

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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

– MARY BAKER EDDY

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Bearing arms: Shifting views of a foundational right

Reporter Patrik Jonsson has been writing about guns for 15 years. As the Monitor's beat reporter in the American Southeast, Patrik has covered gun violence and gun rights; coffee shops banning firearms and stand-your-ground-law advocates using them; mass shootings and the National Rifle Association, and whether the gun itself has become a "sacred object" in America.

In this week's magazine, he writes about a new twist in what has become one of this country's most emotional, and debated, issues: a growing liberal embrace not just of guns themselves, but of an approach to the Second Amendment long associated with the conservative right.



By Stephanie Hanes
Print Editor

"I've covered so many angles on the Second Amendment," Patrik told me. "I've done stories about liberal gun owners, I did a story about women gun owners, I did a story about the complications of being a Black gun owner."

But Patrik started noticing something new after the killing of Alex Pretti, an intensive care nurse fatally shot by federal agents in Minnesota earlier this year.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and a wave of Black Lives Matter protests, Patrik explains, a growing number and diversity of Americans started turning to firearms in hopes of defending themselves from criminals. This, according to scholars, was an expansion of what is sometimes called "Gun Culture 2.0" – a perception of guns as being primarily for self-protection rather than for hunting or military use.

(Previously, those on the left were more likely to identify with gun control advocates, who point to research showing that firearms in the home increase the risk of violence there.)

After Minnesota, though, Patrik found a growing, cross-partisan belief that guns are necessary not just to protect oneself from criminals, but also from the government.

Mr. Pretti had been carrying a licensed handgun – a fact used by some government officials to at first justify his shooting and later raised by citizens across the political spectrum worried about federal overreach.

"What happened after Alex Pretti ... was this simmering sense on the left that, 'Maybe the folks on the right were correct? What if the state falls into the wrong hands?'" Patrik told me.

He started to look for data, he says, and found early indications that thought might be shifting.

"This is at the heart of the story – this rethinking of the Second Amendment on the left and what that means," Patrik says. ■

Almost all US refugees are now from South Africa

All but three of the 4,499 refugees let into the United States this fiscal year so far have come from South Africa.

This squares with President Donald Trump's pledge to prioritize Afrikaners while capping refugee entries at a record low.

Halfway through fiscal year 2026, the latest State Department data published shows that refugee arrivals have already surpassed half of the 7,500 admissions cap.

During the last full year of the Biden administration, by contrast, over 100,000 refugees arrived (a three-decade high). The sharp reversal now – and the singling out of one ethnic group to protect – marks a deep departure from the program built with bipartisan support in 1980.

President Trump took an axe to his predecessor's immigration policies, including expansive refugee resettlement. On his first day back in office, Mr. Trump suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, citing security and assimilation concerns.

Following that news, refugee advocates criticized the withdrawal of American humanitarian aid as major conflicts abroad continued to displace millions.

The Episcopal Church, a longtime refugee services provider, announced it would end those services with the U.S. government and decline resettling white South Africans over others.

The church cited its "steadfast commitment to racial justice."

Late last year, Mr. Trump affirmed that he would prioritize Afrikaner refugees "and other victims of illegal or unjust discrimination."

The president appeared to stake a claim in a debate over the persecution versus privilege of white South African farmers. Farm attacks are real in South Africa, but have been exaggerated.

While more than 90% of South Africa's population is Black, Indian or mixed-race, the Trump administration singled out Afrikaners, who are white. The State Department data does not specify race.

Refugees, who flee identity-based persecution, are accepted for protection in the U.S. before they're admitted. Prior to this administration, refugees had often waited years in camps abroad before they were approved to arrive.

The largest share of South African refugees – over 500 – have arrived in Texas, followed by Florida and California. The exception to South African arrivals came in November, when three refugees from Afghanistan landed in Colorado.

– Sarah Matusek / Staff writer

Turnover is rising in Trump's second term

During its first year, the current administration of President Trump had avoided the inter-Cabinet drama and firings of his first term. But recently, there have been two firings in less than a month. Other top officials are also reportedly at odds with the president, suggesting there might be more drama to come.

Attorney General Pam Bondi was pushed out April 2, just weeks

after Kristi Noem's firing from the Department of Homeland Security in early March.

The firing of a top general at the Pentagon, by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, also shows turmoil in regard to personnel during President Trump's second term.

Departures were a common theme during his first term, when Mr. Trump had a higher turnover than his five predecessors, swapping out 11 Cabinet positions – some of them more than once.

Mr. Trump has already filled the Homeland Security role with Markwayne Mullin, who had been serving as a U.S. senator from Oklahoma. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche is filling the role vacated by Ms. Bondi on an interim basis.

That Mr. Trump has now pushed out two of his most visible Cabinet members – both women – in such a short span underscores the political straits in which the president finds himself. His war with Iran has sharply divided his MAGA base and has created new economic pressures at home, as gasoline prices have jumped.

Mr. Trump had reportedly been frustrated with Ms. Bondi for months over her handling of public demand for the Jeffrey Epstein files.

The president had also expressed frustration over the Justice Department's failure under Ms. Bondi to effectively prosecute figures he believed had targeted him.

Also on April 2, Secretary Hegseth fired the Army's top officer, Gen. Randy George, a move that added to concerns about politicization within America's military, particularly during a U.S. war in the Middle East.

General George became the latest of more than a dozen high-ranking officers in the military dismissed in President Trump's second term.

Two other generals, including the Army's top chaplain, were also fired. General George was asked to step down amid reports that he had disagreed with Mr. Hegseth's decision to block the promotion of several top Army colonels, including Black and female officers, to the rank of one-star general.

Public confidence in the military already shows a trust gap, with overall trust sharply lower than in 2018 – sagging to 33% among Democrats while expanding to 67% among Republican respondents in a December poll by the conservative Reagan Institute.

– **Story Hinckley and Anna Mulrine Grobe** / Staff writers

China, a leader in renewables, was prepared for a global fuel crisis

Despite its temporary gasoline and diesel retail price controls for the first time since 2013, China is well positioned to buffer its consumers and economy from the oil shock sparked by the Iran war.

China has a heavy dependency on imported oil. And if the war drags on and leads to a global recession, China's growth, which depends heavily on exports, would take a serious hit.

But barring that, signs are emerging that the war could boost China's economic heft relative to other countries, as Beijing leverages its robust oil reserves, refining capacity, diversified energy sector, and clean-energy industry dominance.

"China has a lot of leverage because it is shielded from the shock, while the rest of the world is not," says Alicia García Herrero, a

senior fellow at Bruegel, a Brussels-based economic think tank.

In recent years, China has built up sizable oil reserves, in part by importing discounted oil from sanctioned countries such as Russia, Venezuela, and Iran. Iranian oil has flowed to China through a shadow network that involves transshipments via third countries like Malaysia, payments using Chinese yuan instead of U.S. dollars, then processing by China's small private "teapot" refineries – some with rounded tanks and spoutlike pipes.

China's reserves totaled around 1.3 billion barrels at the start of 2026. Even with the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the loss of imports from Venezuela, that amount of oil could still last for the next two years, according to estimates from Gavekal Dragonomics, a research firm focused on China's economy.

Such reserves are helping the government ease the oil price shock for hundreds of millions of Chinese who drive gas-fueled cars and trucks.

China's large reserves and refining capacity, coupled with its diversified energy sources, also puts it in a relatively strong position compared with the rest of Asia.

While countries – including China – may restart or ramp up coal plants or pivot to other sources of fossil fuel in the short run, in the medium term they are also likely to promote more renewable energies such as wind and solar, says Li Shuo, director of China Climate Hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute in Washington.

"It vindicates this longstanding Chinese approach," he says. "Many countries ... are pivoting to China's playbook."

China's main source of energy consumption remains coal, followed by crude oil and natural gas, and a growing share of renewables such as hydropower, solar, and wind. The country produces more wind power than any other nation by far. China also dominates key green energy industries such as solar panels, batteries, and electric vehicles.

The Iran war is likely to bolster China's transition to electric vehicles, as well as its exports of green energy goods to the rest of the world, in particular the Global South.

"This will obviously give an extra push to China's energy transition," says Ma Jun, founder and director of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, a Beijing nonprofit.

– **Ann Scott Tyson** / Staff writer

Iran's machinery of intimidation keeps protesters at bay

Among the pillars of the Iranian regime's power targeted by the United States and Israel are the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran's most powerful military force, with vast influence over politics and the economy, and the omnipresent Basij militia, which surveils society from neighborhoods to universities.

In the Islamic Republic, where clerics hold top judicial and intelligence posts, the true believers of the IRGC and Basij together constitute the tools of Iran's machinery of repression, upon which the regime depends for control and obedience.

Yet, despite the destructive power of the joint U.S.-Israeli onslaught, these security forces continue to work meticulously to warn, threaten, and intimidate any Iranian who might heed calls to rise up and topple the regime.

Indeed, analysts say, Iran's rulers are looking beyond the war,

buoyed by additional internal cohesion wrought by the conflict as well as by decades of indoctrination that have ensured no security force defections.

Iranian state-run TV reports daily on a campaign of arrests, with scores of people detained in each province and accused of being separatists, monarchists, traitors, or Israeli agents. What are known as confession videos also are common.

A violent crackdown on anti-regime protests in January, which were driven by economic grievances, left morgues overflowing with the bodies of more than 7,000 confirmed victims. The uncompromising demonstration of regime power set the example of total street control, for both enforcers and citizens alike, that has prevailed throughout the U.S.-Israeli military campaign.

Iran's national police chief threatened in March to use live ammunition against protesters.

"I have not observed signs of defections within the security apparatus," says Ali Alfoneh, a senior fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, adding that nationalism, rather than Islamism, has sustained cohesion. "The regime's coercive institutions are currently performing more effectively than in the past."

The regime focus on control is an indication it views the risks from unrest as on par with the ongoing war, wrote Karen Kramer and Esfandiar Aban, of the U.S.-based Center for Human Rights in Iran, in *The Washington Post*. "The Iranian regime is preparing for its next war – against its own citizens."

– **Scott Peterson** / Staff writer

As oil prices surge, Filipinos feel the impact of conflict

The Philippines imports 90% of its fuel from the Middle East. As oil and natural gas prices continue to rise, the country is confronting a familiar vulnerability: its near-total dependence on imported fuel from one specific region.

Despite government interventions, the price shock is spreading across industries quickly, tightening household budgets and showing how quickly global disruptions translate into hardship for millions of Filipinos.

Transport workers and food producers "are the first casualties of the oil crisis, as their income dwindles with each fuel price increase," says Amihan Malabay, spokesperson with the Suki Network, a consumer advocacy group.

But they are not alone. For many Filipinos, daily choices about what to eat or how to get to work are getting more and more difficult.

On March 24, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. declared a national energy emergency. He signed an executive order activating a whole-of-government response aimed at managing fuel supply while supporting transport workers, small businesses, and public transport services.

Officials say existing fuel supplies could last until June 30, giving the government a narrow window to secure additional supply, even as global markets remain volatile.

Mr. Marcos stresses that the government is actively sourcing crude oil and refined products worldwide to boost inventory and prevent a worst-case scenario, adding that authorities are not considering an energy lockdown at this time.

The crisis is already hitting hard – and not only at the pump. Rising fuel costs are beginning to push up the price of food and other basic goods. For small business owners who operate on the tightest of margins, the impact is immediate.

Romeo Esmenda makes his living driving a jeepney, a popular mode of public transportation in the Philippines. He has been driving the same route for 29 years, but he says the high cost of diesel has decimated his take-home pay.

"There are days I ask myself if I should even go out or just stay home," Mr. Esmenda tells the Monitor.

– **Mark Saludes** / Contributor

Supreme Court weighs birthright citizenship

Askeptical Supreme Court is considering the Trump administration's effort to reinterpret how the Constitution defines U.S. citizenship.

Justices challenged government lawyers during oral arguments earlier this month in the case *Trump v. Barbara*, widely considered one of the most important the court will decide this term.

The case stems from an executive order Mr. Trump issued on his first day back in office, which attempted to redefine the citizenship clause of the 14th Amendment and a federal law that codified that clause. The clause provides automatic U.S. citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof."

Mr. Trump's order would make the children of parents in the country illegally – or legally, but temporarily – ineligible for citizenship because they are not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the U.S. government. The order would apply only to future births.

The challengers claim that upholding the order would violate the Constitution and upend centuries of settled law. The American Civil Liberties Union led the class action lawsuit on behalf of families whose children's citizenship could be brought into question.

The Trump administration, meanwhile, argues that the order is both legal and necessary to crack down on illegal immigration and "birth tourism," in which a woman enters the United States for the sole purpose of securing American citizenship for her newborn.

During arguments, Solicitor General John Sauer posited that modern times require a 14th Amendment reinterpretation. Unlike the 1800s, he said, foreign visitors are now only an eight-hour flight away. "We're in a new world," he added.

