

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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International reporting beyond the US storyline

Before senior global correspondent Mark Sappenfield traveled to Greenland last month, we spoke about what sort of insights we hoped an in-depth story about the territory might offer to our readers.

There were, after all, a lot of stories about Greenland in the mainstream press at the time. Most of these focused on President Donald Trump's assertion that the United States needed to take control of the island for security reasons, or on Europeans' vehement objections to this plan. Analysts weighed in on everything from the role of Greenland in filling the world's critical mineral needs to its significance in controlling north Arctic shipping lanes.

But Mark wanted to go beyond those headlines. He wanted, he explained to me, to try to also show readers the situation in Greenland from the Greenlandic perspective.



By Stephanie Hanes
Print Editor

"There's a line from the story where I say that the singular focus on Greenland as a pawn in the imperial game leads to a very warped view of Greenland," he wrote to me after filing the story. "Like you, I've seen very little news coverage about Greenland on its own terms."

The Monitor – and Mark – has a history of this sort of coverage. When Mark covered Afghanistan, for instance, he did not embed with the military because, as he puts it, "I felt that wasn't the story.

"Instead," he says, "I traveled around Afghanistan trying to tell Afghan stories. I'm sure the U.S. story was valuable, but I wanted our readers to see Afghanistan as a three-dimensional place. It's still one of the most amazing places I've ever been, with the most generous people."

He dressed in a *salwar kameez*, although, as he notes, nobody would mistake him for an Afghan.

"I can't grow a beard," he says.

Mark says he stuck out in Nuuk, Greenland, too. And part of that was because of how he was approaching his job, with the Monitor ethos that people and places have inherent value and import – not just because of what they mean to the U.S., or any other superpower or storyline.

Two of his sources, he said, told him that "they agreed to talk only because I was doing a different kind of story. Otherwise, they said, they were done talking to the media." ■

Gaza's border with Egypt reopens, but slowly

Navigating border restrictions, armed gangs, and airstrikes, the first groups of displaced Palestinians have returned to the besieged Gaza Strip after nearly two years, passing through the Rafah crossing from Egypt.

Yet the crossing, currently Gaza's lone portal with the outside world, remains a choke point, with few allowed to pass in either direction.

Although the full opening of the Rafah border to the entry and exit of people and goods was a cornerstone of the October ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and of the Trump administration's 20-point peace plan, Israeli and apparently some Egyptian restrictions remained some four months on.

As of earlier this month, Israel was imposing a daily limit of 50 passengers entering Gaza and 150 leaving.

After being processed by Egyptian and European Union border staff, who were deployed as part of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement, returnees are then vetted and inspected by the Abu Shabab militia, a loose group of Gazan gunmen with former ties to militant or criminal groups that oppose Hamas and are backed by Israel.

They then face interrogation by the Israeli military, returnees say. The Israeli Defense Forces said the security screening is being conducted "in accordance with the security policy that was coordinated in advance with Egypt and EUBAM [European Union Border Assistance Mission to Rafah], and in accordance with international law."

Palestinians returning to Gaza are restricted to one bag of clothing and the equivalent of \$640, according to rules placed on the Rafah crossing on the Egyptian side of the border.

Thousands of Gazans are also looking to leave for Egypt via the Rafah crossing, but only dozens have been allowed to go so far – well below the daily numbers set by Israel.

An estimated 22,000 severely ill Palestinians require medical treatment outside Gaza, since Gazan hospitals have been gutted by fighting and Israeli strikes.

– Ghada Abdulfattah / Special contributor
and Taylor Luck / Special correspondent

Sweden's stricter rules for immigration

Sweden, once among Europe's countries most open to immigration, has announced stricter rules for migrants to become citizens. The changes, set to take effect in June, require migrants to wait eight years before applying for citizenship, meet an income threshold, and pass a language and culture test.

Tensions over immigration have intensified in Sweden.

Since 2015, organized crime in the country has risen dramatically, and as recently as 2023, Sweden had the second-highest rate of gun violence in Europe. In recent years, the far-right Sweden Democrats have blamed these ills on welcoming immigration policies.

– Staff

Nigeria to build Africa's first EV factory

Nigerian officials have signed a deal with South Korea's Asia Economic Development Committee to build the continent's first electric vehicle manufacturing plant. The project is expected to produce 300,000 vehicles annually, create about 10,000 jobs, and build a nationwide charging network, Business Insider reports.

Nigeria currently imports hundreds of thousands of EVs annually. Officials hope local manufacturing will reduce that reliance, though critics warn that unreliable electricity could limit EV growth.

Last year, Chinese officials said they also had plans for EV factories in Nigeria. Nigeria is Africa's largest producer of oil; it also boasts significant high-grade deposits of lithium, a key component of EV batteries.

Analysts say electric vehicles could help urban areas across Africa with air pollution challenges. Infrastructure, though, is an obstacle.

– Staff

In 'K-shaped economy,' football fans' experiences vary – based on what they can pay

The Super Bowl is over, but for some football fans looking ahead to next year, the first challenge is whether they'll be able to afford a seat in the stadium for regular home games.

The Buffalo Bills' new \$2.2 billion stadium is a luxury facility that will offer club suites and premium seats with exclusive access to restaurants and viewing areas. It will also have 10,000 fewer regular-priced seats than the old stadium.

Some die-hard fans have already been priced out by season-ticket costs that have sparked heated debates over the past year.

"A lot of people can't afford it," says Chuck Sonntag, a lifelong Bills fan who sells spots in his yard for parking on game days. "I'm not sure I'm going to see any games. I might be outpriced."

To build a new stadium with fewer seats might sound illogical. But for sports franchises seeking to maximize revenue, the math is clear: Wealthy fans are willing to pay more – sometimes far more – for better seats and premium experiences. And it's their spending, not that of the numerically larger middle and working classes, that is driving a growing share of the consumer economy.

Simply put, the era of the general admission ticket might be over.

From hotels and airlines to amusement parks and ski resorts, companies are increasingly focused on providing premium products and services priced far beyond the reach of most Americans. These services allow wealthy consumers to cut lines, watch events from private boxes, reserve season passes, and travel in comfort. Upper-income Americans' rapacious spending is often depicted as the upward-rising prong of a K, in what's commonly referred to as "the K-shaped economy." The declining prong represents everyone else, including many who have been forced in recent years to cut back on nonessentials while inflation negates whatever wage gains they receive.

The top 10% of households by income – those who earn \$275,000

or more per year – now account for 45% of total consumer spending, up from 39% before the pandemic, according to Moody's Analytics. These households typically own property and stocks, and their incomes have continued to outpace inflation. They spend more on goods and services but carry less credit card debt on average than they did in 2019. Lower-income households, by contrast, have more credit card debt than they did before the pandemic, which has further pinched their spending power.

The rising price of sporting-event tickets is just one of many indicators of a K-shaped economy, says Peter Atwater, an economist at the College of William & Mary who studies consumer confidence. He rues the decline of leisure services aimed at a broad mass market – the general admission ticket – and says there's a social cost to living in such a bifurcated economy. "The common experience no longer exists, both in terms of what we do, but also in what we purchase."

Concerns over affordability are reflected in voters' negative perceptions of the U.S. economy and their own prospects for upward mobility. In a recent New York Times-Siena poll, two-thirds of voters said a middle-class lifestyle was now out of reach for most people. Most agreed that it was easier a generation ago to afford that lifestyle.

The U.S. middle class today is smaller than it used to be – roughly half of households today are considered middle class, down from 61% in 1971, according to the Pew Research Center. But middle-class Americans remain affluent by international standards. And more people have actually moved up the income ladder than fallen down it. Around one-third of households now earn \$150,000 or more, according to one analysis of census data. Meanwhile, the United States is home to more millionaires than any other country, with nearly 24 million of them.

These are the big spenders that professional sports teams love to court, says Victor Matheson, a professor of economics at the College of the Holy Cross. In the past, game-day tickets were sold at face value, whether teams were doing well or not. Now, teams use data to pinpoint how much they can charge for seats, adjust prices and products in real time, and find fans willing to pay.

The best seats in the house don't come cheap. Using data from ticket broker StubHub, Professor Matheson has calculated that two floor seats at the Boston Celtics' arena cost the same as an entire section of bleacher seats.

