIALS

In Syria, hope continues to bloom

Amid adjacent conflicts – in the Gulf and between Israel and Lebanon – Syria, as the Monitor reported recently, is "an island of calm in the stormy Middle East." And of buoyant hope.

That is a credit to Syrians' resilience and faith in progress, as they confront economic and political challenges in the aftermath of years of repression and civil war. Some credit is also due their former insurgent-turned-president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, who has sought to shore up stability and restore basic services, through civic conciliation and political pragmatism.

For the international community, the current situation validates

the hope and confidence placed in the government that ousted a brutal dictatorship in 2024. Gulf Arab states have offered aid and investment; the United States and Europe have reopened embassies and lifted sanctions.

"Al-Sharaa has gone through a massive personal transformation that may presage ... political transformation," according to regional analyst Asaad Sam Hanna. He has "adopted a conciliatory approach to various communities ... and sent a clear message to the international community that Syria would be governed by a president rather than [by] the military or religious councils," Mr. Hanna wrote in an Atlantic Council report in March.

But there is still much to do to bridge ethnic, religious, and regional differences. In January, the government restored full citizenship rights and language recognition to its sizable Kurdish minority. And it is integrating their militia fighters into the national security forces. Freedom of expression has also expanded.

The squeeze on oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz has offered an unexpected opportunity: Since March, both Iraq and the United Arab Emirates have begun using Syria's roadways to truck their oil to its Mediterranean ports. This brings in much-needed income through fees.

But, in addition to economic growth, Syrians also hunger for individual freedoms and democratic governance.

Initial steps toward transitional justice are being taken. The next major steps are for Mr. al-Sharaa and his colleagues to deliver on a promised new constitution and national elections.

These will likely require a combination of continued pressure and support from Syrians – as well as from their international allies and friends. ▪

Europe shakes off innovation gloom

The handful of U.S. firms that dominate global tech has almost universal name recognition. And it's widely known that they rely on semiconductors manufactured in East Asia, mainly Taiwan.

But few people realize that the world's only maker of the complex machines used by the Asian firms which fabricate the chips that power American tech advances is in ... Europe (the Netherlands).

Not knowing this little factoid is about more than industry trivia. It points to long-standing, and not entirely merited, views of the continent as an economic has-been, held back by red tape, capital constraints, and innovation inertia.

In fact, the European Union is making quiet progress in undoing both limiting perceptions and policies – even as global markets are more focused on trillion-dollar Wall Street listings in the United States.

"Europe is no musty backwater," The Economist stated in April. "It has the talent, resources and incentive to lead. It should start to think, and act, like it."

And it is, especially after growing differences with its longtime ally, the United States, over trade and defense issues.

Prioritizing stability and social needs

In April, the EU updated its regulations to allow large-scale mergers. In June, French mobile carrier SFR moved forward on a $23.5 billion sale to a consortium. A satellite joint venture and a banking merger are in the works.

The EU is also harmonizing regulations so European firms can operate under consistent rules anywhere on the continent.

"Enough gloom," venture capitalist Suranga Chandratillake wrote in the London Times recently. At close to $7 trillion, he noted, Europe's tech sector accounts for 15% of its gross domestic product.

Coordinating among 27 countries, while upholding citizens' priorities on the environment and social welfare, means the EU doesn't exactly "move fast and break things," as in Silicon Valley. But its caution might be an asset that is underrated.

"Patient capital, deep technical expertise and regulatory rigor are European strengths," according to Arturo Bris, a finance professor and competitiveness expert.

"Europe's innovation model prioritizes long-term stability ... and is particularly strong in areas where technology intersects with social need," such as pharmaceuticals and renewable energy, he wrote in Observer, an online platform.

As the continent slowly charts its own path toward both unity and innovation, other countries and competitors might learn a thing or two from Europe's approach. ▪

Child's play is more than just that

As schools across the United States let out for summer break, more parents and policymakers are trying to make sure kids can get out there and just be kids – step away from screens, play outdoors, or bike to a friend's house.

And, they say, kids should be able to do all this without a parent hovering – or that parent being held liable for not doing so.

In May, the U.S. House introduced a bipartisan bill to promote "childhood independence and protect parents who allow their children to play outside unsupervised." This year, Indiana became the 13th state to pass a measure shielding parents from child neglect allegations for certain unsupervised activities. Last year, Florida, Georgia, and Missouri passed similar laws.

However, it's taken nearly two decades for the concept of "free-range" childhood to impel such adjustments in child protection laws. In 2008, when New York City mother Lenore Skenazy wrote online about letting her 9-year-old make his way home by subway and bus, she caught flak as "America's worst mom" for allegedly exposing him to potential danger.