"Well, it's a new world. It's the same Constitution," replied Chief Justice John Roberts.

Lower courts have consistently ruled against the White House's interpretation of birthright citizenship. If the justices rule in the government's favor, there could be as many as 6.4 million U.S.-born children without legal status by 2050, according to a recent study by researchers at Penn State University.

Much of the oral argument Wednesday focused on a different Supreme Court case. The 1898 decision in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* held that a child born in California to Chinese citizen parents was a U.S. citizen under the 14th Amendment.

The Civil Rights Act of 1866 granted automatic citizenship to persons born in the U.S. and not "subject to a foreign power." But when Congress codified the citizenship clause in the Immigration

and Nationality Act, it used the 14th Amendment’s “subject to the jurisdiction thereof” language.

“One might have expected Congress to use a different phrase if it wanted to try to disagree with Wong Kim Ark on what the scope of birthright citizenship ... should be,” said Justice Brett Kavanaugh during the oral argument.

Mr. Sauer told the justices repeatedly that they could uphold Mr. Trump’s order without overturning Wong Kim Ark. What the court should do, he argued, is acknowledge the importance of the Wong court’s use of the term “domicile” in that decision. The word appears nearly 20 times in the decision, and Mr. Sauer said it refers only to people “who are lawfully present and have an intent to remain permanently” in the U.S.

A decision in the case is expected by late June or early July.

– **Henry Gass** / Staff writer

OUR WORLD

“We should never forget what happened here.”

That’s former political prisoner Jesús Armas discussing El Helicoide, Venezuela’s notorious detention center, with NPR. Nearly four months after the United States captured Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, the country is facing difficult questions on how to reestablish democracy – and El Helicoide’s future is under discussion. A former shopping mall, it was built in the 1950s and became a torture site for the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service in the 2010s. Acting President Delcy Rodríguez proposed that it become a sports complex for low-income residents. Opposition members see that as an erasure of state crimes.

– **Whitney Eulich**

A vote on ‘the gravest crime against humanity’

As pressure builds on Western nations to atone for historical wrongs, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution in March calling the transatlantic slave trade “the gravest crime against humanity” and urging that reparations be paid to affected societies. One hundred twenty-three countries voted in favor of the measure, which Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama called “a route to healing.” Fifty-two others, including all European Union members, abstained. Israel, Argentina, and the United States voted against the measure, with the U.S. government saying that it does not support reparations for actions “that were not illegal ... at the time they occurred.” General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding.

– **Ryan Lenora Brown**

China’s gig economy boom

“Flexible employment” – as gig work is known in China – has surged. From delivery and ride-hailing drivers to freelancing hard hats, gig workers now account for 27% of the total workforce of 740 million people, and 43% of urban workers, according to Caixin Global, a Chinese financial news service. More Chinese job seekers,

including university graduates and skilled professionals, are turning to gig jobs, which once primarily attracted blue-collar workers. High unemployment for urban young people is one factor driving the trend. But the lack of steady income and a social safety net for these employees is a drawback, and the government has yet to fill the gaps.

– **Ann Scott Tyson**

Breaking through bureaucracy

Harry Kruiter, a researcher at the Institute for Public Values, found that social programs in the Netherlands had good motives, but rigidly bureaucratic rule-following often got in the way. In some cases, it made things worse. Now, his Breakthrough Method, aided by a digital tool, is helping officials in more than 100 municipalities find flexible solutions. “The question is always: What solves the problem?” he told *Reasons To Be Cheerful*, an online magazine. “There’s almost always legal room to do what’s needed.”

– **Mark Sappenfield**

NEWS: GLOBAL CURRENTS

ABUJA, NIGERIA

How fired USAID staffers are keeping the agency’s work going

Project Resource Optimization matches defunded projects with new donors, allowing the lights to stay on as American foreign aid shrinks dramatically.

By **Ogar Monday** / Contributor

A year ago, Caitlin Tulloch was working out of her spare room with little more than a laptop and a list of 22,724 names. The list was every project the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, had been funding – from efforts to get clean water to communities in northern Nigeria to an initiative for tuberculosis prevention in Myanmar. That is, until President Donald Trump signed an executive order on his first day back in office last year that froze all foreign assistance.

Ms. Tulloch, an economist who had spent years inside USAID evaluating which of its programs saved the most lives per dollar, understood what that meant.

So, she and a group of former colleagues decided to build what she calls a “lifeboat.” They would try to match the most effective of those stranded programs with new funders able to keep them afloat.

A year later, Project Resource Optimization (PRO) has connected about \$110 million in donor funding to almost 80 projects in 30 countries, according to the group. Meanwhile, government data shows that between 2024 and 2025, U.S. foreign aid fell by nearly 50%, from \$70 billion to \$38 billion.

“For us, PRO was a lifeline,” says Hadiza Marcus, director of programs at Helen Keller International Nigeria. A \$1.5 million grant the organization got through PRO’s matchmaking saved a program to help malnourished children.

“Without that support, we would have had to walk away from children who cannot afford for the help to stop,” Ms. Marcus says.

Bringing back hope

At the start, even Ms. Tulloch, a serial optimist, wasn't sure it would work. Members of the team first whittled the nearly 23,000 programs down to about 80 of the most urgent and cost-effective. They then started looking for donors to fund them.

What they got, at first, was modest: small family foundations in the United States with no prior experience in international development and “grandmothers sending what they could,” Ms. Tulloch says.

None of it was the kind of money that moves the needle on a global humanitarian crisis, but for the projects on PRO's list, it was lifesaving.

Among them was a Mercy Corps project getting clean water to communities in northeastern Nigeria. When The Christian Science Monitor visited last July, a private donor had just pledged \$128,000 to cover some of what the organization lost to USAID cuts.

“It brought back hope,” said Harun Kobia, infrastructure adviser for the project, during an interview at the time.

By August 2025, PRO had connected \$50 million in donor money to projects on its list, according to the organization, about half of what was required.

“At that point, we suspected we were going to be tapering off,” Ms. Tulloch says, “and that we had made most of the matches we would be able to make.”

What happened next surprised everyone – including her.

“In August and September, several really large and unexpected donations came through,” she says. In the space of roughly 60 days, PRO mobilized another \$60 million, enough to fund the rest of the programs on its list.

One was Helen Keller International Nigeria's grant to screen and treat children for malnutrition, and to train health workers and caregivers. Mercy Corps also received another \$1.8 million to complete another clean water project in Nigeria's southeast.

“This will allow us to reach communities that have gone years without safe water,” Mr. Kobia says.

In the cases of projects run by global organizations like Helen Keller International and Mercy Corps, getting the money to recipients was relatively straightforward. But many donors had legal and financial concerns about routing money to local organizations that weren't registered as nonprofits in the U.S. So, PRO began working with the crowdfunding platform GlobalGiving to vet and transfer about \$7 million to locally organized projects. These ranged from support for victims of gender-based violence in Ivory Coast to HIV treatment in Congo.

“The emergency is not over”

For all that PRO has pulled off, Ms. Tulloch and her colleagues are aware of the huge gap yet to be filled.

The money PRO has marshaled averages out to about \$1.4 million for each of its 80 projects. That's enough, in most cases, to keep the lights on for a year. “What it cannot do is replace the scale or the decades of institutional muscle that USAID represented,” says Grace Morgan, a senior analyst at the organization.

The gap is starkest at the local level. The \$1.5 million Helen Keller International Nigeria received via PRO's matchmaking efforts was a fraction of the \$7 million annually that USAID provided for the first phase of its childhood malnutrition project.

“What we have now keeps the program alive, but at a reduced scale,” says Ms. Marcus. The organization is now working with state governments in Nigeria to get malnutrition services directly into their budgets, hoping that public financing can eventually replace what came from Washington.

With USAID no longer operating, most American development assistance now goes through the State Department, which has pledged to make aid more conditional.

“U.S. foreign assistance is not charity, rather it is strategic capital to be wisely invested to advance U.S. interests,” said Nick Checker, who leads the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs, in a recent speech.

Meanwhile, after wrapping up the paperwork to transfer the \$110 million it matched to projects last year, PRO vetted another 30 former USAID projects and is looking again for funders.

The organization also recently became part of the DIV Fund. The privately funded American organization is attempting to do the work once done by the USAID division responsible for testing innovative new aid projects. Multiple members of PRO's team are now on the payroll there.

Others, including Ms. Tulloch, have picked up day jobs elsewhere. But they are still part of PRO, and Ms. Morgan says the organization has no plans to wind down.

“The emergency is not over,” she says. ■

Wildfires' early start puts focus on role of managed burns

Winter conditions usually tamp down risk. But across the U.S., drought and heat set table for hungry fires.

By Harry Bruinius / Staff writer

Barbara Blonder has been a bit worried about her parents' house, which sits near a Cypress swamp outside St. Augustine, Florida.

In a normal year, the saturated wetlands would protect her mom and dad from the threat of wildfires, says Ms. Blonder, vice mayor of the centuries-old historic city on Florida's eastern coast.

But like numerous states across the nation, Florida is in the midst of a severe drought spanning the entire state, and that has fueled a large number of wildfires unusually early in the season.

“If a fire gets going in there, the potential for an ember to reach their house and land on the roof is entirely possible,” says Ms. Blonder, who is also a professor of natural sciences at the city's Flagler College.

Years ago, she was a certified “burn boss” in Florida's nationally recognized wildfire prevention efforts, which include prescribed burns to remove the underlying fuel of what could turn into a massive blaze. “I can remember 15 years ago the Okefenokee Swamp [in Georgia] burned, and a lot of it got into what we call a ‘duff or muck fire’ – a fire in what is normally fully saturated soils, but now it's all dried out and it burns easily.”

The wildfire season in Florida peaks in April, May, and June, but already there have been a series of significant fires in Florida. In the south, a wildfire in Big Cypress National Preserve burned

tens of thousands of acres, sending smoke across highways and into nearby communities. Fires have flared in Central and North Florida, including in the Ocala National Forest and along the Gulf Coast, as dry vegetation and persistent winds fueled rapid spread, an unusually active pattern for this early in the year, according to federal reports and the Florida Forest Service.

The conditions driving Florida's increase in the number and size of wildfires this year have also been driving others across the United States, across a wider range of regions than is typical, alarming wildfire experts of a difficult year ahead.

Last year, conflagrations in greater Los Angeles revealed the extremes of wildfire risks in a region where such fires are notorious. In the first quarter of 2026, however, more than 1.5 million acres have burned across the United States – more than double the 10-year average for the same period, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

In the West, a historic snow drought and an intense, far-reaching heat dome over the western and central United States have contributed to the severe start to the 2026 wildfire season, experts say.

Nebraska has emerged as one of the most striking examples of this year's early wildfire surge in the Great Plains. In March, a cluster of wind-driven fires burned more than 800,000 acres across the state, churning through dry underbrush and grassland under powerful gusts, according to state incident reports.

The Morrill Fire became the largest wildfire in modern Nebraska history, consuming more than 640,000 acres, according to state officials.

Similar early-season fires have flared across states like Oklahoma, Texas, and Colorado, even as winter conditions would typically limit fire spread. The scale and timing of these fires have drawn national attention not just because of their size, but for the number of them, and how quickly many have spread.

"We've seen a lot more winter activity – dry winters with high winds or lightning storms – and we see this increased wildfire risk at times of the year when you may not associate high wildfire risk," says Chris Seaman, a services director at Rayburn Electric Cooperative in Texas, whose job includes monitoring 265 miles of transmission lines for signs of wildfire east of the Dallas-Fort Worth area. "That's kind of changed our dynamic. ... [W]e're always monitoring. We treat it as year-round now."

Drought and high winds have been the immediate causes of the number of wildfires across the United States. But the country's forest policies also have a lot to do with a growing problem, says Josh Cook, a former regional administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the second Trump administration.

"A lot of this is a man-made disaster," says Mr. Cook, who's spent decades working on forestry and land management policy in California. Over the past few decades, the U.S. Forest Service adopted what became its foundational principle: Extinguish every wildfire, as fast as possible, wherever it starts.

That philosophy, he says, spread from federal agencies into state land managers and eventually into the broader cultural assumption that trees are good and fire is bad.

"That has permeated our management practices in Los Angeles, in Nebraska, in Colorado, Oregon, and Washington. Not just forested states, but almost everywhere," he says. "We learned to love trees and we loved them to death."

The consequences, he argues, extend beyond the fire season. Dense, unmanaged forests don't just burn, they drink. The Yuba County Water Agency in Northern California now pays for forest

fuel reduction work in its watershed, he notes, because thinning trees produces a measurable increase in downstream water flow.