Still, stadiums geared to high rollers can sometimes lose their special sauce. When the New York Yankees moved into a new stadium in 2009, "they priced out a lot of the 'bleacher creatures,'" says Scott Pitoniak, a veteran sports reporter in Rochester, New York. At regular season games, corporate-owned seats behind home plate often sat empty, and even when the stadium filled up for big games "it didn't rock the way the old place [did]," he says.

Mr. Sonntag, the long-suffering Bills fan, started a nonprofit with money from a legal settlement, to bring disadvantaged children to watch games and join a tailgate party. Even before the stadium move, Mr. Sonntag was finding it harder to pay for tickets.

He hopes to bring a few kids to the new stadium, if game-day tickets are available. But for the most part, he's resigned to watching the Bills on TV. At least the team isn't moving and he can still sell parking, he says.

– Simon Montlake / Staff writer

Oklahoma removes tenure at most universities

Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt signed an executive order this month eliminating tenure at public colleges and 13 community colleges, citing taxpayer accountability.

Public research universities, including the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University, may still offer tenure, with post-tenure reviews and possible remedial action.

The move mirrors efforts in other GOP-led states, which some see as part of wider pushback on “wokeness.” Critics say it threatens academic freedom.

– Staff

Venezuela hopes oil revival will ease economic woes. People want political change, too.

Just days before his ouster by the United States, Venezuela’s authoritarian leader, Nicolás Maduro, promised on national television that his country would move into 2026 by diversifying its economy away from a historic reliance on oil.

Within 48 hours, after a dramatic U.S. strike on the South American nation, Mr. Maduro was out. And it became clear that Venezuela would instead be sticking with the commodity that is so central to national identity that locals breezily joked it was cheaper to fill their cars than purchase a bottle of water.

Venezuela’s economy has been in shambles for more than a decade, a situation exacerbated since the U.S. placed sanctions on the oil industry in 2019 to put pressure on the Maduro administration to make political change. Now, the U.S. is positioning itself to create “tremendous wealth,” as U.S. President Donald Trump put it, for Americans, Venezuelans, and Big Oil.

On Jan. 29, interim President Delcy Rodríguez announced a broad reform of the hydrocarbons sector that could help facilitate foreign investment. With some U.S. sanctions lifted, and the United States pushing oil majors to invest billions into the Venezuelan energy sector, Venezuela’s oil revenue is expected to grow in a way no one could have projected at the end of 2025.

But, after more than a decade of economic misery and authoritarian rule, the government has a short runway to show Venezuelans that their quality of life will improve under Ms. Rodríguez. Experts see many steps – from democratic strengthening to prioritizing humanitarian relief inside Venezuela – that are needed for an oil-centered solution to be successful.

“The population wants a change in the status quo,” says Giorgio Cunto Morales, an economist and lecturer at Andrés Bello Catholic University in Caracas. Nondiscounted oil sales could affect wages, temper inflation, and reestablish public services such as electricity, but it won’t be a quick transition and likely won’t be enough, he says.

“Venezuelans want improved living conditions, but not to make authoritarianism more tolerable,” Mr. Cunto Morales says of ongoing restrictions on civil liberties. They want political change, too.

Venezuela for years struggled with triple-digit inflation. Its gross domestic product has declined by more than 70% since 2013, when

Mr. Maduro took over from predecessor Hugo Chávez. That’s the largest economic collapse in the Western Hemisphere for a country not at war.

On Jan. 20, Ms. Rodríguez said the country had received \$300 million in its first oil sales overseen by the U.S.

Under U.S. oversight “the idea has been sold to citizens that we are going to move forward, because [the Venezuelan government] isn’t going to steal the money anymore,” says G.S., an educator in Caracas, who asked to be identified by his initials due to ongoing government repression.

But “food is still expensive,” he says, which contradicts an overwhelming sense that change is coming. “There are a lot of expectations,” he says, but “it’s a matter of time and patience” before recovery becomes a reality.

– Whitney Eulich / Special correspondent
and Mie Hoejris Dahl / Special contributor

Japanese prime minister’s party wins supermajority

Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae won a landslide victory in a snap parliamentary election on Feb. 8. The historic win strengthens Ms. Takaichi’s mandate to execute a bold, conservative agenda including increased defense spending and immigration curbs. She gave her party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a massive boost as it secured a rare supermajority with 316 of the 465 seats in Japan’s powerful House of Representatives.

Ms. Takaichi has pledged to stimulate Japan’s sluggish economy by cutting taxes and increasing investment.

Japanese stocks soared with news of the strong election win.

The popularity of Ms. Takaichi, elected in October as Japan’s first female prime minister, has surged in part because of her tough stance toward China. Ms. Takaichi has remained unbowed despite a barrage of diplomatic and economic pressure from China intended to punish her for making statements last fall supportive of Taiwan, an island democracy claimed by Beijing.

– Ann Scott Tyson / Staff writer

After a big rise, cryptocurrency stumbles

Cryptocurrency has taken a major dive early in 2026, reviving questions about its stability and usefulness beyond serving as a high-risk asset.

The digital money known as bitcoin, recently touted as a kind of digital gold that could serve as a hedge against inflation and geopolitical uncertainty, lost about half its value in the four months leading up to Feb. 5.

The irony is that the price of traditional gold has soared more than 25% over the same period.

“We’ve seen this argument from the pro-crypto crowd that bitcoin is this safe haven, but it never really works out,” says Igor Pejic, a tech strategist and author of “Tech Money,” a book about the new

rules of technology investing, which is due out in May. In the end, bitcoin generally moves with tech stocks, he says, soaring when market sentiment on tech improves and plunging when it sours.

Market sentiment on tech stocks soured ahead of that early February dive. Artificial intelligence company Anthropic is introducing AI technology that might replace specialty software on which companies currently rely. Those software companies potentially could face big losses in sales.

Bitcoin has fallen more dramatically than tech stocks. From a high of more than \$126,000 per unit in October, its price collapsed below \$64,000 on Feb. 5 – before recovering a bit. Ethereum, the second-most-popular cryptocurrency, is down by a similar percentage.

The Trump administration's embrace of crypto was supposed to usher in an era for it to flourish. A friendlier regulatory environment and the launch of exchange-traded funds investing in the digital currency helped push up investors' enthusiasm. President Donald Trump last year also established a federal strategic reserve of bitcoin.

Mr. Trump and his family are also connected to World Liberty Financial, which focuses on a special kind of digital money known as stablecoins. Stablecoins aim to maintain a fixed relationship with a traditional currency, such as the dollar, so they're not typically subject to the swings that other cryptocurrencies are.

In recent months, factors such as economic uncertainty and rising geopolitical strains have made investors begin selling their holdings. The selloff accelerated in early February, after Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told the House Financial Services Committee that the government had no plans or power to bail out bitcoin. The plunge has wiped out all the gains bitcoin had made since Mr. Trump came into office.

The downturn itself is nothing new. Over the past 14 years, bitcoin has seen six declines of 60% or more, says Campbell Harvey, a finance professor at Duke University.

Each time, the digital money has rebounded and reached new highs, he adds. It's anybody's guess whether that will happen again.

– **Laurent Belsie** / Staff writer

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

4

Social media platforms that are at the center of a legal dispute. Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and TikTok have been sued due to allegations that their platforms foster addictive behavior and harm children. In a statement, Meta said it strongly disagreed with the allegations. TikTok and Snapchat parent company Snap Inc. settled the lawsuit just before it went to trial Jan. 27.

33

States, including California and New York, that have filed lawsuits against Meta claiming that it collects data on children under age 13 without parental consent. The lawsuit also alleges that Meta-based apps contribute to the youth mental health crisis. Meta has denied wrongdoing.

95

Percentage of youth, ages 13 to 17, who report using social media. Two-thirds of teenagers use social media every day, and one-third say they use social media "almost constantly."

\$1.7 TRILLION

The net worth of Meta as of Feb. 3. The tech company had 3.58 billion daily users across Instagram, Facebook, Threads, and WhatsApp as of December 2025.

84

Percentage of American adults who say they use YouTube, the most widely used platform in the United States. Some 71% report using Facebook, and 50% are on Instagram. YouTube is owned by Google.