"Overprotectiveness is a danger in and of itself," Ms. Skenazy wrote. "A child who thinks he can't do anything on his own eventually can't." She has since co-founded and heads Let Grow, a nonprofit promoting "reasonable childhood independence" as a natural and essential part of growing up. Limits on outdoor freedoms, Let Grow says, can drive children online for entertainment – which brings its own hazards.

Childhood abduction is extremely rare in the U.S., but 45% of parents describe themselves as overprotective. A 2025 poll of 8-to-12-year-olds found that 62% had not walked or biked to a store, park, or school without an adult. Yet, 61% of them wanted to play with friends in person without adults present.

There's a country where kids get to do just that – Denmark, which gave the world those bright little Lego bricks. (The name is a contraction of the Danish phrase *leg godt*, "play well.")

Danes encourage play that's unstructured, often unsupervised,

and sometimes risky. Danes also consistently rank near the top in global measures of happiness, child well-being, and social trust. Alongside the occasional bump or scrape from free-form play, children also learn about compromise, fairness, and taking turns – skills that are useful in the adult world.

"Danish parents see their children as innately competent, meaning they trust their ability to navigate risks and challenges," according to psychology professor Marie Helweg-Larsen of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The general approach, she wrote in The Conversation in May, is to "create environments for these natural competencies to flourish; ... to encourage cooperation instead of using control."

When parents let go of overprotectiveness and oversupervision, children's play can let them grow into courageous, capable adults. ▪

BEST BOOKS OF JUNE

What Monitor book reviewers like best this month.

Land
by Maggie O'Farrell
Maggie O'Farrell's magnificent historical novel "Land" is a powerful epic about a remote Irish peninsula and its beleaguered peoples. Set in the aftermath of the Great Hunger, the narrative focuses on the family of a surveyor and cartographer named Tomás. He has been hired by the British Ordnance Survey to map the territory and record the loss of hundreds of Irish tenant households following the potato blight. Lushly written and heartbreaking, the novel is also a moving paean to perseverance and survival.

Green City Wars
by Adrian Tchaikovsky
Skotch isn't merely a raccoon. The world-weary protagonist of "Green City Wars" is a freelance investigator with a job to do – locate and deliver a mouse to his former employer before warring squirrel armies, or the rat gangster boss, or a weasel enforcer grab him first. Sound crazy? Part noir, part "Animal Farm," the latest from Adrian Tchaikovsky envisions a world where genetically engineered animals provide the (mostly) unseen labor powering humans' harmonious eco-dreamland. Feathers ruffle and the fur flies as vexing questions about exploitation, addiction, and the privilege of independent thought loom in the shadows. Tchaikovsky's world-building dazzles.

An Artful Dodge
by Karen Odden
This unusual historical novel set in Victorian London revolves around a notorious ring of women thieves. Virtuoso cat burglar Kit Jimeson yearns to escape the gang's dangerous lifestyle and protect her beloved younger sister from joining. When treacherous Maggie O'Connell, leader of the gang, returns from prison, she resents Kit's standing with the group. "An Artful Dodge" offers a surprisingly moving tale with loyal and courageous characters.

A Pair of Aces
by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray
In 1930s New York, two women from very different milieus – a prosecutor and a brothel owner – team up to topple mob boss Lucky Luciano. The novel is based on the true story of Eunice Carter, Manhattan's assistant district attorney (and first Black female prosecutor). While Carter's collaboration with high-class madam Polly Adler (a real person) is fictional, both women blazed trails in hostile environments.

Murder at the Spirit Lounge
by Jess Kidd
In Jess Kidd's terrific second mystery featuring former nun Nora Breen, a séance for six becomes one unholy mess. A "world-renowned medium" has been murdered while doing the hard (and apparently lucrative) work of "lifting the veil between worlds." From an alluring actress to a gruff colonel, the gathering's motley attendees can't explain what happened – and then, one by one, start meeting inexplicable ends themselves. Ever curious, Nora teams up with Detective Inspector Rideout, himself an attendee, to uncover the truth. The writing is stellar; the message of partnership vanquishing vindictiveness a balm.

Leave and Come Back
by Lavanya Lakshmi
Lavanya Lakshmi's sparkling rom-com finds Simran's love interest, Leo, unintentionally crashing her cousin's two-week wedding festivities in New Jersey. Worried that her judgmental Aunt Veema will reject Leo, Simran enlists her cousins' help in a scheme straight out of a Bollywood movie. Their aim: Make Leo the most helpful and appreciative wedding guest ever, so that he will win Veema over and be accepted into the family. The novel turns grief and misunderstandings into life-affirming renewal.