Mr. Cook has also spent over 25 years working alongside the Mooretown Rancheria, a Concow-Maidu tribe whose aboriginal homeland lies in Northern California. The tribe lost their land after settlers seeking gold and then timber flocked there in the 19th century, but then worked to get it back. What they found when they returned was a forest that had been overgrown, dense, choked with fuel, and burning with increasing regularity and ferocity.

"They are focused on forest fuels reduction," Cook says. "This is where the last generation worked in the forest when the forest didn't burn down every year."

Still, as the Monitor reported last October, California and other states are beginning to embrace the kind of "controlled burns" that Indigenous peoples long used to fight wildfire with fire, even though unease and suspicion still surround the practice, which is relatively new for people in the western U.S.

Florida, in fact, has been recognized as a national model in fighting wildfires, especially with its decades-long embrace of prescribed burns to remove the dry vegetation that fuels wildfires. The state conducts more controlled fires annually than any other, and maintains one of the most extensive wildfire mitigation systems in the country.

The practice itself has deep roots in Florida, Ms. Blonder notes, stretching back through Indigenous land management traditions and into the habits of early settlers. "It just makes more sense to put the money to fight wildfires in the front end – prevention, not just reaction," she says.

In some cases, Ms. Blonder says, the tools to fight the increase in wildfires are older than the nation itself, whether carried forward by the prescribed burn traditions of American Indigenous tribes or preserved in Florida's right-to-burn law – and the 2 million acres the Florida Forest Service burns intentionally every year.

The knowledge of how to live with fire, she says, has always been there, even as wildfires continue to cause more damage. "We're living the future," Ms. Blonder says. "It's come. And it isn't going to get better anytime soon." ■

MEXICO CITY; AND CARACAS, VENEZUELA

Maduro's gone. Venezuela's still waiting for real change.

The U.S. military captured Venezuela's strongman leader Nicolás Maduro in early January. Venezuelans are hopeful, but the former regime is still in charge.

By **Whitney Eulich** / Special correspondent
and **Valentina Gil** / Special contributor

When Jordan Flores walked into Venezuela's presidential offices for a news conference on March 6, it was the first time in his nearly decadelong career as a journalist that the media was invited inside the pink walls of Miraflores Palace.

For more than 20 years, the Venezuelan government tightened its grip on civil liberties, including freedom of the press, by shuttering news outlets, revoking broadcast licenses, and blocking online

news content. For a political reporter such as Mr. Flores, the opportunity last month to stand just a few feet away from Venezuela's acting president, Delcy Rodríguez, and U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum felt "historic."

And none of it would have happened, Mr. Flores says, without the U.S.-led operation to capture Venezuela's authoritarian leader and former president, Nicolás Maduro, on Jan. 3.

Since the U.S. military ferried Mr. Maduro off to a detention center in the United States, there have been important changes in Venezuela's political, civic, and economic life.

Inflation is still driving up the cost of living, but the government passed sweeping hydrocarbons reform that would make investing in Venezuela more appealing to international companies, especially now that the U.S. has lifted oil sanctions. Authorities have also loosened their grip on free expression by allowing local and international journalists into the presidential palace, permitting public protests, and passing an amnesty law for political prisoners.

Venezuelans say they are feeling hopeful in ways that few imagined possible when they rang in the new year with Mr. Maduro still at the helm.

"They have very high expectations," says Benigno Alarcón Deza, a Venezuelan political scientist and former director of the Center for Political and Government Studies at Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, a Catholic university in Caracas. "But there's also fear that this moment won't solidify into a democratic reality," he says.

Mr. Alarcón refers to something he calls "learned fear," after several events in recent years raised expectations for change – such as the 2024 presidential election, which showed overwhelming support for the political opposition – but never actually delivered on those expectations.

Many Venezuelans are feeling hopeful again, experts say, but most of the changes since Jan. 3 could be easily reversed. A presidential election is, in theory, on the horizon. But no date has been set, and Ms. Rodríguez could benefit from its delay.

"The dictator was taken out of Venezuela, but we maintain a dictatorship," says Paola Bautista de Alemán, director of the Institute of Political Studies FORMA, and a public policy fellow at the University of Notre Dame.

"Grandmother of the resistance"

Despite the easing of U.S. sanctions after Mr. Maduro's ouster, economic relief for much of the citizenry has not yet materialized. Prices for basic goods are climbing and Venezuela still maintains the highest annualized inflation rate in the world, estimated at around 600%. Since Jan. 3, Venezuela's currency has lost nearly 20% of its value against the U.S. dollar.

The grim economic picture is slightly tempered by people's hope that change is coming. What is not clear, though, is how long they are willing to wait to feel a real difference in their lives.

The U.S. government said in February it had returned \$500 million to Venezuela from an initial sale of oil following Mr. Maduro's capture. Members of the public are starting to ask why that hasn't affected the minimum wage, which has been locked in at 130 bolivares (about 28 cents) per month since 2022. According to Cendas-FVM, a research center for the union representing Venezuelan teachers, in February, the cost of a basic food basket was nearly \$650 for a family of five, costing well more than 2,000 times the minimum wage.

On March 12, hundreds of workers and retirees took to the streets in Caracas to demand a higher minimum wage. "Tired of trying to make my salary do magic," one protest sign read. To the

surprise of many, protesters were allowed to reach their intended destination: the National Assembly.

During Mr. Maduro's nearly 13 years in power, public protests were met with a violent response from government security forces. In 2024, following the presidential election that Mr. Maduro claimed without evidence to have won, thousands of people were imprisoned for taking part in demonstrations.

Now, people feel emboldened to speak up. "We've lost our fear," says Emilio Rodríguez, a retiree who joined a subsequent minimum wage protest on March 25. He says he stretches his income of roughly \$0.60 cents per month "like play-dough – the furthest I can."

The sense that the U.S. is pressuring Venezuela's leadership to change is part of what is feeding a renewed sense of hope. "The government has no choice but to heed our requests, because the one setting the agenda is the U.S. government," says Génesis, a protester who declined to give her last name, instead offering an alias, "the grandmother of the resistance."

Unlike the early March protest that made it to the National Assembly, subsequent marches on March 23 and March 25 were pushed off course by the national police. They weren't violent, but this was a reminder that Ms. Rodríguez's administration might be less than committed to loosening restrictions on free expression.

Mr. Flores, the journalist, felt similarly about his visit to Miraflores Palace. When he first arrived, he was told he – as well as many other local reporters – was not on the list and would not be allowed entry. Eventually, it was U.S. government employees who put pressure on the Venezuelan press office that got him permission to attend the news conference.

"The whole day felt like a reflection of this current political climate," Mr. Flores says. "The government feigning openness while secretly maintaining its old ways." He says the same trend has been repeated since Jan. 3, including with a new amnesty law.

Still awaiting amnesty

In theory, the February amnesty law applies to all political offenses committed after 1999, when Mr. Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez, rose to power, through 2026.

However, the law was passed by the National Assembly without input from the opposition, and observers say it has not been fully enacted. Some 700 political prisoners have been released to the great relief of their loved ones, but hundreds more are still languishing in detention.

"There have been people denied amnesty, and what's worse is that more than 10,000 people have tried to access the judicial benefits," says Dr. Bautista. "The black box of human rights violations in our country is still unopened," she says.

One well-known political prisoner arrested in July 2021 and accused of terrorism was released in February. But by March, the government announced it was denying amnesty to Javier Tarazona, who directs an organization tracking abuses by the Venezuelan military and Colombian armed groups along the border. He continues to protest publicly, despite the risks.

"We haven't seen real structural change from the government, but we are seeing the courage and persistence of the people," says Dr. Bautista.

A murky political road ahead

Since the contested 2024 presidential election, many Venezuelans hoped that if Mr. Maduro were removed from office, the opposition would automatically step into power.

The U.S. recognized Venezuelan opposition candidate Edmundo González as the winner of that election, despite Mr. Maduro claiming victory. And opposition leader María Corina Machado, who was barred by the government from running, was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize last year for advancing democracy inside Venezuela.

But in January, U.S. President Donald Trump left power in the hands of Ms. Rodríguez, Mr. Maduro's former vice president, not the popular opposition.

The Trump administration has said its ultimate goal is to restore democracy in Venezuela, but no election date has been set. Many here believe Ms. Rodríguez is already angling to be the next president. It's in her interest, experts say, to delay elections as long as possible, in part so that there is a better chance of seeing economic improvements before the next election.

"There will have to be free and fair elections in Venezuela," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on March 31. "We have to be patient, but we also can't be complacent."

"What kind of country will emerge from all of this?" asks Dr. Bautista. "I don't think anybody knows. But it's clear the driving force of change inside the country is the courage and the hope of the [Venezuelan] people." ■

ROME, GA.

More liberals are buying guns. Why?

Rising gun ownership among Democrats is reshaping U.S. gun culture and recalibrating the debate between gun rights, civic safety, and government control.

By Patrik Jonsson / Staff writer

On a hillside outside Rome, Georgia, a sign on a small building announces a firm called Osprey Shooting Solutions, whose Latin motto translates to "In peace, like a wise man, he should make suitable preparation for war." Next door is a dusty gun range where a man practices quick-draw fire with a trainer behind him. The pop-pop-pop of small-arms fire fills the air.

Rural ranges like this have often been seen as the purview of white conservative men, some of whom style themselves as citizen-protectors.

Yet owner Edgar Mills, a former Green Beret soldier, is a key player in what has become a noticeable shift in who owns firearms in the United States, and why.

In the last couple of years, a growing number of women and people of color have begun training with Mr. Mills. His clients are conservatives, moderates, liberals, and those who defy simple labels altogether. His star student is Eva, a former infantry soldier who appears at the range in pink stockings and painted nails.

In some ways, Mr. Mills' expansive view of gun ownership is still unusual in a firearm culture often associated with support for President Donald Trump and his villainization of Democrats and progressive politics. Yet those who see the Second Amendment's right to bear arms as a bulwark against oppressive government are beginning to include liberals who increasingly find themselves in political – and social – crosshairs.

Laying out the welcome mat to Democrats and others who don't fit a traditional conservative gun-owner profile has become good business, especially at a time when gun sales, which peaked at about 22 million in 2020, have slowed. Gun owners who lean left politically "are looking for an accepting place where people aren't stink-eyeing them," says Mr. Mills, whose solid physique hints at years of war-zone deployments. "Nobody wants to be in an environment where they're not wanted."

Across the U.S., gun ownership by people who identify as politically left of center is rising. One NBC News survey showed that the number of Democratic households with guns rose from 33% in 2019 to 41% five years later. Other studies confirm that gun culture is now far more diverse than is often portrayed in the media, and that Second Amendment activism is a key driver for many new gun owners.

Current events and politics, experts and observers say, are playing a role in who carries what and why.

A trend that began with women and Black people outbuying white men at gun shops during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated with the fatal shooting of Alex Pretti in Minneapolis in January, according to liberal gun-rights groups. A legal gun carrier who never drew his weapon, Mr. Pretti was killed as he tried to help a woman knocked down by federal immigration enforcement agents. His death raised the stakes among some left-leaning Americans worried about armed agents trampling their civil rights.

In the process, some Americans have shifted from opposing guns to embracing them, setting up new political dynamics in a restive America.

"What has changed with Trump's second term and the Alex Pretti incident is the idea that guns aren't just for personal self-defense, but may also be to resist government tyranny," says David Yamane, author of "Gun Curious: A Liberal Professor's Surprising Journey Inside America's Gun Culture." "This becomes a challenge for a lot of centrist liberals because they place a lot of faith in the state," he adds. "Then they see what could go wrong if the state falls into the wrong hands."

Why buy a gun?

Broadly, polls consistently show that Republicans support gun ownership at much higher rates than Democrats. At the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, one banner showed a Confederate battle flag with an assault-style weapon and the taunt "Come and take it."

Democrats, by contrast, traditionally favor stricter gun laws. In 2019, when former Texas Rep. Beto O'Rourke declared, "Hell, yes, we're going to take your AR-15, your AK-47" at a Democratic presidential primary debate to endorse a mandatory buyback program for assault-style weapons, the audience's cheer drowned out the rest of his answer.

In recent years, gun ownership as a political statement – and for political reasons – has accelerated, with more citing the need for self-defense and liberal gun organizations seeing heightened interest. That sales growth has blunted the "Trump slump" for the firearms industry, which usually sees lower sales when gun owners feel confident that a new president is protecting gun-carry rights.

Professor Yamane, a sociologist at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, began studying gun culture a decade ago to understand its mainstream appeal. To better understand it, he ended up buying a gun himself. The move was unusual – and unpopular – among his peers, he says, and "has been a solitary experience."

But he is not so lonely anymore.

While gun sales have fallen from a high-water mark in 2021, annual sales still hover around 15 million each year and are still higher than before the pandemic, according to The Trace, a nonprofit publication that reports on U.S. gun violence. Nearly 5 million guns were sold in the first four months of 2025, it says.