– **Victoria Hoffmann** / Staff writer

Sources: Free Speech Center, The Associated Press, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Pew Research Center, FinanceCharts, The Wrap

OUR WORLD

A Chilean counternarrative on migration

Chile's President-elect José Antonio Kast will be inaugurated March 11, at a moment when migration is top of mind. The country's foreign-born population increased by nearly 50% between 2018 and 2023, and Mr. Kast has promised to crack down on unauthorized immigrants. But in Valparaíso, Eduardo Dib, whose family is of Lebanese and Syrian descent, launched a museum late last year that offers a counternarrative by showing how migration from Europe and the Middle East transformed Chile amid its independence movement in the 1800s.

– **Whitney Eulich**

France's towering figures

When Gustave Eiffel envisioned the design for the Eiffel Tower, built in 1889, he decided to adorn the lattice of the first floor with the names of France's greatest scientists. Among the 72 names Mr. Eiffel selected, there was not a single woman. Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo recently released the names of 72 female scientists to join their male counterparts inscribed on the structure. The names will go to an academic panel for approval, and once authorizations to modify the monument are signed, engraving could start in 2027.

– **Colette Davidson**

'He was a fearless voice of the people, a philosopher of freedom, and a revolutionary force.'

That's what Nigerian President Bola Tinubu recently said of his countryman, musician Fela Kuti. Mr. Tinubu joined fans across the globe in celebrating Mr. Kuti, who posthumously became the first African musician to receive a lifetime achievement award at the Feb. 1 Grammys. Using his genre-bending big band music as his mouthpiece, Mr. Kuti became one of Nigeria's most important political critics in the 1970s and '80s, and his music remains the soundtrack of protest movements in his homeland and beyond.

– **Ryan Lenora Brown**

Investigating is her bread and butter

The City Council in Manchester, England, has a nemesis: a British online content creator who posts under the name Zoë Bread. Much of her social media content chronicles trips to museums or puppet-making. But in the past year, she has shot to fame as a citizen journalist, probing Manchester parking policies and affordable housing requirements. The quirky investigator, who conceals her face behind a bread-shaped mask in her videos, has racked up 1.5 million TikTok followers and attention from the BBC, ITV, and other media.

– Arthur Bright

NEWS: GLOBAL CURRENTS

Satellite data centers might help Earth. But what about space?

As tech companies and governments fill the night sky with satellites, some astronomers are urging caution.

By Stephen Humphries / Staff writer

A new space race is underway. But this one is not so much between nations as it is between tech companies.

The quest? Be the first to launch data centers into space. The stakes? According to some astronomers, the night sky itself.

This month, Elon Musk announced that his space-faring company, SpaceX, had merged with his artificial intelligence company, xAI, in an effort to launch 1 million satellites that could work together to form extraterrestrial data centers. Google's Project Suncatcher proposed creating data centers in space by using lasers to transmit data between satellites in near proximity to one another. And late last year, a competitor named Starcloud launched a refrigerator-sized satellite into space – the first step toward its own orbiting data center.

None of this will be technologically easy. But tech companies claim that data centers in space could become more cost efficient than the massive warehouses of computer servers devouring land, water, and electricity on Earth.

"Global electricity demand for AI simply cannot be met with terrestrial solutions, even in the near term, without imposing hardship on communities and the environment," Mr. Musk said in a statement after announcing his merger. "By directly harnessing near-constant solar power with little operating or maintenance costs, these satellites will transform our ability to scale compute. It's always sunny in space!"

However, some astronomers and economists are concerned that what might be beneficial to one environment might be harmful to another. There are already about 14,000 satellites in space. Sometimes, they collide. They also spawn space junk – everything from spent rocket boosters to loose bolts. On Jan. 30, for instance, one of Russia's old spy satellites disintegrated into bits and pieces.

Putting sizable data centers into orbit could compound those challenges. In recent decades, there's been a growing awareness that mankind could be repeating the mistake it made with the oceans, viewing space as an inexhaustible resource where we can dump things. Out of sight, out of mind. This has prompted scientists,

economists, and politicians to focus on solutions that facilitate technological progress yet also reduce pollution of the orbital commons.

"Increasingly, people in this realm ... are beginning to recognize that space is an environment, much as the Earth is an environment," says Akhil Rao, a former NASA economist.

Still, in 2024, data centers in the United States accounted for 4.4% of the nation's electricity consumption. A study last year from the Environmental and Energy Study Institute found that large data centers can consume 5 million gallons of water a day.

The trade-off on the other side of the environmental ledger is often less obvious. In 1978, astrophysicist Don Kessler co-wrote an influential paper about the potential consequences of an accumulation of satellites around the planet. Even without data centers in orbit, it's getting cluttered up there.

Astronomers are particularly concerned about "the Kessler Effect." That's when orbital collisions create space junk, which begets even more collisions and even more debris. In 2009, for instance, a communications satellite slammed into a disused Russian military spacecraft. Each object was reduced to clouds of shrapnel that continued traveling around the planet. It takes about 11 years for gravity to bring smaller objects in lower orbits down to Earth.

There are currently 25,000 tracked pieces of debris in orbit, according to Jonathan McDowell, an astrophysicist who recently retired from the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. And that's just the stuff we can see. Smaller objects, such as frozen globules of propellant expelled by satellites, whiz through orbit faster than bullets, becoming hazards for astronauts during spacewalks. In December, a spacecraft docked at China's space station was rendered temporarily inoperable because of a damaged window after a suspected space-debris strike.

Unless there's a cleanup, space might eventually become too hazardous to safely traverse. Time to call in the space garbage trucks.

A British and Japanese company called Astroscale is set to launch a debris-removal vehicle this year. It will shepherd disused satellites and rocket boosters into a lower orbit so that they'll burn up reentering the atmosphere. Other cleanup technologies are being tested. In 2018, a European RemoveDebris satellite successfully captured an object in space with a polyethylene net. A Swiss company named ClearSpace is developing a vehicle with claw-like robot arms to latch onto satellites that need to be scrapped.

"China, which hasn't in the past had such a great record on space debris, is actually the first country to have done a real debris-removal action," says Dr. McDowell. "In this case, in geostationary orbit, 36,000 kilometers up, where they sent a tug up to a dead navigation satellite of theirs and towed it to a higher – what's called a graveyard – orbit and released it there."

There's a common interest in solving the tragedy of the space commons, says Dr. McDowell. An organization named the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee provides recommendations about best practices. But these aren't binding. In violation of the guidelines, Russia conducted a military test to blow up one of its satellites five years ago.

Many commercial companies such as Starlink have followed good disposal practices, says Dr. Rao, the former NASA economist. And they have an incentive to do so. If companies leave dead satellites in space, then they are creating risks for their own active satellites.

Still, compliance can be tricky. Satellites become less responsive to commands over time. By the point that satellites pass their expiration date, they're no longer able to de-orbit.

Economists have been proposing incentive-based solutions.

For example, regulatory agencies in various nations could charge companies a tax for as long as their satellite is in space. Agencies could issue a bond whenever a satellite is launched. The bond is only redeemable upon de-orbit. Money raised by the bond could be put toward space cleanup activities.

Among those clamoring for change are astronomers. Satellites create light pollution in the night sky, says John Barentine, former director of public policy for the International Dark Sky Association in Tucson, Arizona.

The man-made celestial objects, whose solar-paneled wings make them look like metallic dragonflies, reflect sunlight back down to the ground. They show up in astronomical images. Astronomers on the lookout for dangerous asteroids – such as the one that crashed in Russia in 2013 with a shock wave that injured 1,500 people and damaged buildings – say that the glint of satellites at dawn and dusk also makes it harder to spot things behind them. Data center satellites would be even bigger and brighter than regular ones.

“Thousands of bright satellites would actually degrade our ability to detect some of the threatening [near Earth objects],” explains Olivier Hainaut, an astronomer at the European Southern Observatory in Chile, via email.

Today, the average person isn’t thinking a whole lot about space debris. That broader shift in thought will come, Dr. Barentine says, once the public understands how it affects them. That’s what motivated him to co-found the Center for Space Environmentalism last year. His goal is to bring extraterrestrial issues to public attention. That often starts with telescopes in backyards.

“Cultivating a closer relationship between humans and the cosmos through the medium of the night sky could be a way to increase appreciation for the space environment and its inextricable connection to our own environment,” Dr. Barentine says. ■

Letter to Pokrovsk: Your beautiful spirit isn’t lost

On visits to the now-ruined Ukrainian city, a reporter fell in love with its roses, and what they symbolized.

February 2026

Dear Pokrovsk: It is with deep sadness that I address these words to you, now that you lie in ruins, charred and bomb-blasted, and emptied of the many thousands of residents who until very recently gave you life.