Moonlight Murder
by Uzma Jalaluddin
Uzma Jalaluddin's eloquent sequel to "Detective Aunty" is a bona fide cozy murder mystery hit! South Asian-Canadian detective Aunty Kausar Khan is impelled to investigate another murder in Toronto – this time linked to one of her granddaughters. Double doses of intrigue arise, as clues pile up that inspire Kausar to finally solve who killed her son, Ali, 20 years ago.

Stalin's Apostles
by Antonia Senior
Antonia Senior's "Stalin's Apostles" revisits the infamous Cambridge Five spy ring, a cadre of posh Englishmen who infiltrated the upper ranks of Britain's clubby midcentury establishment – and funneled mountains of secrets straight to the Kremlin before their unmasking in 1951. The noxious mix of English manners, left-wing idealism, and cold-blooded betrayal has long captivated the public. But Senior's new account strips the spies of romantic glamor, focusing instead on the devastating human costs of their treachery and how they aided Soviet dictator Josef Stalin in building a brutal empire.

The Wreck of the Mentor
by Eric Jay Dolin
An American whaling ship is lost at sea in a fierce storm, and the survivors wash up on a small speck of land in a remote corner of the Pacific. In their bid to survive, they will face unimaginable hardships and challenges, not the least of which include clashes with different groups of Pacific Islanders. More broadly, this is a story of what happened when the economic growth and expansion of the West collided with traditional cultures that were, for good reason, deeply suspicious of newcomers.

The First All-Star Game
by Randall Sullivan
In 1933, the United States was reeling from a market crash and an assassination attempt on the president. Baseball, still in its fledgling days, was sinking under the influence of gamblers and gangsters, even as the athleticism of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig drove the sport to new heights. A Chicago journalist was so dedicated to the idea of bringing all the best players to one game in Comiskey Park that he promised to cover any losses with his own paycheck. The result was the first All-Star Game – a home run for both baseball and a nation yearning for hope.

Lightning Beneath the Sea
by James M. Tabor
Though little known today, New Yorker Cyrus Field became a global celebrity in the 19th century after he assembled a scientific dream team to lay the first transatlantic telegraph cable. The technology allowed messages between continents to travel within minutes. That great leap forward, and the glory and complications it created in its wake, are at the heart of James M. Tabor's sweeping chronicle of the birth of the global communications age.

The Long Revolution
by Nathan Perl-Rosenthal
Before the Fourth of July became associated with fireworks and barbecues, it was a day for debating the American experiment in self-government: For the nation's first 100 years, the centerpiece of the annual celebration was a public oration assessing the health of the country's founding ideals. Using 2,500 surviving speeches as source material – and citing abolitionist Frederick Douglass' 1852 address as a masterpiece of the form – historian Nathan Perl-Rosenthal presents a compelling vision of a Revolution that early generations of Americans viewed as fragile and incomplete.

The Beasts of the East
by Andrew Moore
Environmental journalist Andrew Moore explores citizen-driven efforts to restore the once-verdant ecosystems of the eastern United States and draw near-extinct species back to their native habitats. He examines firsthand the return of buffalo and bison, as well as sandhill cranes to areas once decimated by industrialization and suburban sprawl. And while these initiatives are not without challenges, Moore's meticulous research, conveyed in engaging prose, also restores a sense of hope.

The Hardest, Longest Race
by Eric Moskowitz
Automobiles were still a novelty in 1909, and paved roads were something of a rarity, too. That made for a precarious odyssey when the moneyed rake Robert Guggenheim decided to stage a cross-country car race from New York City to Seattle, a contest that author Eric Moskowitz chronicles with voluminous research and wry humor. Fans of great summer road trips will find his story irresistible. ▪

IN PICTURES

Watching the whirled go by

Story by Cameron Pugh / Staff writer

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

On an overcast day when air sticks to skin, people are dancing everywhere.

Standing in a parking lot beside a towering stone church, a young woman enjoys a moment away from the crowd. With only her breath as company, she glides through smooth ballet motions, her limbs flowing like water. Later, just a stone's throw away, a dancer in a fiery red blouse shimmies onstage, matching the rhythm of a plucky tune in Spanish. Up the street, sneakers morph into tap shoes, as a man in a button-up shirt teaches people of all ages the first steps of a basic routine.

At the Dance for World Community festival, people step to music from nearly every corner of the planet, waltzing across language barriers and borders.