L.A. Progressive Shooters, a gun-education group in Los Angeles that welcomes people regardless of their politics, has had to expand its increasingly sold-out training sessions. Another nationwide group based in Newton, Massachusetts, the Liberal Gun Club, saw its membership rise by 66% – from 2,700 members to 4,500 – in the year before Mr. Pretti’s shooting. The organization passed its total 2025 training numbers in the first three months of 2026.

Some of the new gun groups eschew political affiliations. Others cater mostly to liberals.

In Shelton, Connecticut, for example, an organization named A Better Way 2A promotes gun rights for progressives and sells a variety of merchandise, including stickers that say, “You can’t vote away fascism. Buy a gun.” The Socialist Rifle Association, founded in Kansas in 2018, claims 10,000 donors and says it seeks to advance “an inclusive, safe and healthy firearms culture in America to combat the toxic, right-wing, and exclusionary firearm culture in place today.”

“Owning a gun now is not an automatic indicator that you’re most likely a conservative,” says Jordan Levine, co-founder of A Better Way 2A. “You have far more people who are politically involved – Gen Z and millennials especially – who see things and feel this dread that your most paranoid conservative gun owners have felt for so long. But now, it’s not liberals coming for your guns, but conservatives coming for our rights.”

Different views among Democrats

For those who see guns as problems, not solutions, the trend is jarring. Most researchers agree that stricter gun laws save lives, though Americans are still split on whether gun rights or gun control is more important.

Now, with the public on high alert about armed federal immigration enforcement, that debate, once confined largely to political circles, is now on Main Street.

“There’s something that has been lost with the aggressiveness of what’s happening,” says Dru Stevenson, a professor at South Texas College of Law in Houston. “We don’t know where the boundaries are anymore, and where do they stop?”

The shootings in January of Mr. Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis have crystallized those concerns and turned arguments for stricter gun rights upside down.

Conservatives’ concerns, once fueled in part by the National Rifle Association’s descriptions of federal agents as “jack-booted government thugs,” became visceral for liberals who watched the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown in Minnesota. Mr. Pretti was hailed as a hero among those on the political left for defending his community against federal agents carrying out a deportation agenda in a way many believed clashed with local values.

Videos have since emerged of armed Minnesotans standing guard in neighborhoods, including one in which a gun carrier says, “This is my area. ... I protect my people.”

Many liberals identified with those protesting, says Edward Gardner, head of the Liberal Gun Club in Massachusetts. “Renee Good looked like a middle-aged soccer mom. Alex Pretti looked like an average white guy with a beard. [The killings] twinged something in people’s brains: If it can happen to them, it can happen to me.”

Guns as a common cause

But the question of whether calls for gun rights and regulations are evenly applied is a nuance embedded in the legal arc of the Second Amendment in American history.

The amendment has always been messy. The Founding Fathers wrote it in part to discourage tyrannical government. But in practice, it was mostly used to justify repelling Indian attacks on settlements and, in the South, to intimidate abolitionists. The Second Amendment might also be a reminder to respect other people’s spaces, suggesting a broader notion, as Mr. Mills, Osprey’s owner, puts it, that an armed society that is ready to defend itself may, in fact, be a better society.

For Mr. Mills, preserving expanded gun rights helps protect all Americans from government overreach. Not that he doesn’t worry about gun safety for the public at large. But that’s a quandary, he says, he cannot solve. “What we know about the government is, if you give them an inch, they take a mile.” ■

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

19

Percentage of Americans who scroll social media first when trying to gather information about breaking news. By contrast, 36% of Americans have a preferred, trusted news source they turn to first. Only 1% of those surveyed turn to an AI chatbot for news updates.

5.6

Percentage of Americans ages 22 to 27 holding a bachelor’s degree who are unemployed. The rate, from late 2025, is the highest in three years, signaling a tough labor market for recent college graduates.

58.9 MILLION

The number of people living in Italy, a population count that is stabilizing after 12 years of decline. Despite its birth rate decreasing, immigration is offsetting this. Italy has one of the largest foreign-born populations in Europe, with roughly 6 million people.

10

Megawatts, the minimum peak electric demand for large data centers that will be subject to new limits in South Dakota, an emerging hot spot for such centers. Gov. Larry Rhoden has signed a law mandating that the centers ensure water use does not strain local resources and that they cover their own electrical infrastructure costs.

15,800

The number of years that dogs have been around. Recent DNA analysis from archaeological sites in the United Kingdom and Turkey has revealed the world’s oldest genetic material linked to dogs, which is believed to date to the Late Upper Paleolithic period.

– Victoria Hoffmann / Staff writer

Sources: Pew Research Center, Entrepreneur, Yahoo News, South Dakota Searchlight, Nature

LONDON

The Iran war and international law: Fears grow of ‘era of impunity’

Maybe threats from Washington and Tehran will turn out to be bombast, and a way will be found to start winding down the Iran war.

Yet the targets of the saber-rattling – energy and desalination plants in Iran and in U.S.-allied Gulf Arab states, on which tens of millions of people rely – have spotlighted an issue likely to keep reverberating beyond the Middle East, no matter how and when the fighting ends.

It’s best captured by the official rubric of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, a key part of the international rules of warfare agreed upon after World War II: “the protection of civilian persons in time of war.”

The threats to critical civilian infrastructure have deepened concerns that the Iran war is dealing a major new blow to long-accepted norms governing how and when nations should be able to wage war.

Actions proscribed include attacks on civilians, or civilian infrastructure, without a demonstrable military justification.

That legal framework has been eroding for more than a decade: Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad’s targeting of rebel-held areas with chemical weapons and barrel bombs during his country’s civil war prompted warnings at the time of an “era of impunity” for attacks on civilians.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has since shrugged off the need for “protection of civilian persons.” Russia has fired thousands of missiles and drones at energy facilities in Ukraine.

The scale of destruction in Gaza from Israel’s retaliation for Hamas’ October 2023 kidnappings and killings has also provoked accusations it has violated international law.

Yet the Iran war is being viewed as a challenge of a different order – because America was not only a supporter, but also a prime architect, of the “rules-based” order forged since World War II.

The absence of support from key U.S. allies has been only partly because they were kept in the dark about the war plans, or because of President Donald Trump’s alternately dismissive and hostile treatment of them since he returned to office.

Nor is it down to sympathy for the regime in Tehran. Allied leaders have stressed that they share Mr. Trump’s view that Iran is repressive at home and violently destabilizing abroad, and should not be allowed to get a nuclear weapon.

Yet a number of allies have questioned the president’s claim to have launched the war because of an “imminent” threat from Iran – the kind of preemptive attack that might pass muster under the U.N. Charter.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney called the war “inconsistent with international law.” Political leaders in other Western countries – including NATO members France, Spain,



By Ned Temko
Connecting
key themes in the
world’s news.

and Norway, as well as neutral Switzerland – have also voiced that view.

U.S. allies have signaled a readiness to join in policing a reopened Strait of Hormuz – the waterway through which a significant part of the world’s supply of oil, gas, fertilizer, and other materials passes. But only if that follows an internationally negotiated arrangement to reopen it.

The fear, however, is of a new escalation, and a new challenge to the civilian safeguards in the Fourth Geneva Convention, expanded in 1997, and in a further U.N.-sanctioned statute in 1998.

They have raised that concern in response to a move by America’s Iran war partner, Israel, to reoccupy southern Lebanon, clear border villages of civilians, and possibly destroy homes as part of a campaign to disarm the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militia.

In a statement in early April, European foreign ministers held Hezbollah ultimately responsible for having joined the war and firing into Israel.

But the ministers called for protection of the “civilian population, humanitarian personnel, peacekeepers, and civilian infrastructure, including airports, ports, and bridges across the country, in line with international humanitarian law.”

That could prove an even higher hurdle if the United States and Iran act on their threats.

In a March 21 ultimatum, President Trump gave Iran 48 hours to open the Strait of Hormuz, or he would “obliterate” the country’s energy plants. He then extended the deadline, saying that if “no deal is made” over the next few weeks, U.S. forces would “hit each and every one of their electric-generating plants very hard and probably simultaneously.”

Iran responded to the initial ultimatum by threatening to attack power and desalination plants in the Arab Gulf states – an especially dire prospect for their populations, which depend on desalination for fresh water far more than the Iranians.

Iran’s reply to Mr. Trump was to threaten “more crushing, broader and more destructive actions.” The two then agreed to a temporary ceasefire brokered by Pakistan.

For Mr. Carney, the Iran war has vindicated a message he’s been delivering for months now: that the world order is dominated by self-interested, great-power “hegemons,” and the old “rules-based order” isn’t returning.

But his call for fellow “middle powers” to wield their collective weight in response could provide a clue to postwar efforts to keep at least some of the rules of war alive.

In a high-profile speech weeks before the Iran war, he urged a mix of pragmatism and “fundamental values.”

Those values, Mr. Carney said, included “sovereignty and territorial integrity, the prohibition of the use of force, except when consistent with the U.N. Charter and respect for human rights.” ■

How do Americans see each other? What new data says about perceptions of morality.

Researchers asked people from different countries to rank the morality and ethics of their fellow citizens. The results could offer insights into how communities can rebuild trust.

By **Mark Sappenfield, Sara Miller Llana, and Audrey Thibert** / Staff writers
and **Ismira Lutfia Tisnadibrata** / Special Contributor

BERLIN; TORONTO; BOSTON; AND JAKARTA, INDONESIA

This year, the Pew Research Center decided to try something new. In its annual survey on global views of morality, it added a fresh question for its respondents from around the world.

Do you feel the ethics and morals of others in your country are good?

The United States finished last.

It was the only country among the 25 surveyed where more than half of respondents rated the ethics and morals of people in their country as somewhat bad or very bad.

Canada – which usually ranks similarly to the U.S. in such surveys – finished first. Some 92% of Canadians rated fellow Canadians as having somewhat good or very good ethics and morals.

It was a perplexing result, running dramatically against longtime trends shown by similar studies.

“There’s no paper out there that explains this,” says Joshua Conrad Jackson, a behavioral scientist at the University of Chicago. “We don’t really know what’s going on in the survey.”

Researchers are trying to piece together what it might mean. Given that this was the first time the question was ever asked, was it a blip? An outlier? Or has it unearthed something new about how Americans think about morality and each other?

No one is willing to say they have the answer. But a range of theories have given fresh fuel to decadeslong conversations about polarization and social trust. Do Americans increasingly see one another as unethical? Not everyone thinks that’s necessarily what this survey highlights. But looking at the U.S., Canada, and Indonesia – which came fractionally second to Canada in the Pew survey – offers insights and ideas to consider, if not definitive answers. And it suggests potential ways back for the U.S. Not only are moral views of one another often wrong, but America was also once a global leader in overcoming entrenched lines of division.

Many theories

Part of the challenge with drawing firm conclusions from this particular survey is that researchers are not entirely sure what respondents are telling them. Morality is a difficult subject to quantify; people disagree on the definition, and some respondents deny that it is even a thing. For that reason, studies on morality are often closely linked with similar studies on ethics, kindness, or trust.

In the past, these studies have revealed several findings that generally hold true across societies and over time. Respondents

think the morality of those close to them is stronger than the morality of those they don’t know, and they believe that morality in society is getting worse.

The results of the latest Pew survey don’t fit neatly into either of those trends.

Adam Mastroianni – a social psychologist who, one colleague says, “knows more about this topic than anyone in the world” – is stumped.

“It appears to be out of step with a lot of other surveys we’ve seen,” says Dr. Mastroianni, author of the science newsletter *Experimental History*.

But he has a theory.

“Here’s what I think might be happening,” he says in an email conversation. “When you ask Canadians: ‘How moral are Canadians?’ they hear that question as, ‘How moral is Canada compared to other relevant countries?’ And they say: ‘Very moral,’ because in the news they mainly see other countries blowing each other up.”

Otherwise, why would so many Canadians say other Canadians are moral, when in other surveys, Canadians routinely say nearly half of Canadians can’t be trusted?

Pew’s Kirsten Lesage is loath to draw conclusions, even as an author of the study. But a few things stick out to her:

- Usually, young adults and older adults have broadly similar views on trends in morality. But on this question, younger adults in the U.S. were an outlier. They were more likely to see other Americans as having bad morals and ethics.

- Pew has data on Christians and religiously unaffiliated people in 17 countries. In half of those countries, including the U.S., people who are not religiously affiliated are more likely than Christians to rate morality as bad.

- The data does appear to have a political element. In the U.S. and beyond, respondents who support the party out of power are more likely to see others as having bad morals.

Pew’s question might hint at “affective polarization,” says Dr. Jackson. This is deeper than political polarization. It’s polarization based on what you think of others generally. In other words: Do you feel a strong connection with like-minded people and strong negative emotions toward others?

Data shows clearly that the U.S. has high and accelerating levels of affective polarization. In fact, Dr. Jackson says, when you overlay one respected study about affective polarization around the world on the Pew question, “The rank order [of countries] roughly matches.”