Yet, they’re also words of appreciation, for what you revealed of yourself, and for what is lost but might rise again.

It is now nearly three years since this American reporter first walked your rose-bed-lined streets.

On that warm June evening in 2023, my objective had been to interview some of your residents about Russia’s war that had already cut you off from the capital of your region of Donetsk. I would spend the night, then move on to other towns along the war’s slowly shifting front lines.

I did not know then that this would be



By Howard LaFranchi
Staff writer

just the first of numerous visits to Pokrovsk, your being a rail and transportation hub of strategic importance to both Ukraine and the invading Russian forces. Or that, by the time this past fall that Russia’s scorched-earth warfare had turned you into an empty, ruined wasteland, I would realize that I had a special place in my heart for you, Pokrovsk.

On my most recent reporting trip to Ukraine, in December, visiting you was out of the question. Drone footage of ruined streets and videos of Russian soldiers raising their country’s tricolor flag over a bombed-out city hall made that clear enough.

Yet, that special place in my heart had been secured by the many wonderful residents who invited me into their homes, their gardens, their parks and emergency response stations, to share their stories as a terrible war approached.

Sign of resilience

Pokrovsk was a city of roses. The well-tended rose bushes flanking the concrete welcome sign at the city’s highway entrance was evidence of this, as were the rows of blooming bushes along the main avenue through town.

On that first visit, several couples enjoying the evening from benches in the park outside their Soviet-era high-rise apartment blocks were unanimous in their pride in the city’s roses. But one woman told me rather enigmatically that many of the flowers were a recent addition to Pokrovsk’s public spaces, and that therein lay a story I might investigate.

A little research revealed that, in 2022, the mayor had announced that 60,000 roses would be planted as a sign of the city’s resilience despite the war.

More recently, in the fall of 2023, as Russian troops pursued a costly (and ultimately failed) siege aimed at quickly capturing the city, some Ukrainian officials had faulted Pokrovsk’s obsession with its roses. City leaders would have been better off disregarding such frivolous pursuits, they opined, and focus instead on building up the city’s defensive infrastructure.

I didn’t agree with the criticism. As I have learned over the years of covering the war, while meeting hundreds of Ukrainians, people need something hopeful and inspiring to hold on to amid such adversity. For the people of Pokrovsk, that something was the roses.

The roses of war

The glimpses I had of this became certainty when I reported a story on your roses in June 2024. Your population was down from 60,000 to about 11,000, but the roses were in full bloom.

I visited the 84-acre Jubilee Park with its 1,300 rose bushes, where park director Konstantyn Derevinskyy spoke lovingly of the roses. With the dull thuds of war coming from the front line less than 20 miles away, Mr. Derevinskyy said he was stopped every day by residents expressing their appreciation for the sense of order and hope the roses gave them.

Then, down the main street through town, at the municipal grounds equipment sheds, manager Oleh Tkachenko echoed the mayor’s view that the city’s roses weren’t superfluous niceties, but instead played a critical role in reassuring residents and messaging to the world what Pokrovsk is made of.

“When our residents see us tending the roses, it reassures them that we are going nowhere,” he said. To the world, he added, it says “We are Ukraine. Pokrovsk is a Ukrainian city, and we will be here tomorrow.”

But it was an encounter with resident Halyna Fateieva that I now realize started this mysterious process of putting you, Pokrovsk, in my heart.

As my team and I drove down a residential side street on our way out of town, I spotted glorious rosebuds towering over a fence. We stopped and rang the bell at a garden gate, drawing Halyna out of her house. When interpreter Oleksandr Naselenko explained that an American reporter wished to ask about her roses, she did not hesitate to welcome us in.

In my story, I described Halyna's rose garden as fit for a queen, which it truly was. But it was what she said as she presented to me the most beautiful bouquet I'd ever seen that stuck with me: "I love these roses," she said, "but I don't see them as all mine. They are in my garden, but their message of hope and peace is for everyone."

The joy of music

My heart's place for you, Pokrovsk, expanded again in November 2024. On what would be my final visit, we discovered the modest rail yard building where composer Mykola Leontovych, in the early 1900s, wrote and rehearsed with the railroad men's choir his famous "Shchedryk," known to me as "Carol of the Bells."

Thanks to that composition and the rapturous receptions it would garner across Europe and at Carnegie Hall in New York, Mr. Leontovych would become known as the Ukrainian Bach.

By that visit, which lasted just a few tense hours, your population had dwindled further, and the front was less than five miles away. Smashed and burnt buildings and concrete anti-tank installations attested to the war's encroaching presence. I imagined that despite the distant booms of war, I could hear that choir practicing a carol that would become another gift from Pokrovsk to the world. And I was filled with joy.

And yet, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's declaration last fall that after a 20-month siege, Pokrovsk was finally his, reports continue of ongoing battles, particularly in the north of the city, disputing Mr. Putin's confident claim.

So, though I know you lie ruined and wasted, dear Pokrovsk, and that the many residents who welcomed this reporter and shared their stories are now gone, you also give me hope: that your Jubilee Park with its 1,300 roses has been spared, that the modest white stucco rail yard building where Leontovych composed "Shchedryk" stills stands.

And that Halyna Fateieva's roses have survived, and even now are preparing to burst into bloom this spring.

With enduring affection ...

The prediction market boom - and backlash

Betting on outcomes of real-world events often is more accurate than traditional polls. But it raises concerns about cheating and corrosion of trust.

By Patrik Jonsson / Staff writer

A growing number of Americans are betting on game scores, weather patterns, technology releases, and even when singer Taylor Swift and football player Travis Kelce will get married. They are joining prediction markets – online pools wagering on the outcomes of real-world events – that have turned niche speculation into a mainstream form of trading.

These betting markets are booming, with trading up from \$9 billion in 2024 to over \$44 billion in 2025. They are valuable, experts say, because they often create more accurate forecasting models in politics and business than traditional polls. And bettors say crowd-sourced wagers are a potentially profitable way to engage in sports, like the Olympics, and other events.

With the boom has come backlash, though, not just from sports fans but also from sports leagues and public officials worried about the risk of rigged wagers where a player might balk for a bet. The NFL, for example, banned ads for prediction market sites like Kalshi, PredictIt, and Polymarket during the Super Bowl, citing concerns about legal gray areas and game integrity.

But the risks extend beyond these markets to other forms of wagering – such as recent sportsbook-betting allegations involving NBA figures. One notable historical precedent is the 1919 "Black Sox" scandal, in which several Chicago White Sox players took bribes to throw the World Series, a conspiracy that shattered public trust and led to lifetime bans for stars like Shoeless Joe Jackson.

"For many centuries, people have wanted to legally restrict these sorts of activities," says Robin Hanson, a George Mason University economist and a pioneer in prediction markets research. "Yes, we've carved out exceptions because we see social value in them," he says, referring to once-illegal activities such as stocks, insurance, and auctions. "But technically, they're all gambling."

Q: How did prediction markets start, and why are they popular?

In the early 1900s, betting markets on elections often exceeded the value of transactions on the U.S. stock exchanges.

As the overall accuracy of – and trust in – election polling have faltered in recent years, interest in prediction markets has resurfaced.

In traditional legal gambling, people place bets against "the house," which sets fixed odds and is regulated at the state level. In prediction markets, people are betting directly against each other, and the marketplaces are regulated federally as exchanges. In both cases, the businesses make money through different forms of transaction fees. And in both cases, bettors can win multiples of what they wager, if betting against the odds.

Modern prediction markets trace their origins to 1988, when professors at the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business developed a market to predict the winner of that year's presidential

race between George H.W. Bush and Michael Dukakis. (The idea, now known as the Iowa Electronic Markets, was that people who bet their own money on outcomes would produce more accurate predictions than standard polls.)

Over the next 20 years, the system continued to produce reliable results. By 2007, a study found that the IEM was proving more accurate than 74% of some 1,000 opinion polls analyzed between 1988 and 2004.

Today, sites allow people to place bets – or “event contracts” – on real-world events that could happen in the future. These are typically simple “yes” or “no” bets of up to 99 cents with payouts based on how many people participate and the odds of the event happening.

“The long-term vision is to financialize everything and create a tradable asset out of any difference in opinion,” Tarek Mansour, a Kalshi co-founder, said at a conference last year.