"Dance has an inherent power to unify people across different groups, different cultures, different backgrounds," says José Mateo, whose eponymous dance school produces the festival each year in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "Dance is always present, and it's a language that has an appeal one might say is universal." When he launched the festival in 2009, Mr. Mateo saw it as a way to bring together Greater Boston's dance community, whether they pirouetted to orchestral sonatas or stepped to hip-hop. He wanted to change the narrative around ballet specifically, he says, a genre that many people see as haughty and limiting.

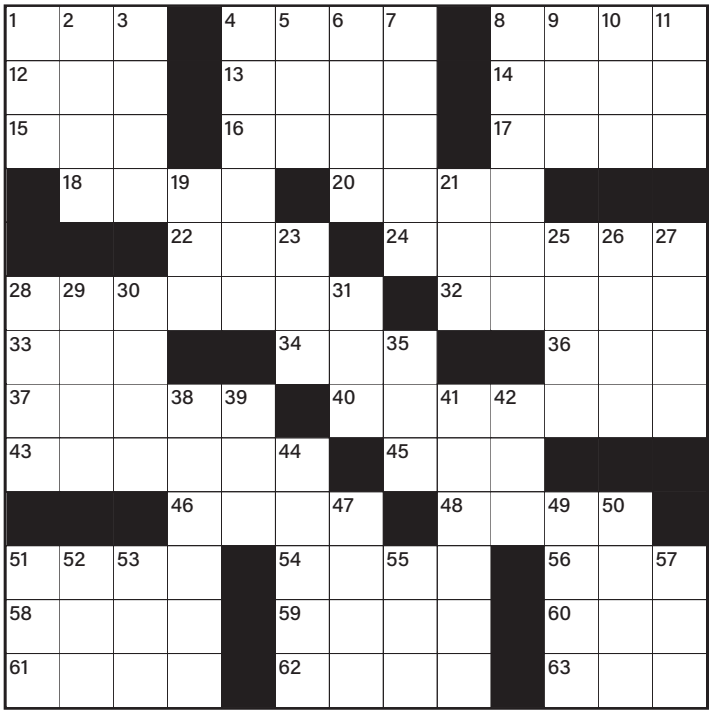
Today, as the festival shuts down a street near Harvard University, Mr. Mateo seems to have done just that. Throngs of people gather to watch troupes perform ballet over the hum of violin strings, twirl to Hindi music in traditional Indian dress, and even stomp to heavy metal.

But it's not just professionals getting their bodies moving. Here, anyone can be a dancer. The idea that dance is for everyone, regardless of ability, infuses the festival.

"I always wanted to do dance," says Sara Zhao, who was pulled onstage during an Indian dance routine. Her young children dance at José Mateo Ballet Theatre School, and she says she's "living vicariously through them."

"It's just really cool to see all the different ways that people can move their bodies to the music. It's really expressive and fun," she adds. ▪

Crossword



© Lovatts Puzzles

ACROSS

1. Driver's license abbr.
4. Porcine title role
8. Lightbulb unit
12. Barn dweller
13. Base opposite
14. Bird in hieroglyphics
15. Bearded beast of Botswana
16. Big hart
17. Bouncy gait
18. Parking place?
20. Miss America wear
22. Pot pie spheroid
24. Acquired
28. Texan's hat
32. Bypass a vowel
33. Sully
34. Billy, for one
36. Ad-___ (improvise)
37. Jargon
38. Folded food
39. Cost increaser
41. Hearth tools
42. Groan inducer
44. Teenage Mutant ___ Turtles®
47. Layer cake layer
49. Lest
50. Angora output
51. Photo chances
52. "C'est la ___!"
53. Mandela's org.
55. Lifesaver, maybe
57. Body shop?

40. Motor levers
43. Beefeater
45. Second person?
46. Illuminated theater sign
48. Didn't guess
51. Flattened circle
54. Inning allotment
56. Flight record
58. Needle dropper
59. Fan's disapproval
60. Umami sauce
61. Church offshoot
62. Master's subject
63. Dutch tree

DOWN

1. Setter or shepherd, e.g.
2. Has possession of
3. Saddened
4. Stitches temporarily
5. Do film work
6. Inclination
7. Hoover handle?
8. "Where" attachment
9. Like a pocket dict.
10. Spanish uncle
11. Hissed reproof
19. Well-related
21. What'd I tell ya?
23. Green light
25. Carpet feature
26. Returning tide?
27. Ball belles
28. Canine command
29. Empty weight
30. Postulation word
31. Prelude to pick
35. Doris or Clarence

Sudoku difficulty: ★★★☆

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

Crossword and Sudoku solutions

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

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.