The big outlier in that case is Canada, which normally scores lower. But Keith Neuman, a senior associate at the Environics Institute, a Canadian polling firm, says that might be a matter of timing. The question from Pew was posed at a time when U.S. President Donald Trump took office threatening to annex Canada.

“Canada was feeling an existential threat; that has a unifying tendency,” says Dr. Neuman.

Founding philosophies

In many ways, the data reveals Indonesia as an interesting case study, says Dr. Lesage of Pew. In its global morality report, the survey asked respondents to consider the morality of nine behaviors, including divorce, extramarital affairs, and gambling. Indonesia is among the strictest across the board, seeing almost all the behaviors as immoral.

That might seem to indicate a society with harsh moral judgments of others. But the reverse is true. As in Canada, 92% of Indonesians saw their fellow Indonesians as somewhat moral or very moral.

Part of that can be attributed to having the shared values of a dominant religion. Nearly 90% of Indonesians are Muslim.

“Laws and institutions in Indonesia are still strongly influenced by religious values, although they are often paraphrased in more universal language,” says Nadia Yovani, a sociologist at Universitas Indonesia in Depok.

The Muslim concept of five daily prayers, she says, teaches discipline and regularity. “This value of discipline is then reflected in social rules, such as the obligation to arrive on time at school or work,” she adds.

The same dynamic holds true in Sweden, though in a different way. Sweden ranked fourth in the Pew question, with 88% of Swedes saying other Swedes were somewhat good or very good morally. But that is based on a strong shared ethic grounded in secular humanism.

Yet Indonesia has also done something else. Back in 1945, in an effort to unite the vast and culturally diverse archipelago into one nation, Indonesia’s founders outlined an official state ideology known as Pancasila. Its five principles promote religious tolerance and an embrace of the moral traditions of all Indonesia’s faiths. Today, references to Pancasila abound, from Jakarta gift shops to church facades in Borneo.

“For a heterogeneous society like Indonesia, Pancasila provides common ground that allows different groups to coexist,” says Tubagus Haryo Karbyanto, secretary-general of Forum Warga Kota, a nongovernmental organization advocating on social issues.

Dr. Yovani notes that, at the end of Ramadan, when Muslims break a full month of fasting during the day, non-Muslims in Indonesia will often prepare the first celebratory meal for their Muslim neighbors. Pancasila touches on something deep in the Indonesian identity, others agree.

“Such traditions have long been part of everyday life,” says Elfrida Manurung, a postgraduate student at Indonesian Christian University in Jakarta. “So whether or not Pancasila exists, Indonesian society already has moral values inherited from its cultural heritage.”

Canada looks to similar historical influences. John Ralston Saul, a Canadian essayist and novelist, argues that well before Canada became a nation, it was constructed upon a “triangular foundation” of three distinct peoples: Indigenous, French, and English. And in an isolated, northern climate, they all had to work together to survive.

“So the idea that you could have a country which was based on a kind of cooperation between differences without removing the differences, and make this a way of life, then you’ve got something quite interesting,” he says. “I think that that’s sort of the basis of what Canada is.”

In 1867, modern Canada was founded on peace, order, and good government – in contrast with the American concept of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, notes Michael MacMillan, a co-founder of the Samara Centre for Democracy in Toronto.

“It’s perhaps accurate, maybe fanciful, that Canadians get along better because we needed to get along better,” he says. “Or maybe that’s what we were taught to believe.”

Cracks in American polarization

For its part, the U.S. has a motto on every piece of currency that should evoke the same sense of collectivism: *e pluribus unum* – “out of many, one.” But that founding ideal is being put to the test. The rise of affective polarization is “steeper in the U.S. than in any other country surveyed,” says Dr. Jackson.

Yet researchers have found that views about the morality and

trustworthiness of others are often built on false perceptions, both in the U.S. and beyond.

“People think other people dislike them more than they dislike others,” says Dr. Jackson. The driver of affective polarization is: “I don’t like them, because they don’t like me.”

Michael Jackson has been thinking a lot about morality recently. He’s studying it in his college philosophy class in Las Vegas. On a recent visit to Boston, he struggles for his own definition, but says people do seem too quick to judge others today.

“For sure, people go, ‘Oh, you don’t agree with me, so you must be an idiot, so I hate you,’” he says.

The reasons for this are a matter of debate. Some point to the rise of social media and cable news. Others point to trends in geography, with like-minded people moving to the same areas.

Another reason could be how different groups prioritize certain values, says Jan Voelkel, an assistant professor of public policy at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. “It’s very clear that Democrats and Republicans both really care about morality and just that they care about a different kind of morality.”

Democrats might be focused more on issues of reducing harm and fostering fairness, while Republicans value a form of loyalty seen as patriotism, he says. “Republicans also think that it is really important to respect certain traditions,” he adds. “Democrats do not necessarily think that that is a strong moral value in itself.”

Yet he notes something important. While Republicans’ and Democrats’ dislike for each other has grown enormously, their differences on actual policy haven’t changed much.

“Our differences have less to do with the facts and policy and [rational thinking], and much more to do with emotion and identity and fear,” says Amanda Ripley, author of “High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out.”

She calls it a “revenge cycle,” and Lucas Carvalho can see that.

The student at Northeastern University in Boston pauses outside class on a crisp New England day. In general, he believes that “the majority of people are quite moral,” he says. “But I think that people just have a bad outlook on other people.”

Mr. Carvalho sees a lack of community contributing to a knee-jerk judgmentalness.

“I would say as a society, I think we’re more individualistic,” he says. “Because we’re not as much of a community nowadays ... people aren’t as open to new ideas.”

As a result, “the slightest thing can tick someone off.”

In theory, the solution is fairly straightforward, says Ms. Ripley. It’s about building relationships across divides.

“People want to trust each other. People want to live in a country where they can feel proud of their neighbors. That’s a very basic need,” says the author. “If we think the other side or our neighbors are really immoral, and then we find evidence that they’re not as immoral as we thought, people do react in a positive way to that.”

That remedy would have been very familiar to Alexis de Tocqueville, the French historian who chronicled America in the 1830s. To him, what made America exceptional was “the art of associating” beyond the strict class lines that divided Europeans of that era.

“Americans of all ages, all conditions, all minds constantly unite,” he wrote in “Democracy in America.” “Americans use associations to give fetes, to found seminaries, to build inns, to raise churches, to distribute books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they create hospitals, prisons, schools.”

It might be getting harder to see this principle in action stateside, but it rings true to Annisa Nurul Utami.

In her work as a high school principal in Garut, in the mountainous Indonesian province of West Java, she's worked closely with Muslims and non-Muslims alike. She's witnessed many admirable qualities – such as charity, respect, tolerance – across demographic lines.

“I think morality itself isn't a single, fixed thing,” she says. “It's influenced by many factors that are interconnected. In Indonesia, religion is definitely a strong foundation. It can strengthen things like cooperation and *gotong royong*,” or the Indonesian idea of “shouldering burdens together.”

But everyone has the capacity to be moral, she says, “whether it's for spiritual reward, obedience to God, or simply to live harmoniously with others.” ■

THE EXPLAINER

Why the US will pay a French company nearly \$1 billion to give up wind farm plans

The Trump administration's deal to pay TotalEnergies to shift from wind farms to U.S. fossil fuel investment fits within a strategy to restrict offshore wind industry.

By **Cameron Pugh** / Staff writer

In late March, the Trump administration announced it had struck an unusual deal. The U.S. government will pay TotalEnergies, a French power generation company, \$928 million to scuttle its plans to build two wind farms off the coasts of New Jersey and North Carolina. Together, the projects could have powered some 1.7 million homes.

The deal represents a new wrinkle in President Donald Trump's campaign to jettison America's nascent offshore wind industry, which many environmentalists see as key to reducing the country's carbon footprint. Mr. Trump has criticized wind power as ineffective and costly, and his administration has tried to curtail wind infrastructure development.

“Offshore wind is one of the most expensive, unreliable, environmentally disruptive, and subsidy-dependent schemes ever forced on American ratepayers and taxpayers,” said Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, in a news release announcing the deal.

Environmentalists see the administration dismantling offshore wind as shortsighted and damaging to Americans' pocketbooks. While offshore wind remains more expensive to install and run than other energy sources, costs have fallen significantly in recent years, driven by growing interest from nations and corporations, as well as improving technology. Offshore wind costs have decreased more than 50% globally since 2013, according to a 2024 report from the U.S. Department of Energy. They are expected to keep declining as the industry becomes more established.

“It's also just a real hallmark of the administration's hostility to clean energy at a time when clean energy projects are some of the biggest and cheapest and fastest coming on line,” says Ted Kelly, director and lead counsel for the Environmental Defense Fund's

clean energy program. “Instead of encouraging that, we're now not only discouraging it, but taxpayer money [is] being paid to stop it.”

The deal with TotalEnergies raises questions not only about the future of offshore wind in the United States but also about the extent of the president's authority to influence private business transactions. Here's a look at some of the issues at play.

Q: How will the deal work?

The Trump administration will essentially refund the \$928 million TotalEnergies paid for leases to build Attentive Energy, about 40 miles off New Jersey, and Carolina Long Bay, roughly 22 miles off North Carolina. Federal law mandates these leases, which are typically acquired through a bidding process, for anyone seeking to generate electricity in the waters off the country's coasts.

In exchange, the French firm has agreed to redirect that money into oil and gas projects in the United States. Those investments include Rio Grande LNG – a liquefied natural gas plant in South Texas – and unspecified oil projects in the Gulf of Mexico. In the Interior Department news release, TotalEnergies' CEO Patrick Pouyanné was quoted as saying that fossil fuel projects are a “more efficient use of capital in the United States.” The company also pledged not to build any offshore wind projects in the U.S., citing unspecified national security concerns.

Further details about the deal, which was first reported by The New York Times, have not been made public. Environmental advocates interviewed by the Monitor say it is highly unusual for a president to transfer taxpayer funds to a foreign company to prevent private investment. Most of the revenue from offshore leases goes to the Treasury Department's general fund, which finances daily government operations, and the money TotalEnergies paid for the leases might have already been spent.

TotalEnergies, one of the largest liquefied natural gas companies in the world, already has investments in the Rio Grande plant dating back to at least 2023. It's unclear how much money the company might now funnel into the Texas plant. It's also unclear from what source the Trump administration would draw the funds. Some reports have suggested the money will likely come from the Justice Department's Judgment Fund, which the government uses to pay court judgments and settlements. Neither TotalEnergies nor the Interior Department responded to requests for comment.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, an arm of the Interior Department, awarded TotalEnergies leases for both Carolina Long Bay and Attentive Energy in 2022. According to the leases, which are publicly available, TotalEnergies paid \$133 million for the land encompassing Carolina Long Bay and \$795 million for the territory slated to become Attentive Energy.

Q: What other actions has the Trump administration taken on offshore wind?

In December, the Interior Department issued a work stoppage halting construction on five wind farms off the East Coast. The administration cited a classified report from the Defense Department claiming offshore wind posed a national security threat. The administration also pointed to a finding in a public Energy Department report that said turbine blades and towers can create radar interference. Radar systems raise their threshold for detection to combat this, the report says, and might “miss actual targets” as a result.

Each of the farms sued over the work stoppage. Judges, after viewing the classified report, ruled against the government in all

five of those cases. The classified report has not been made public, and litigation in the cases is ongoing.

On his first day in office, President Trump issued an executive order temporarily suspending offshore wind leasing pending an assessment by the Interior Department. He cited “the need to foster an energy economy” that meets rising demand, as well as unspecified impacts on marine life, ocean currents and wind patterns, and energy costs. A federal judge in Massachusetts ruled the order unlawful in December. The Trump administration filed a notice of appeal in February.

Q: What do environmentalists say about the deal?

Climate advocates and researchers argue that offshore wind is an effective and efficient method of generating clean energy. They’ve criticized the deal with TotalEnergies as an abdication of the country’s responsibility to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

“This is as much an attack on planet Earth relative to its ecological health as it is an attack on this particular technology,” says Stephen A. Smith, executive director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy.

Over its lifetime, the Energy Department says, a coal-fired power plant produces 90 times more greenhouse gas emissions than a wind farm.

Research suggests that offshore wind is more reliable than onshore wind, because the turbines tend to be larger, and the wind is stronger, faster, and more consistent over open ocean. South Fork Wind off the coast of New York – one of the country’s few completed offshore wind projects – produced electricity more than 92% of the time during its first year of operation, according to the farm.

As the war in Iran has sent oil prices soaring, Brad Campbell, president of the Conservation Law Foundation in Boston, says renewable energies like offshore wind could help insulate consumers.

“Offshore wind is a homegrown energy supply. We’re not dependent or vulnerable to price spikes from disruption of international markets,” Mr. Campbell says. “It provides stability, particularly to the electric grid, when there are disruptions to oil and gas supply.”