Q: Why the pushback?

Critics see prediction markets as increasingly risky and part of a rise in “the gamblification” of society.

Earlier this year, several states moved to restrict prediction market activities, arguing that the companies were using the markets not only for legitimate forecasting but also for sports gambling.

In a Feb. 2 statement, New York Attorney General Letitia James warned that prediction sites could expose New Yorkers to significant financial risk and that the industry could face penalties for unlicensed sports wagering in New York. Online betting in general (not limited to prediction markets) has been linked to an increase in bankruptcies. About 1 in 5 online sports bettors – often young men – show signs of a gambling disorder.

Q: Why are sports leagues and public officials speaking out?

The NFL and other sports leagues now accept standard sports betting, but some are concerned about looser regulations governing the new – albeit similar – prediction markets. Betting, many argue, can attract new fans and keep existing ones engaged. The NHL, for one, has partnered with prediction markets like Kalshi and Polymarket. And there are already active, legal, and regulated prediction markets in play ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan Cortina.

But golf’s PGA Tour, like the NFL, has officially blocked players from endorsing prediction markets, saying they operate in a regulatory gray zone that creates legal and reputational risks. And while the NBA has not issued a league-wide ban, it has voiced concerns. Bets, some league officials argue, undermine the integrity of games and the trust that binds teams and fans.

The NCAA is facing a point-shaving scandal – in which players sabotage games to make money – involving dozens of people and multiple teams. In January, the NCAA president sought a pause in the use of prediction markets for college sports.

Beyond sports, public officials worry that prediction markets allow insiders to make “signal bets,” or moves meant to identify undervalued betting opportunities, giving one group of bettors an advantage over the general public.

Critics also say that betting on violent or lethal events could cross moral and ethical boundaries.

Last June, one Polymarket “yes/no” bet was on “Israel military action against Iran by Friday.” When the strike happened, one user made \$128,000 on the bet.

Another user profited more than \$400,000 on a contract over when Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro’s rule would end, raising

concerns of inside knowledge of the U.S. raid that ousted him.

U.S. Rep. Ritchie Torres, a New York Democrat, recently introduced the Public Integrity in Financial Prediction Markets Act of 2026, which, if passed, would bar government officials from using insider information for financial gain. ■

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

KULAMUA, INDIA

Bipin Dhane inspired a flood-hit island to come together for its children

Seasonal monsoons in a remote village have twice battered The Hummingbird School. Each time, residents have rebuilt it.

By Arundhati Nath / Contributor

Ten years ago, Bipin Dhane, who had completed postgraduate studies at a prestigious Indian technical college, was working for a shipbuilding firm in Singapore. He was paid well but wanted more from life.

“I had sleepless nights,” he recalls. “I thought I wasn’t doing anything for the world.”

So, Mr. Dhane quit his job, gave all his savings to his family, and moved to Majuli, a remote Indian island that needed a volunteer schoolteacher. His mother and father were agnostic.

“I was the first engineer from the family,” Mr. Dhane says. “My parents wanted me to work and earn.”

Within a year, Mr. Dhane had so impressed the islanders that they donated land, bamboo, and their labor to build a permanent place where he could teach their children. Mr. Dhane named it The Hummingbird School, after an inspiring story that Wangari Maathai – the late Kenyan environmentalist and Nobel Peace laureate – often told about a hummingbird’s courage during a forest fire.

“That story saved my life; I don’t have to take the burden of the whole world on my shoulders,” Mr. Dhane says. “When so many households came to help in building the school, it really felt like little hummingbirds had come together.”

Innovation and impact

Dressed in light blue and navy uniforms, older Hummingbird School students sit outside reading books borrowed from the school library, while younger ones play catch or tend to a small vegetable garden on campus.

Ninth grader Diya Das has studied here for eight years. She says the school has given her opportunities that she would not find elsewhere, such as learning Sattriya classical dance, organizing a literary festival, and performing theater.

“My favorite place is our school,” Diya says. “I love being here.”

Founded in 2017, the school teaches more than 300 students, from kindergarten through 10th grade. Ninety-five percent of them are from the Mising tribal community. More than half attend for free because they can’t afford to pay school fees; the rest contribute

a nominal 500 Indian rupees (about \$5.50) a month.

Ninth grader Santosh Pegu lives at a hostel the school operates for orphans and students from impoverished families. “I feel like I’m staying at my own home,” he says. “We stay together, study together, and have fun together.”

Students learn all major subjects, but are also encouraged to get involved in the arts and to learn life skills through group projects. They design wall magazines on which they write poetry, short stories, and jokes.

“The Hummingbird School teaches in innovative ways,” says Momee Pegu (no relation to Santosh), the founder of RIGBO, a Majuli-based nonprofit that works to build leadership and entrepreneurial skills among young people. “The students get plenty of scope to learn and explore, and the school is creating a good impact on the community.”

“Let them become role models”

Each year, deadly and destructive floods ravage Majuli, the world’s largest inhabited riverine island, centered on the Brahmaputra River in northeastern Assam state. Roads are in poor condition, and few health care facilities exist for the roughly 167,000 islanders. Educational and employment opportunities are also limited.

Seasonal monsoons in 2017 and 2020 battered the school, which occupies four whitewashed concrete buildings in the remote village of Kulamua. Each time, residents rebuilt the school.

“A lot of books and school property got damaged,” Mr. Dhane says. “We deposited a lot of soil to elevate the land now.”

Residents hope the school will be less vulnerable to flooding. As in the Nobel laureate’s hummingbird story, the lesson is that the efforts of one individual are magnified when they band together with others.

Still, funding remains a challenge for the school, whose annual operating costs exceed 24 million rupees (about \$265,000). A bank headquartered in Mumbai provides some of the money, and individual donors sponsor fees for 100 students a year.

Mr. Dhane says that most people think tribal education should be synonymous with vocational skills. While The Hummingbird School does instruct students in gardening, bamboo craftwork, and knitting, “our focus here is to offer high-quality education,” he says. “Let them also go to top colleges. ... Let them become role models for their community.”

Mr. Dhane no longer teaches at the school but stays involved in its overall academic planning and management. He also heads Ayang Trust, a nonprofit on Majuli that supports the school.

While Mr. Dhane’s parents were initially sad and angry that he left behind his lucrative engineering career, they eventually realized the value of The Hummingbird School. “When they visited the school and saw the work that I have done, they were very proud,” he says. “My dad used to post about my work on Facebook and elsewhere and talk to everyone about me.” ■

REPORTERS ON THE JOB

NUUK, GREENLAND



Mark Sappenfield

“I have decided that I don’t have any time for journalists anymore.”

Surely, many sources I’ve called over the years have had this thought. But none have ever said it aloud so bluntly.

That line from an expert at the University of Greenland merely punctuated my five days in Nuuk. Greenland’s capital is exhausted with journalists. The media hordes came when U.S. President Donald Trump started making noise about annexing the island a year ago. And they have never left this town of 20,000. It has been overrun by microphones, cameras, and questions. But I found that once a conversation began, there was ample time, food, and hospitality. ■

ANGANGUEO, MEXICO



Whitney Eulich

I’ve read about reporters who travel on assignment with their families. When a recent reporting trip to a monarch butterfly reserve coincided with a school break, it felt like the perfect moment to bring my family along. My children were helpful assistants, noticing details I might have missed. My 4-year-old spotted a layer of dead butterflies spread among plants on a hillside, at his eye level. My 9-year-old described monarchs clumped along tree branches as looking like “dead leaves,” which was more apt than any of the descriptions I’d come across. I left the reserve satisfied that mixing work and family isn’t impossible – and sometimes it’s worth the extra effort. ■

BOSTON



Cameron Pugh

Information is a reporter’s greatest asset. But, as I recently found while reporting a story tracking excessive force claims against Immigration and Customs Enforcement, information isn’t always easy to find. I wanted to know whether the number of people accusing ICE of excessive force increased in the past year. After poring through reports and not finding definitive answers, I started calling immigration lawyers. Almost uniformly, they reported a rise in clients seeking to file lawsuits accusing ICE of causing injury. I knew, then, that I had a story. And it drove home an important reminder: Often, the best information doesn’t come from a computer screen; it comes from people. ■

WASHINGTON



Caitlin Babcock

Reporting on Congress often means reacting quickly. In the U.S. Senate basement, I was looking for lawmakers for a shutdown funding story. An elevator dinged. A senator stepped out and was thronged by reporters. But something else caught my eye. Almost unnoticed, Chris Murphy of Connecticut, a Democratic senator key to my story, was entering a subway train that connects the Senate to members’ office buildings.