Q: What kind of impact will the deal have on offshore wind development in the U.S.?

With the Trump administration’s offshore wind losses in court, the president might be seeking new ways to move against the industry, says Mr. Kelly, from the Environmental Defense Fund.

“They might turn their attention to trying to prevent any more projects from getting started,” he says.

Mr. Campbell, who is also a lawyer, questions whether the president has the authority to conduct this kind of deal. In general, Mr. Campbell says, the president cannot spend money that has not been appropriated by Congress. ■

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

NEW DELHI

‘Change of heart’: Indian nonprofits promote a culture of reuse for wedding celebrations

From reworn bridal dresses to recycled wedding favors, New Delhi-based groups help couples honor both tradition and the environment on their big day.

By Safina Nabi / Contributor

Anu Priya Kumari always dreamed of wearing a wedding dress like the bright, ornately embroidered ones she saw on social media. But she knew that buying such a dress would stretch the limited savings of her farming family in India’s eastern Bihar state.

Then, a local volunteer for the New Delhi-based nonprofit Goonj reached out to the family about its free wedding kits, which provide garments and other wedding items assembled from donated materials. Instead of buying new clothes that would likely be worn only once, Ms. Kumari decided to use one of Goonj’s kits for her wedding last November. It had nearly everything needed for a bride’s big day, including an elaborate red dress, several saris, a pair of sandals, cosmetics, and jewelry.

“I was very happy when I saw the dress,” Ms. Kumari says, speaking over the phone from her village, Jhamatia. “We would never have been able to afford something so beautiful.”

Goonj is one of at least two nonprofits based in the Indian capital aimed at helping couples rethink extravagant weddings with single-use items. Founded in 1999 by Anshu Gupta, Goonj collects wedding clothes used mainly in urban centers and redistributes them through community-led programs, mostly across rural India. Local volunteers identify engaged couples and discuss options for lower-cost and more environmentally friendly weddings that still honor tradition.

“In India, there are three things people often make larger than life and spend their entire earnings or savings on: weddings, rituals after a death in the family, and building a house,” says Mr. Gupta. “With the wedding kits, we aimed to promote sustainability and help families avoid falling into debt. Over time, we also saw a change of heart as people began making more conscious choices.”

Cutting textile waste

More than 10 million weddings take place each year in India, the most in the world.

“Natural fiber textiles behave like organic waste and can generate methane in landfills under anaerobic conditions,” says Shobha Vijender, the founder of Sampurna, a New Delhi-based nongovernmental organization. “Large-scale disposal events like weddings may significantly add to this burden.”

India accounts for about 8.5% of global textile waste, generating an estimated 7.8 million metric tons annually. About half comes from discarded clothing and household textiles.

Sampurna collects wedding fabrics and textiles used in religious

rituals and repurposes them into handcrafted items, including tablecloths, jackets, wall hangings, and seat-cushion covers. The group also uses the collected material to make *potlis* – elegant, reusable bags that can contain wedding favors to distribute to guests or even serve as wedding gifts.

Ms. Vijender says the *potlis* have been popular. Most of the proceeds from the modest cost that Sampurna charges – from 50 cents to \$1 per bag – go to women from marginalized Indian communities who create and stitch the bags.

Reviving a “legacy of sharing”

Both Goonj and Sampurna have evolved over the years. Goonj began primarily as a clothing redistribution effort. As volunteers encountered families struggling with the financial and social expectations for marriage ceremonies, the organization gradually expanded its work to include the wedding kits. Sampurna’s gift bag initiative emerged more recently with a similar concern about the environmental costs of modern weddings.

Goonj says it has repurposed more than 72 million kilograms (72,000 metric tons) of donated material since 2014. Since 2023 alone, the organization has distributed more than 800 wedding kits for brides from low-income families. Those who received the kits initially kept them, but Goonj’s local volunteers now work to recirculate them.

Meanwhile, Sampurna has produced more than 6,000 items since 2023 that give once-worn bridal and ceremonial textiles a second life. Together, the efforts suggest a small but growing shift toward weddings supported by reuse rather than new consumption, according to Anita Patil, who manages a nationwide network of partner NGOs for Goonj.

Karthik Natarajan, an architect and textile product designer who has worked for more than two decades on sustainability initiatives in India and Germany, says Goonj’s and Sampurna’s initiatives send a message to younger generations.

“In many parts of India and South Asia, wedding garments and household items were traditionally passed down through families from mothers to daughters and granddaughters,” he notes.

“Fast fashion gradually pushed that culture aside, but efforts like these are helping revive that legacy of sharing and reuse.”

“Good for the planet”

Arvind Charpota, a farmer in northwestern Rajasthan state, had imagined a grand wedding, including an embroidered outfit for himself with well-made shoes and headwear. But after a local Goonj volunteer pointed out that spending his savings on a single day could leave him and his bride struggling, Mr. Charpota requested a wedding kit.

“To my surprise, the kit ... was beautiful,” he says, speaking by phone from the city of Banswara. “I am glad I changed my decision. It helped me save money, and I still got to wear something even better than I had imagined.”

Wedding photographs show Mr. Charpota in a fine yellow suit with pink-and-yellow headwear and black shoes. His hands are adorned with henna.

“I have encouraged two more grooms to use my attire, and I will continue doing so,” he says. “It’s not only conscious spending but also good for the planet.” ■

REPORTERS ON THE JOB

DENVER



Sarah Matusek

Call it Christmas in spring. In late March, a belated Christmas card arrived from a former source, a Southwest rancher I’d interviewed two years ago. His holiday family newsletter came complete with pics of cute grandkids. I left a voicemail thanking him and said we should catch up. Other past sources who have generously shared their time came to mind, so I reached out to four. One, a Japanese American detention camp survivor, responded with a story idea. Another, an artist, wants me to visit her soon. When so much of my day is spent solo, typing away, I count these connections as gifts – and grist for future articles. ■

ROME, GEORGIA



Patrik Jonsson

Perseverance is almost always the key to solid reporting. For a story about gun ownership, I met Edgar, a weapons trainer, at a rural shooting range. It was a good interview, and after an hour, it seemed a natural time to end. But sensing there was more to learn, I asked him a bit more about his work. He wasn’t just a range coach, it turned out. He also runs urban survival scenarios to teach leadership skills. He recently ran one that featured a hunt for a rogue militia. The tale became the glue that held the story together. The wait is often worth it. ■

LIMA, PERU



Howard LaFranchi

Over decades of reporting abroad, my first stop is always the nearest newspaper kiosk. It’s a great way to get insight on local events, trends, and sources. On a past trip to a newsstand in Lima, Peru, a report on the death of literary giant Mario Vargas Llosa pointed me to the café where he had held court.

Talking with regulars there became my lede.

This habit has been more difficult with the decline of newspapers. Still, on a recent trip to Lima to cover its April 12 presidential election, I returned to the same kiosk in the Miraflores neighborhood that I’d patronized before. I met Raquel, who told me she has been selling newspapers there for 45 years. “Thanks for being a repeat customer,” she said, with a twinkle in her eye. ■

RWENZORI MOUNTAINS, UGANDA



Simon Vera

Heights make me uneasy. But somehow, when the Monitor asked me to report on the disappearing glaciers of Uganda for an upcoming story, it didn’t quite register that glaciers tend to sit on top of mountains.

To reach them, I spent two days in rattling buses and then hiked five days through the Rwenzori mountain range, dreading the final ascent. As a guide held my hands, I traversed narrow ridges and steep rock faces, regretting my life choices. But I got there eventually and feel privileged to have seen the glaciers. In 10 years, these glaciers will probably be gone, according to the scientists I interviewed, while many Ugandans who depend on their meltwater have never seen them. ■

Children's innocence and the Iran war

One theme of the Iran war has been rising concern for children. More to the point, the concern is over how to safeguard their inherent innocence and propensity for peace.

One example focuses on Iran's use of 12- and 13-year-olds in "war-related roles," such as security patrols. A teachers union in Iran has condemned such militarization of childhood. It warns about placing children in harm's way, which would be a violation of international child rights.

For its part, the United States was criticized after an American missile struck near an Iranian girls' school, resulting in more than 170 deaths. The White House claims children are not U.S. military targets. Meanwhile, the Pentagon has launched a formal investigation of the incident.

Israel has appealed to the United Nations to respond to Iran's alleged indiscriminate missile attacks on "innocent civilians and children." And on March 3, the Security Council met to discuss the general topic of children and education during conflict. The Iran war was top of mind, starting with comments by U.N. Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo.

"When conflicts erupt, children are among those most severely affected. We have been reminded of this truth over the last two days," she said. "Schools in Israel, the [United Arab Emirates], Qatar, Bahrain and Oman have closed and moved to remote learning owing to the ongoing military operations in the region."

One reason for this strong spotlight on children in war lies in the expanding set of treaties and global norms over decades to protect youth in conflicts. The U.N. has found that many armed militias are willing to accept that the innocence of children requires they not be used as soldiers.

The focus on children has also sometimes helped end wars. In recent decades, outcry over the use of child soldiers during conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, for example, raised pressure on belligerents to compromise. Sierra Leone's 1991–2002 civil war led to the first conviction for the war crime of recruiting children as well as attention on the rehabilitation of former child soldiers.

At the same time, many current wars, including in Myanmar and Yemen, involve children as combatants. In Iran, many parents accept the regime's recruitment of children. Still, the worldwide attention on the issue might turn public attitudes to further support the safeguarding of children's innocence – and perhaps help turn the tide of the war. ■

Truth-seekers in Russia

After more than four years of war in Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin might be discovering that adherence to open communications can be essential for a motivated military. A Kremlin attempt to steadily shut down Russia's most popular and effective messaging platform, Telegram, has stirred dissent among civilian volunteers who assist the war online.

They are the patriotic digital warriors who arrange money and supplies – the resources the military does not reliably provide – for

soldiers on the front lines.

Without access to an independent app like Telegram, which has been slowly throttled for months, this civil society of auxiliary supporters could weaken their support of the government. Morale in the army ranks might fall fast.

In March, one well-known blogger, Ilya Remeslor, who had been loyal to Mr. Putin, turned on the Kremlin for its "strangling of internet and media freedoms." He has since been put in a psychiatric ward.

Spotty access to Telegram has begun to reduce the ability of soldiers to message their families. For many Russians, an open internet is essential to send alerts about Ukrainian missile attacks. A government-backed new app, called Max, is widely seen as inadequate in its capabilities as well as an attempt to control all digital communications.

"All military work goes through Telegram – all communication," a Russian soldier told Politico. A total ban on the app "would be like shooting the entire Russian army in the head."

Frequent internet blackouts have already disrupted daily life. Memes have made fun of Russians using paper maps, pagers, and walkie-talkies. In March, protests in defense of Telegram were planned in more than two dozen cities and towns but were prevented by local officials. And as more people rush to use censor-skirting VPNs (virtual private networks), officials are clamping down on those, too.

A survey in March found 83% of teenagers have reacted negatively to the internet restrictions. Nearly half said they were angry, and 15% said they were crying.

The inventor of Telegram, Russian tech billionaire Pavel Durov, said the Kremlin's moves on free speech are "a sad spectacle of a state afraid of its own people." Yet his fellow-citizens' response to the expected end of Telegram could end up being a force for freedom.

And the same ideal of liberty, it turns out, is just what the people of Ukraine are defending. ■

Local bonds in a war can give peace a chance

In one of Africa's largest countries, fighting and wartime atrocities have intensified as Sudan marks three years of civil strife. Amid the violence as well as food scarcity, however, ordinary Sudanese continue to support each other through mutual aid networks.

These humanitarian efforts, known as emergency response rooms, won a prestigious award in March from a British think tank, the Chatham House Prize. The award shines a spotlight on the effectiveness and civic underpinnings of such community associations.

Sudan's war has displaced nearly 13 million people, and the emergency response rooms have sprung up to source and distribute food, water, and medicine. They often have volunteers cooking meals in open-air kitchens where fleeing families eat together. Chatham House praised the "impartial nature and attempts to provide aid to all."

That spirit of inclusiveness during a conflict is not confined to Sudan. In many conflict zones, such efforts help lay a groundwork for peaceful coexistence at the community level.

"Innovation often emerges most forcefully in fragile environments," according to Ibrahima Bokoum, a community leader in the

eastern part of Congo, an area riven by rebel warfare. Writing in a recent Atlantic Council report, Mr. Bokoum noted, “Resilience cannot be imported; it must be cultivated locally.”

Peacebuilding during a violent conflict

“People ... assume that peacebuilding only takes place after the guns have fallen silent, when in fact peacebuilding can and does take place before, during and after violent conflict,” observed Dylan Mathews, head of the international nonprofit Peace Direct. The challenge, he wrote in a 2022 article, is to cultivate “societal attitudes that foster peace.”