I popped my head in. “Can I ride with you?” Two other reporters joined. As we rode together for five minutes through underground tunnels, we had a rare unrushed conversation, away from the microphones and clamor. ■

As the world fights over Greenland, its people double down on their own values

Greenlandic culture and identity, rooted in Inuit traditions, have seen a revival. As the world clamors for its rare earth minerals and energy potential, will its people be able to choose their own path?

By Mark Sappenfield / Senior global correspondent

NUUK, GREENLAND

Amid the kayaks, local costumes, and Arctic mummies that a visitor might expect to find in the Greenland National Museum, there's a curious addition: a Sears catalog.

The yellowing pages hold a strangely pivotal place in the history of Greenland. They tell of the moment when the United States first came to the world's largest island, which stretches deep into the Arctic Circle.

Compelled to defend it against Nazi Germany during World War II, the U.S. did something more. It ushered in a wave of cultural change that dramatically altered Greenland's future – symbolized by the Sears catalogs that were sent to almost every resident living there at the time.

More than 75 years later, the U.S. wants to return, this time as owners. Though he has toned down his demands, President Donald Trump cites Greenland's crucial role in defending the U.S. from long-range missile attacks and the threats of an increasingly open Arctic Ocean.

Mr. Trump's attempts to take over the island cast Greenland in the role of passive imperial pawn. The reality is much more dynamic.

Greenland's 57,000 people are waking up. As they gain more autonomy from Danish rule, there has been a revival of Greenlandic culture and identity, and the territory has begun to chart a path unlike any national government in the world.

Nowhere else does an Indigenous community hold so much power and influence over national affairs, with 90% of Greenlanders identifying as Inuit. The result is a new model of governance, guided by Indigenous values.

Here, no one is allowed to own land, and society is built on a sense of communal well-being that goes deeper than any theoretical Western-ism, residents say.

"When you are part of a smaller community, there is a different way to be around one another," says Malu Rosing of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs in Copenhagen, and a native Greenlander. "It's a society where the stronger have to help the weaker."

To Greenlanders, this is a different kind of freedom – one in which communal ties to one another, and to the land, are at the foundation of a caring and mutually dependent society.

For many here, Mr. Trump's threats were a threat not just to a government or a military, but to a way of life.

Even as the American president softens his demands, a deeper question behind them remains: What will happen to Greenland

from here?

■ ■ ■

The challenge facing Greenland is in many ways the same challenge that has beset Indigenous communities worldwide for centuries: Engage with the broader world and risk being overrun, or remain independent at the cost of isolation and lost opportunity.

No one thinks navigating that choice will be easy. Many believe it could take years, even decades. But the threat of a U.S. invasion and takeover has forced Greenlanders to think about what they want their future to be.

"There is a huge awakening in this moment," says Liv Aurora Jensen, a graphic designer in Nuuk, the capital and home to about one-third of Greenlanders. "The people's voice in Greenland is becoming more and more clear."

This is obvious throughout Nuuk, where street corners are a riot of Greenland's flag, a modernist, red-and-white interpretation of the famous Arctic sunset. Called *Erfalasorput*, or "our flag," it hangs in shop windows, is displayed on cars, and sits atop nearly every flagpole.

But the evidence of Greenland's cultural revival is also apparent in Ms. Jensen's kitchen – and on her own skin.

Outside the window is a classic scene of Greenlandic winter: brightly colored houses clinging to the weather-beaten rock, the fjord beyond fretted with the shocking blue of calved glacier ice.

Inside is a portrait of the new Greenland. Nearly everything is a product of the design company, Inuk Media, run by Ms. Jensen and her husband, filmmaker Peter Jensen.

Contemporary plates, curtains, and cutting boards are etched with traditional Greenlandic symbols – and given a modern twist. Ms. Jensen's designs have won awards from Slovenia to Japan to Germany.

As she sets the breakfast table, lines of blue dots around her forearm become visible. It's a traditional Greenlandic tattoo, and only a decade ago, it was close to becoming a lost art when only two people on the island knew how to etch them into skin. Now, such tattoos are commonplace.

"We are seeing a very, very visual desire to show off our culture," says historian Ujammiugaq Engell. Recalling a 2017 exhibition she did on Greenlandic tattooing, she adds: "I had never worked on anything that created such demand."

These expressions of cultural independence are in politics, too. Since 2009, Greenland has been able to manage its internal affairs, while Denmark controls defense, foreign policy, and currency. But polls find Greenlanders want more. They don't want to be a part of the U.S. – or Denmark, for that matter. Some 84% want to be independent, according to a January 2025 survey by Greenlandic and Danish media.

Yet there are telling asterisks. More than half say it will not happen for 10 to 20 years. And 45% say they do not want independence if it affects their standard of living.

Currently, more than half of Greenland's public revenues are grants from Denmark. Independence would mean finding ways to replace that. In the past, the task seemed nearly impossible, with Greenland's economy almost wholly reliant on fishing. But a new moment of opportunity beckons.

The globe is clamoring for the minerals and energy Greenland has in abundance. How it chooses to develop that wealth – or not – could prove the biggest test of its ideals.

■ ■ ■

In recent years, Greenland has become the blank slate for powerful people's economic dreams.

Not only does the world's largest island hold some of the largest deposits of rare earth minerals – materials increasingly essential for modern technology – it also has massive hydropower potential. Business leaders see Greenland as a prospective source for huge amounts of cheap energy to run power-thirsty data centers.

In the U.S., a Reuters report suggests several tech billionaires have floated the idea of establishing a “freedom city” in Greenland – a libertarian utopia with limitless energy and minimal government oversight.

The report states that the “vision for Greenland ... could include a hub for artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles, space launches, micro nuclear reactors and high-speed rail.”

Naaja Nathanielsen's own vision is dramatically different.

Greenland's economic minister is open to investments. But she is unflinching that they must not harm Greenland's values and ways of life. She and her people have no misgivings about forgoing lucrative development opportunities that have any whiff of exploitation of people or the environment.

“We've built in high expectations,” says Ms. Nathanielsen, who also serves as Greenland's minister of justice. “One reason we don't have a lot of mines is that we have higher standards.”

“I cannot lower the standards,” she adds. “We will lose the backing of the local community.”

Economic growth cannot become destructive to the very communities it purports to benefit.

“We could develop 100 mines and hydropower, but that would require a lot of workforce coming in from the outside and put a great stress on our culture,” she adds. “We want tourism, but we don't want to be overrun in our small communities.”

Christian Keldsen understands the desire to set such high standards. But the director of the Greenland Business Association in Nuuk says the government might need to be more flexible if it wants to hit its economic goals.

“If I want to attract investment, I need to be able to accommodate what investors want,” he says. “It's not enough to say, ‘We're open for investment.’”

He points to utility costs, which are the same across Greenland, from relatively urban Nuuk to the many isolated settlements spread across the island.

The goal of such price controls is to support Greenlanders living in remote settlements. But the government could do that in other ways – like subsidies, he says – that would allow utility prices to more fairly reflect market demands.

“It's an ambition of the government to be an exporter of energy,” says Mr. Keldsen. “But to sell surplus energy, you need to sell it at a lower price.”

Some of these tensions have played out dramatically at the Kvanefjeld mine, which overlooks the fjords near the town of Narsaq at the southern tip of Greenland.

Australia-based Energy Transition Minerals has held the mining rights since 2007, but in 2021 Greenland banned uranium mining – a practice that has caused significant damage to Indigenous communities from Canada to Australia.

While Kvanefjeld was not a uranium project, there was enough uranium present to shut down operations. Energy Transition Min-

erals is now suing Greenland for more than \$11 billion.

Mr. Keldsen declines to comment on the case, but speaking generally, he says there are opportunities for greater understanding between the government and the business community.

“We need to be bringing more data and a more contemporary mindset on this,” he says. “We're looking for more trust.”

For her part, Ms. Nathanielsen is comfortable with keeping the standards high. The growing need for rare earth minerals and energy will eventually bring the right companies to Greenland's doorstep, she says.

If they could add even three mines in the next 10 years, she adds, “That would make a real change for our economy.”