Last year, Peace Direct supported local initiatives in 33 countries, including Myanmar. There, under a dictatorship, “Hate speech, propaganda and rumours kept neighbours as strangers,” the organization reported. But local communities forged connections across ethnic lines, which eventually morphed into violence prevention and mutual aid networks.

Observing community interactions at a very different period in history, French historian Alexis de Tocqueville identified “the art of associating” within local communities as a key to democracy. He was talking about the United States in the mid-1830s, several decades after it had become independent – and a couple of decades before it fought its own civil war.

Through active, iterative associations within local communities, Tocqueville observed, “sentiments and ideas renew themselves, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed.” ■

READERS RESPOND

Going the extra mile

Cathy Buckenmaier’s essay in *The Home Forum* in the March 9 Weekly, “Our beloved Bertha, in it for the long haul,” was a great article. I felt the same about a 1980 Datsun B210 hatchback on which I put 247,000 miles, enjoying (for the most part) its five-speed grip on a mountainous commute between New York City and the western Catskills. (The scenic route involved more than a few “hill roads” with 11% to 12% grades.)

Tears came to my eyes when my trusty mechanic finally said, “Time to go shopping. I can’t find nothin’ to weld this here onto.” After that, all my cars were hard-pressed to compete with those memories, never mind the Datsun’s track record for gas mileage and reliability.

Elizabeth Ramsey
Delaware County, New York

Please explain

I think of the March 16 Weekly as an explainer issue. Its four focus articles – context about the Iran war, the Sunni-Shiite divide, the ayatollah’s death, the Strait of Hormuz – were extremely helpful to my understanding of the war. I really appreciate the explainer focus in this issue and more generally.

I especially liked Scott Peterson’s article “Ayatollah Khamenei’s killing: A turning point for the Islamic Republic,” as it helped me understand what life experiences have shaped people’s values and beliefs.

Mary Harrison
Arlington, Massachusetts

THE HOME FORUM

Fix my watch, tell me a story

A visit to a venerable watchmaker brings out stories of watches, including an heirloom pocket watch that saved a life.

Who even has cause to utter the word “watchmaker” anymore? I, for one, haven’t worn a watch in many, many years. Nor do most of the people I know. But a lovely gold pocket watch came down to me from my great-grandmother. Its only flaw was that it didn’t run. So I asked around and was told that there was a watchmaker in Bangor, Maine, only a few miles from my home.

The shop was everything I had hoped it would be: small, intimate, with oak cabinets, specialized hand tools, and lovely old timepieces lying in state in a glass display case. The pièce de résistance was the workbench, easily a hundred years old. This bench, flanked by myriad small drawers, was specifically designed to place the work surface at eye level. The pullout, cloth-covered shelf was a clever touch to catch any tiny part that might fall. The watchmaker himself, a white-haired éminence grise, was bent over his work, a jeweler’s loupe in his eye, when I walked in. He greeted me warmly.

I soon learned that Keith Taber had been at the job for 55 years – in other words, since I was in high school. He was a legacy watchmaker, having been trained by his father, who learned the trade at the Waltham Watch Company Factory in Massachusetts, now defunct. I presented my pocket watch to him; he examined it and then said two welcome words: “No problem.”

I was moved to ask Mr. Taber a few questions. Did people still wear watches? He asserted that they certainly did and that wristwatches were making a comeback. “Mostly baby boomers and now, younger guys,” he said. Interestingly, he attributed the uptick to the isolation induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. “People stayed home. They found Grandpa’s old watch.”

The stories took wing from there, and I perched ripe for the listening. Any interesting customers? Why, yes. “About 20 years ago, [the musician] David Crosby walked into my shop with his wife’s Rolex. He had heard about me and wound up staying for an hour.”

How about interesting watches? Yes, indeed. “An older gentleman came in with a Panerai Rolex used by the Italian navy in World War II.” Mr. Taber went on to explain that only 20 of these original diver’s watches were made for two-person scuba teams that could go after German submarines. I asked why only 20 were made. “There was too much radioactive material in the illuminating paint, so they were discontinued. These watches are priceless. The owner came in and wanted to sell it, but on further reflection he changed his mind.” And then there was the time someone brought in a Patek Philippe, “the most desirable brand in the world, some going for millions of dollars.” I asked if he was able to fix it. Mr. Taber’s matter-of-fact response: “Oh, yes.”

Perhaps the most striking story concerned an antique silver pocket watch with a deep dent in the casing. The man who brought it in was a descendant of a Civil War soldier who had

carried the watch into battle. The man was shot, but the bullet struck the watch, saving his life. That fortunate event allowed the soldier's family line to continue generation upon generation. "Maybe that watch was the precursor to the Kevlar vest," Mr. Taber remarked with a chuckle.

As far as Mr. Taber knows, he's the only watchmaker between Bangor and the Canadian border. In fact, many of his customers come from these nether regions. "So business is good?" I inquired. He smiled as he said, "I'm busy all the time."

This gladdened my heart. In this digital age, when the workings of our electronics are invisible to us, and when "replace" has largely done away with "repair," it's important to be reminded of a time when the world was mechanical. Things were so finely tuned that it took a human eye – assisted by a jeweler's loupe – to keep the nuts and bolts of daily life ticking along.

Speaking of which, I picked up my great-grandmother's pocket watch three days later and held it to my ear. It purred like a kitten.

– Robert Klose

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

'Be not deceived' – Paul's prompt to see what's true

Most people rely on the physical senses to inform or confirm their life experience. But do the physical senses show us what's really happening? Or are they deceptive?

Last year the unreliability of the physical senses was reinforced for me on a visit to Hawaii when the constellation Orion leaned over so far that it looked like its foot would dip into the ocean and get wet. I laughed. Of course, Orion wasn't tipping over; the Earth was rotating on its axis at 1,000 miles an hour.

Paul, one of the greatest Christian missionaries ever, warned against self-deception, writing, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7, 8).

Paul urges his audience to grasp their innate God-given capacity to understand Spirit, God, as the source of their well-being – in short, to see what's true.

We know from the first chapter of Genesis in the Bible that Spirit's creation is spiritual and "very good." That raises the question: How can we yield to the spiritual facts of God's harmonious creation instead of consenting to the opposite so-called facts of matter?

To answer this, it's helpful to consider what Mary Baker Eddy, the discoverer of Christian Science, says in "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" on page 471: "The facts of divine Science should be admitted, – although the evidence as to these facts is not supported by evil, by matter, or by material sense, – because the evidence that God and man coexist is fully sustained by spiritual sense. Man is, and forever has been, God's reflection. God is infinite, therefore ever present, and there is no other power nor presence. Hence the spirituality of the universe is the

only fact of creation."

God, Spirit, universal good, is the only power. Understanding that Spirit alone has power and presence dispels matter's deceptions and brings healing. I experienced this truth when I went on a hike with my husband. All of a sudden, large black wasps swarmed my bare arm and stung me. I felt intense pain, and welts rose on the arm. By the next day, the symptoms had spread aggressively, suggesting an allergic reaction.

That's when I prayed by asking God, Spirit, to show me more of my true spiritual being. Then I recalled that on the hike I was voicing criticism of our city government for making decisions that I felt ignored what longtime residents wanted. I hadn't been appreciating all the good that Spirit gives everyone, including me. No longer deceived by a material view, I noticed the pain stopped and the sting marks quickly faded away, and there were no aftereffects.

Since then, I've become more alert to deceptive thinking, and when I spot it I immediately focus on God, good. By letting my thought move higher with the joy of spiritual sense, I see more of God's glorious earth and feel more of Spirit's peaceful presence.

"Spirituality lays open siege to materialism. On which side are we fighting?" (Science and Health, p. 216). This is a crucial question. We don't have to be led astray by the testimony of the physical senses. Instead, we can each daily perceive more of the spiritual sense of life.

– Elizabeth Beall

CULTURE

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

From music to majors: Hip-hop advances in academia

As some colleges offer full degrees in hip-hop and others expand course offerings, educators and students believe career paths will keep opening.

By Ira Porter / Staff writer

On a recent gray and dreary day, lecturer Chesney Snow circles a studio at Princeton University's Lewis Center for the Arts, surveying students who are role-playing on yoga mats. Their aesthetic of Nikes, shell-toe Adidas, and Pumas matches the subject perfectly: hip-hop.

Mr. Snow's students – seven women and one man – are preparing to perform spoken word and body movements as an accompanist plays a black upright piano.

"Center yourselves," Mr. Snow instructs. "Being vulnerable in hip-hop is really, really central to the work that we have to do."

The course name is Miss-Education: The Women of Hip-Hop.

Although an elective on this campus, hip-hop has advanced in academia, from the first class on the genre being taught at Howard University in 1991 to minors and certificates, and now to full degrees in hip-hop offered at schools like Johns Hopkins University's Peabody Institute in Baltimore and Loyola University New Orleans. Some educators say hip-hop studies can boost student engage-

ment and foster culturally relevant pedagogy. It also bridges the gap between academic theory and lived experience.

A Broadway actor and singer who founded the American Beatbox Championships, Mr. Snow envisions the class as a study of feminism in hip-hop. But he also wants it to be performance-based, similar to the popular early aughts MTV program “The Lyricist Lounge Show,” which blended sketch comedy and hip-hop. He says he uses musical theater, comedy, and hip-hop to delve into critical social issues.

His students read scholarly books, learn the importance of documenting history, and conduct research through interviews. Performance is next, with original student pieces in the pipeline.

How we got here

Hip-hop music, created in the 1970s on New York City streets, was once considered a fad, but it has grown to become arguably the most influential music genre in the United States and a dominant force globally, creating billionaire artists and producers and dominating music charts. Hip-hop has influenced global fashion and social justice movements and solidified itself as a major art form. From rapper and music producer Kendrick Lamar’s Pulitzer Prize to classes in esteemed university lecture halls, hip-hop has solidified its status.

Academics say that, like jazz in its early days, hip-hop has relatively few academic programs for now, but it will keep growing.

Hip-hop practitioners are being hired to teach, students are writing dissertations, and more graduate courses that draw research dollars are being taught. Money has been pumped into conferences at institutions such as Ohio State University, Columbia University, the University at Buffalo, and Rutgers.

Harvard University started the Marcylia H. Morgan Hip Hop Archive & Research Center in 2002. In 2012, the University of Arizona was the first to offer a minor in hip-hop studies. A year later, Harvard offered the first Nasir Jones Hip Hop Fellowship.

In 2021, Loyola University New Orleans offered the first Bachelor of Science in Hip Hop and R&B. In January of this year, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign board of trustees approved a Bachelor of Arts degree in Hip Hop Culture and the Arts. The Illinois Board of Higher Education is reviewing the proposal.

From study to career

Bachelor’s programs in hip-hop signal not only students’ willingness to invest four years studying it in college. It also means students believe hip-hop degrees will help them transition into marketable careers spanning from hip-hop artists and producers to teaching and researching the art form’s contributions to the world, similar to jazz more than half a century ago.

“Hip-hop has been a galvanizing grassroots arts movement that grew from our cities, including having a vibrant history and presence here in Baltimore,” says Fred Bronstein, dean of the Peabody Institute, the country’s oldest conservatory, at Johns Hopkins University. Mr. Bronstein says that the major grew from a popular class that composer and pianist Wendel Patrick started teaching in 2018. Enrollment in the course has tripled over the last five years, he says.

The major blends Peabody’s music engineering and technology programs with performance training, the foundation of its strong reputation.

Mr. Patrick leads the program and recruited Grammy Award-winning rapper Lupe Fiasco to be a visiting professor. Mr. Fiasco has held other prominent faculty appointments at schools such as Yale University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“We in academia have to break down artistic silos, expand the canon, and teach all our students to think more broadly about what it means to be a musician,” Mr. Bronstein says via email.

Using a hip-hop lens to see the world

Timothy Welbeck is an assistant professor of Africology and African American Studies and the director of the Center for Anti-Racism at Temple University. Last year, he began teaching a class called Kendrick Lamar and the Morale of m.A.A.d City, which uses five of Mr. Lamar’s studio albums – a blend of Black music art forms, such as rap, jazz, and rhythm and blues – to discuss themes like police brutality, housing segregation, and urban policy.

In addition to his Pulitzer, Mr. Lamar is an Emmy Award-winner who recently became the most decorated Grammy Award-winning rapper of all time.

“It’s a legitimate form of academic study, but it took a long time for the academy to figure that out, and there was a lot of stumbling along the way,” Mr. Welbeck says.

He says that it was hard for academics to wrap their heads around what hip-hop studies can be.

“If we can talk about Shakespeare, we can talk about Kendrick Lamar. If we can talk about Beethoven and or Chopin and Bach, and talk about baroque music and how that illustrated the tones and the impressions of the time that it was released, we can talk about how ‘good kid, m.A.A.d city’ reflected the times that it was released,” Mr. Welbeck says, referring to Mr. Lamar’s second studio album.