■ ■ ■

Peter Jensen, Ms. Jensen's husband, has some sympathy for the challenges businesses face in Greenland.

He came to Nuuk in 1985 as a 20-something hoping to become Greenland's first great moviemaker. But his initial experience was moving from house to house every night, since the only apartments available were controlled by the government – and there was a 10-year wait.

When he eventually decided to form his own media company, he tried to get a bank loan but failed, despite having a million Danish krona in business commitments. A friend offered his fishing boat as collateral. The bank still said no.

Finally, Mr. Jensen had to go door to door to raise funds, eventually getting the owner of one of Nuuk's biggest fishing operations to front the money in exchange for ownership of half the company. He was sleeping about two hours a night.

Over time, Mr. Jensen became the “grand old man” of Greenlandic film, producing documentaries, commercials, and collaborations with major companies like Disney.

Years later, he married Liv, who was by then his business partner, and they moved to Denmark. They thought they might never return.

“We were tired of being in Greenland,” he says. “It's so hard to be an entrepreneur here,” he says. But after he left, he found he missed being home. “In those two years, I realized how much I loved this country.”

He looks out his kitchen window across the fjord and knows one thing. No one owns that land.

“We have this kind of feeling of freedom, how we are apart from the world,” he says. “You can just go out into nature and shoot your own food.”

Ms. Jensen chimes in that it is not unusual – or controversial – for even a government minister to call in and say he's going hunting that day. “That's what makes us very proud. It's our land, it's our soul,” she says.

Business is hard for her here, too. “If I have to produce something, it has to be abroad,” she says. Greenland does not have the industries she needs to make her household goods. But she thinks Greenland has its priorities right – and the world can learn something from that.

“It's not all about money,” Mr. Jensen says. “There can be a new way of doing things, and Greenland can be a model.”

■ ■ ■

Part of Greenland's path forward means finding a way through the past. And that means wrestling with Denmark's complicated

colonial legacy.

In some ways, Greenland was fortunate.

“One of the reasons Greenlandic colonial history is so different is we were colonized on a very different philosophical grounding than any other place,” says Ms. Engell, leader of the Nuutoqaq Local Museum in Nuuk.

The Christian missionary who first established a permanent Danish presence on Greenland in 1721, Hans Egede, came with an unusual respect for the native culture.

In other places, “the arrival of the church often meant the complete erasure of a culture,” says Ms. Engell. But Egede “fought quite hard to preserve a lot of the cultural heritage we have today.”

That meant Greenland kept hold of many of its traditional practices and, perhaps most important, its language. But some traditions, such as tattooing, largely disappeared.

More problematic was the relationship established between Danes and Greenlanders, which was unambiguously paternal. In later years, the Danish government turned Egede’s ideals into policy, passing laws that kept Greenlanders locked in time. Up until World War II, Greenlanders were required to sew their own clothes, and simple items like petroleum lanterns were deemed too modern.

That’s when the Sears catalogs came in.

With the Nazi takeover of Denmark, Greenland turned to the U.S. for defense. The powerful neighbor gladly accepted, but did not care about keeping Greenland “Greenlandic.” So, in came American feature films, radio, and Sears catalogs, cracking open a new world.

“It was the first time the Greenlandic people had a say,” says Ms. Engell. “While the rest of the world was burning, the Greenlandic people felt a sense of freedom, of evolving.”

When Danish control returned, the tables flipped. Denmark pushed modernization at a dizzying speed, but the reasserted sense of colonial control brought devastating consequences.

Danish authorities closed isolated settlements and forced residents into cities where they had no social standing or understanding of even how to use modern facilities like toilets.

“All the evolutions you had in the rest of the world – we went through all those different phases in 30 years,” says Ms. Engell. “As a byproduct of that, a lot of people lost their identity and purpose.”

Alcoholism soared, as did suicides.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, the Danish government implanted contraceptive devices in thousands of teenage Greenlandic girls, some as young as 12, without their or their parents’ consent – an official effort to keep the population of Greenland down.

“There is a dark, dark history between Greenland and Denmark,” says Frederik Fuuja Larsen, curator of the Greenland National Museum in Nuuk.

For Raket Sanimuinaq, overcoming that darkness has been a decades-long struggle.

At age 4, she felt called to become a shaman – using ancient Inuit traditions and connections to ancestors to bring healing. But her mother said it was too dangerous. The Danes didn’t understand.

Mrs. Sanimuinaq heard stories about how kids had thrown rocks at her great-grandmother for following the traditional ways. At a boarding school in Denmark, she was told her beliefs were evil.

“I tried my very best to adapt,” she says. Still, she went through severe crises and attempted suicide more than once. “Applying Western methods to a spiritual crisis, it wasn’t working for me, at least.”

But in recent years, Mrs. Sanimuinaq has felt a dramatic shift. When a priest on live television put Christianity and traditional Inuit beliefs on equal footing, “it was a historic moment.”

Both sides need to come together to find restoration as equals, says Mrs. Sanimuinaq, who now has her own practice in Nuuk. “What I see is a balance slowly being restored.”

“We had to cope in silence,” she adds. “Now, the Danes are listening, and that is part of the healing. That is all we need: freedom to be who we are. The mirror of colonization is that we’re not good enough to be who we are.”

Mr. Larsen of the National Museum has seen how insidious this sense of inferiority can be. In the past, when his museum was asked to work on research projects with others, it was rarely given any more than a brief credit line at the bottom. Greenlandic researchers tacitly accepted themselves as second-class.

But that has changed – and he has helped change it. In the past decade, Mr. Larsen began issuing an ultimatum: “If you want to work with us, we want an equal voice.” It worked.

Ironically, Mr. Trump’s interest in Greenland might be giving Greenland and Denmark the chance for a similar reset. There are signs that Denmark is now listening to Greenland in ways it had not before.

For years, Greenland has demanded an apology from Denmark for its contraception campaign. But it wasn’t until Mr. Trump returned to office – with his designs on Greenland – that Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen issued a formal apology, describing it as “systemic discrimination.” Women affected by the policy can also apply for \$46,000 each in reparations.

In that way, Greenland’s revival is not only an attempt to reclaim Indigenous traditions, but an attempt to find new ways to engage with Denmark – and the world.

■ ■ ■

To Mala Johnsen, that can only be a good thing.

The former auto mechanic plays the part of Greenland’s antihero to a T. Seated casually in a chair of the café of Nuuk’s decidedly Nordic-style cultural center, Mr. Johnsen is a revolutionary in fleece. His manifesto is the clothing he wears.

His brand, Bolt Lamar, is arguably Greenland’s hottest clothing line. He and co-owner Army Mogensen say they were tired of sunsets and polar bears and kayaks – all the familiar icons of Greenlandic art. “Everyone used Greenlandic stuff to the point of being souvenirs,” Mr. Johnsen says. “We wanted to do something completely the opposite.”

So they created a line of streetwear that would not look out of place in South Central Los Angeles. At first, no one knew it was Greenlandic. And they worked hard to keep it that way. They used foreign models on photo shoots “to make us feel bigger than we were.” They kept a low profile.

Along the way, however, Bolt Lamar did become quintessentially Greenlandic. Fishermen wear their clothes as workwear. Teens wear them clubbing. Now, many people in town know where it comes from.

For both partners, Bolt Lamar became a way to widen Greenlanders’ world.

“We wanted to show that you don’t have to be specifically Greenlandic,” says Mr. Mogensen. “We can be anything. We are citizens of the world.”

In her own way, Ms. Jensen of Inuk Media sees something similar. “When I travel around the world and see different cultures, my own becomes much clearer.”

The question now is how much to open that world.

“We want to let in the world, but we want peace and quiet,” says Mr. Johnsen. “We want tourists, but we want the place for ourselves. We’re very welcoming, but at the same time, there’s a part of us saying, ‘Shut up, we just want to hear the wind.’” ■

EDITORIALS

Lifelines amid a deepfake flood

Concern over how easily artificial intelligence can be used to produce highly believable deepfake images – especially nonconsensual sexualized depictions of adults and children – is at an all-time high. It follows the recent flood of such imagery produced through Grok, the generative AI chatbot linked to the worldwide social media platform X.

France, Britain, and other governments have begun investigations, while some temporarily shut down national access to Grok. In the United States, lawmakers and some watchdog groups have called for new laws. Last month, X announced restrictions to Grok’s capabilities in public posts. But Reuters reported that, when prompted, the chatbot continued to create sexualized images several weeks later.