How it relates

Toby Jenkins, a professor of higher education at the University of South Carolina and associate provost for faculty development, teaches a course on hip-hop culture and has documented some of the history of hip-hop and academia. She says that she treats hip-hop as a tool for student engagement.

“I think it is attractive to students to have institutions that have unique offerings that seem exciting,” Dr. Jenkins says. “[Students] expect it to feel a little bit different than high school felt, and to be more life-giving and exciting.”

The class she teaches this semester touches on hip-hop culture and elevates themes in everyday life, such as what it means to have ambition, to affirm people in their lives, or to be creative and authentic to oneself. There’s the music and the genre’s visual and audio components. Students create playlists for each class and discuss reading material through a hip-hop lens.

“As some scholars become really important, you see somebody writing a book, and they’re on The New York Times Best Seller list, then [hip-hop] becomes okay,” Dr. Jenkins says. “You see an institution like Harvard creating the Nas fellowship, and it becomes OK. Harvard has a whole archive on hip-hop. This is viable.”

“A serious class”

Back at Princeton, second-year neuroscience major Rachel Adjei participated in a class recently where students interviewed Grammy-nominated rapper Rah Digga over Zoom to learn about documenting oral history.

“What really drew me to the class was the title, the Miss-Education portion,” says Ms. Adjei, referring to the play on the self-titled iconic debut solo album “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,” the first hip-hop album to win a Grammy for Album of the Year.

“Not only are we going to be working with hip-hop and creating raps, but also embodying them on stage and giving yourself a

presence,” she says.

Faculty understand that parents paying more than \$80,000 a year for their children to attend college might be dubious. But as hip-hop on campus grows, so might the career opportunities that have nothing to do with performance, educators say.

Jediah Worrell is a second-year African American studies major. She was all smiles as she and her two group partners performed their skit in Mr. Snow’s class. An amateur rapper herself, she raced to a microphone in front of a camera, where Rah Digga smiled back and answered her questions. She enjoys the class, but when she told her mom about it, she got questions.

“My mom’s response was, ‘So when are you going to take a serious class?’” she laughs and shakes her head. “But I was trying to explain to her, as an African American studies major, this is a part of my field. This is also a part of the culture and what we’re studying, the interior of Black life.” ■

BOOKS

Are you there, readers? It’s a Judy Blume biography.

A new book illuminates the prolific author’s life, work, and fame. Her frankness made her a lightning rod.

By **Barbara Spindel**

In his new biography of author Judy Blume, Mark Oppenheimer observes that for many young people in the 1970s, reading Blume’s work was “not just a rite of passage but a habit.” That habit was enabled by the writer’s prodigious output: Between 1970 and 1975 alone, Blume published a remarkable 10 titles. Among them are some of her best-known books – including “Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret,” “Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing,” and “Deenie.” Blume continued writing for children, teens, and adults into the 21st century, if at a less breakneck pace. Her books have sold more than 90 million copies worldwide.

The engaging “Judy Blume: A Life” begins with its subject’s childhood in suburban New Jersey and works its way to the present. Now in her 80s, Blume, after two divorces, is happily married. She’s the proprietor of a nonprofit bookstore in Key West, Florida, where she’s known to greet worshipful fans. The question animating Oppenheimer’s biography is why Blume’s work has resonated with so many readers for so many decades, making her the rare author to achieve mainstream celebrity status.

To answer the question, Oppenheimer, himself a longtime admirer of Blume’s work, turned not only to the books but to the woman herself. Blume sat for hours of interviews and answered hundreds of questions via email; she also connected Oppenheimer with her family members and friends. Intriguingly, he reports that after he sent Blume a draft of the manuscript, she responded with a 40-page memo filled with suggestions, some of which he accepted and others not.

Blume was born into a middle-class Jewish family in 1938. She married her first husband while still a college student at New York University and gave birth to a daughter and son within the next four

years. As a restless homemaker in the Jersey suburbs, she framed her college diploma and an academic award above her washing machine, “to remind myself that I was an intelligent, educated person,” she recalled years later.

Bursting with ambition and creative energy, Blume began a short-lived stint as a felt artist before turning to writing. Her initial forays into children’s literature were, in her words, “terrible ... imitation Dr. Seuss.” She racked up a pile of rejection letters before a weekly writing class in New York City helped her find her voice and hone her craft.

According to Oppenheimer, Blume was wildly successful because she brought realism to children’s literature, tackling topics like puberty, divorce, and bullying in her fiction. (He acknowledges that she was not alone in doing so, citing Norma Klein and S.E. Hinton.) “Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret,” told in first person, “takes seriously the ... development of an adolescent girl, from the narrative point of view of that girl,” he writes. The book also credibly captures the voice of its protagonist, 11-year-old Margaret Simon, with Blume mining material from her own childhood.

Blume’s frankness made her a lightning rod. Her work has frequently been targeted for banning, leading her to free-speech advocacy and a long affiliation with the National Coalition Against Censorship.

Oppenheimer, the author of 2021’s “Squirrel Hill” about the shooting at Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life Synagogue, considers Blume’s entire body of work. While her oeuvre is often discussed in terms of hot-button topics, the biography offers a welcome reminder that Blume has excelled at lighthearted, funny books for children, such as 1980’s “Superfudge” and its spinoffs.

The author also provides sharp critical assessments of Blume’s work for adults, including her 1983 novel “Smart Women,” about a trio of divorced single mothers. “Everybody in the book has the emotional age of about twenty,” he writes.

Perhaps most significantly, Oppenheimer conveys what the books – and their author – have meant to readers. At the height of her success, Blume received roughly 2,000 letters per month, many from young people confiding in her about their problems. Blume famously corresponded with some of her readers for decades. “Is there another contemporary author who has so collapsed the distance between herself and her readership?” Oppenheimer asks.

Oppenheimer’s once-warm relationship with Blume reportedly cooled after she sent him that 40-page memo. For his part, Oppenheimer seems aware of the sensitivities involved in writing a biography with input from its living subject. He states in an epilogue that his job “is to offer one plausible, but selective, account of the subject’s life.” If that account – as laudatory as it generally is – has not pleased Blume, it is likely to appeal to her legions of fans. ■

Groundbreaking musician Alice Coltrane gets her due

By Mackenzie Farkus

The life of jazz virtuoso Alice Coltrane has often been overlooked in favor of her husband, the late John Coltrane, one of the most influential figures of jazz. But in Andy Beta's "Cosmic Music: The Life, Art and Transcendence of Alice Coltrane" readers get to know the groundbreaking musician as she finds both musical and spiritual transformation.

Born Alice McLeod in 1937 as the fifth of sixth children, Alice spent much of her childhood at Detroit's Mt. Olive Baptist Church, where her mother and father were active in the musical programming. At age 9, she began to follow in her parents' footsteps, joining several choirs and playing both piano and organ in services.

Detroit was a proving ground for musicians of all stripes, where a young singer or instrumentalist could achieve the best education by simply going to church or walking down the streets. It helped that the city's public school system "was accepting when it came to girls - both Black and white - learning music," at a time when "it was still rare ... for women to have a proper musical outlet beyond the church."

By the time she was in high school, the "extremely quiet and shy" Alice was well-known in her community as a multi-instrumentalist, playing jazz at school and in nearby clubs. But the pursuit of further jazz and classical musical education led her to travel to New York and Paris in the late 1950s. It was during these travels that Alice first watched John Coltrane perform. But it wasn't until a show at New York City's famous Birdland Jazz Club where Alice finally met him backstage, finding her match in the equally quiet and shy musician. Their whirlwind romance began on the John Coltrane Quartet's European tour in 1962, followed by their eventual marriage in 1965.

Their marriage, however, was short-lived: John Coltrane died in 1967. In the wake of her husband's death, a grieving Alice - widowed at just 29, with four young children - was adrift. After the intervention of family and friends, she threw herself back into music, mastering the harp while balancing child care and housework. So, too, did she find solace in the maintenance of her husband's legacy, combing through his personal archive to release posthumous albums, such as 1971's "Sun Ship." Alice's first three solo albums during this time included the well-received "Ptah, the El Daoud" in 1970.

Still, a number of critics were quick to dismiss Alice as just the "widow of John Coltrane." Some even went so far as to describe her as "the Yoko Ono of jazz," overlooking Alice's own talent. Yet fellow musicians, including Pharoah Sanders and Laura Nyro, recognized her musicianship, becoming frequent collaborators.

A 1970 trip to India proved to be a lasting influence on her music. Alice, finding spiritual transformation along with a cohort of fellow musicians, adopted the name Turiya. Upon her return to the United States in 1971, the album "Journey in Satchidananda" debuted, drawing upon the gospel music of her church years and her newly found Hindu faith.

By 1975, Alice had moved to California, further immersed herself in Hinduism, and stepped away from almost all public performances - save for those honoring her late husband. Alice passed away in 2007, shortly before a fire at Universal Studios destroyed archival materials from both Alice and John.

For Beta, Alice's music "was always there, waiting for that mo-

ment when a new generation would be ready to hear its message, aware and openhearted to 'the most beautiful music in the universe.'"

Artists such as Radiohead, singer-songwriter Laura Veirs, and the innovator Flying Lotus - Alice's grandnephew - all count the musician as an inspiration; award-winning rapper and pop singer Doja Cat is also a fan.

Beta's writing is engaging and approachable, allowing those unfamiliar with both Alice and the jazz world at large to appreciate Alice's life and contributions to the genre - restoring her legacy for all to enjoy. ■

SUDOKU

Sudoku difficulty: ★★☆☆

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

How to do Sudoku

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

Crossword and Sudoku solutions

BRITAIN'S SUPERSTARS

N	I	T	A	R	E	S	E	B	N	E	B
R	R	A	R	E	A	S	N	O	W	N	O
U	A	S	N	A	P	N	A	I	T	N	A
S	B	S	E	B	M	A	X	E			
		G	A	G	N	S	E	N	O	R	W
S			P	A	C	K	E	T	S		
		L	A	I							H
O		A	L	A	D	S	S	E	S		P
D					K	E	N	E	D		S
		T	S	L	A	S	T	A	G	S	T
C		S		L	E	I	D	L	E	N	B
		O	M	I	T	E	D	I	T	E	O
		H	I	S	A	G	N	A	L	I	T

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

Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Eng. ____
- 4. Badgers or bugs
- 8. Certain queen's digs?
- 12. Groundbreaking discovery?
- 13. Clean up your language?
- 14. Go without saying
- 15. "Ich ____ ein Berliner"
- 16. Neutral state?
- 17. Arch.'s drawing
- 18. Male-only, partywise
- 20. Tenth out of ten
- 22. Bashful, but not Dopey
- 24. Lamented loudly
- 28. Like vinyl records
- 32. Texas tourist stop
- 33. Catwalk line?
- 34. Garlic, in Grenoble
- 36. Clown's projectile
- 37. Wife of Woodrow
- 40. Some sugar containers
- 43. Head south, so to speak
- 45. Choke on a joke
- 46. Academic hurdle
- 48. Retrocedes
- 51. Can of worms, say
- 54. Daytime refreshers
- 56. Artesian water
- 58. "Rents" alternative
- 59. Carpet measure
- 60. Mismanage
- 61. Giovanni's "good"
- 62. Grilling instruction
- 63. "Cat on a Hot ____ Roof"

DOWN

- 1. Court tactic
- 2. Flower of one's eye?
- 3. Camp sight?
- 4. Equine exclamations
- 5. Cookbook direction

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15				16					17			
	18		19			20		21				
			22		23		24			25	26	27
28	29	30				31		32				
33					34		35			36		
37			38	39		40		41	42			
43					44		45					
			46			47		48		49	50	
51	52	53			54		55			56		57
58					59					60		
61					62					63		

© Lovatts Puzzles

- 6. Country music's Vince
- 7. Beefeater's choice
- 8. Low-cost lodging
- 9. Bratty kid
- 10. Engage in rivalry
- 11. List ender
- 19. Aesop's thistle-eater
- 21. Aral or Caspian
- 23. Congressional affirmative
- 25. Hair-raising site
- 26. Time going backward?
- 27. Gazelle girls
- 28. Brow-wiping utterance
- 29. Word processing command
- 30. Arabian Peninsula boss
- 31. Chip topper
- 35. Jet flyer's problem
- 38. Crossword fly
- 39. Machinist's ____ nut
- 41. "Veni, vidi, vici" speaker
- 42. Frequent 007 adversary
- 44. Mamas' mamas
- 47. Part of a stable family?
- 49. Borscht bit
- 50. Darjeeling duds
- 51. Seek apples, perhaps
- 52. Jaw dropper
- 53. Tolkien's The Prancing Pony, e.g.
- 55. Princess perturber
- 57. Supersized coffee pot