At the heart of the matter is how best to balance First Amendment free speech protections with legal and social expectations of accountability and corporate ethics.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression cautioned against a rush to regulate. “The right response,” it said, is to enforce existing laws and “resist the temptation to trade constitutional principles for the illusion of control.”

Some analysts and tech sector leaders believe otherwise.

“When a company offers generative AI tools ... it is their responsibility to minimize the risk,” Sloan Thompson, of EndTAB, which tracks tech-facilitated abuse, told Wired. “X has done the opposite. They’ve embedded AI-enabled image abuse directly into a mainstream platform.”

In January, Dario Amodei, the CEO of AI firm Anthropic, noted that the technology is entering a risky period of “adolescence.” Mr. Amodei has often called for regulations that would require AI companies to disclose how they guide model behaviors and incorporate standards that protect privacy and dignity.

The Harvard Law Review last year pointed to the three-decades-old Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which limits publisher and distributor liability for internet platforms.

In the age of generative AI, this section “may have outgrown its original purpose,” it said. “The purpose of the First Amendment is to protect core forms of human expression,” the journal noted. This can include what is sometimes referred to as “lawful but awful” content.

But, as much as humans rely on the automated work of AI, those systems do not have “morality, intelligence or ideas,” it noted, and “should not receive the same protections as humans.”

According to Anthropic’s Mr. Amodei, “If we act decisively and carefully, the risks can be overcome. ... And there’s a hugely better world on the other side of” this phase of AI transformation. ■

Europe’s future hinges on Hungary

Arise in anti-corruption movements in Europe has upended politics from Serbia to Bulgaria to Romania. Now, one of the continent’s most entrenched leaders, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary, faces a serious challenge this April in an election that could be determined by what one commentator calls a public “yearning for integrity.”

For the European Union, too, the stakes in the election are high. Mr. Orbán and his populist conservative party, Fidesz, have often obstructed the 27-member bloc’s efforts to help Ukraine and counter Russia. The EU has also held back funds for Budapest over its shrinking rule of law.

After nearly 16 years under Mr. Orbán, Hungary has the lowest living standards in the EU. Its 9.6 million people have experienced three years of economic stagnation. It is also ranked by Transparency International as the EU’s most corrupt nation.

Voters are finally linking antidemocratic misrule with their economic misery. Independent polls show an anti-corruption party, Respect and Freedom (or Tisza party) with a wide lead over Fidesz. The party’s leader, Péter Magyar, has shot up in popularity after two years of touring the country with warnings about the private use of public money by Fidesz.

Tisza is “much more than me ... it’s a movement of the vast majority of the Hungarian people against corruption, lies, propaganda, and autocracy,” Mr. Magyar told Deutsche Welle. He promises to strengthen judicial independence, end nepotism in government, and make other reforms to curb graft.

Mr. Orbán’s political machine and media control might yet prevent a Tisza win. But, says EU Today editor Gary Cartwright, if polls hold, “Hungary is on the brink of one of the most significant political transformations in its recent history.”

“In the crucible of early 21st-century European politics, Magyar’s ascendancy is a reminder that democratic renewal remains possible – even after years of drift towards authoritarian proximity and geopolitical ambivalence.” ■

Ukrainians embrace a war anniversary

To the rest of the world, Ukrainians might have little reason to commemorate the fourth anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion on Feb. 24. Their country is enduring one of its worst winters. Heat and electricity are scarce from missile attacks on energy facilities. An estimated 200,000 Ukrainian soldiers have gone AWOL. And last year was the worst year yet for the number of civilians killed in the war.

“For Ukraine, each day is a day of blood, death, tears and struggle,” Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, told OSV News.

Yet, with a gumption and ingenuity that they have also mustered to keep a Russian military from making sizable advances, Ukrainians will mark the day with various expressions of gratitude, unity, and perhaps solemn celebration.

One event will be the first nationwide “day of prayer.” One reason

for the event: Church attendance is up, especially as many places of worship have become “humanitarian hubs” to help the needy.

“People are searching for meaning. I see it every day,” said Major Archbishop Shevchuk.

“There are moments when anyone would ask, ‘Where is God? Have we been forgotten?’ But our people are finding answers here – in community, prayer, perseverance,” he said.

Around the world, Ukrainians abroad will mark the anniversary with vigils and rallies, as they have in recent years. Some military experts suggest the world also note how Ukraine has become a marvel in designing its own drones and cruise missiles.

The U.N. Security Council will hold a special session on Feb. 24 to discuss the impact of the war on Ukrainians. The European Parliament plans to approve a €90 billion (\$107 billion) loan to Kyiv from European Union member states on that day. Top EU officials will be in Ukraine for the anniversary.

“Moscow is not invincible. On the battlefield, its army is at a standstill. At home, its economy is in crisis,” wrote Kaja Kallas, the EU’s high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, on the social media platform X. “Increased pressure, together with our partners, and increased military support to Ukraine can shorten this war.”

Ukraine has done much to both endure and to recover, especially in Bucha, scene of the first mass killing of civilians by Russia. The city has been rebuilt. “We needed to transform a place of tragedy into a place for living again,” former city council member Mykhailyna Skoryk-Shkarivska told commonspace.eu.

“Every sign of normal life, our families, community, friends motivates us,” she added. “Even during conflict, people kept cooking borsch and mashed potatoes, tending to daily life, and celebrating the small moments.”

And the big events, like an anniversary of a war’s beginning. ■

READERS RESPOND

An America without ‘rules of the road’

The Global Patterns commentary “How will the world adapt to America’s unilateralism?” in the Jan. 26 Monitor Weekly uses the example of Hans Monderman’s challenges to traditional thinking about street engineering to seemingly rationalize Donald Trump’s challenges to the world order. The article suggests that in the anarchy that comes from threatening the existing world order and eliminating the rules we follow, we will be like motorists without “rules of the road,” and will be more cautious in our relations and safer in an environment where no one is quite sure where they stand with each other.

The lesson of Monderman’s critique was not the elimination of rules, but the application of new techniques of traffic management, and rules based upon a shared understanding of what would help improve road safety. Mr. Trump appears to be simply challenging the existing rules, with the only proposed alternative being unilateralism or “America knows best.” When global relations become “Everyone in the community only out for themselves,” we are neither safer nor smarter.

John T. Spence
Covington, Kentucky

Looking good

Hurray! What an inspiring new look for the Monitor Weekly. Simplicity of layout. Parts where they belong, all clearly identified. And, best of all, no doubt about the identity of the publication. What joy to see this freshness at this particular moment in civilization’s struggle to do better. I get the sense of a strong continuation of the Monitor’s desire to connect with people all over.

Sara Barnacle
Dover, New Hampshire

THE HOME FORUM

Putting my stamp on a lost art

Always dialed in to the digital world, one writer finds respite in his postcard pastime – proof of the old truth that givers get more than receivers.

As a loyal soldier in the digital revolution, I write dozens of emails each day, along with scores of texts and my usual share of social media posts. But recently, I’ve become a regular sender of postcards, embracing a tradition once popular in an earlier century. Dropping them into the mail always makes me smile, proof of the old truth that givers get more from such gestures than receivers.

I didn’t set out to revive a lost art or make some larger point when I took up my postcard pastime. Like so many of life’s happy turns, it came about by serendipity. While in Pittsburgh to attend my son’s college graduation, our family spent a sunny morning at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, one of the city’s star attractions. We like to stop by the gift shop when we visit museums and public gardens, though my wife and I are empty nesters more interested in downsizing our possessions than in acquiring new stuff. But gift shops help keep cultural institutions afloat, so we make token purchases when we can as a small nod of support.

Though warm spring weather told us that the Yuletide season was months away, my wife selected some Christmas ornaments to remind us of Phipps during the holidays. While standing in line with her at the cash register, I spotted a rack of postcards. For a few years now, I’ve brought home postcards from various places and perched them along a bookshelf near my home computer, creating a private gallery that reminds me of faraway destinations. Clattering away at my keyboard, I often glance at a postcard from a Van Gogh exhibition in Dallas, for example, and mentally travel into one of his vivid olive groves brightened by a luminous cloud.

With that pleasant idea in mind, I purchased a few postcards depicting Phipps’ botanical wonders, including a cactus as big as a bushel basket and a blue blossom, grand as a windmill, that seemed to radiate warmth. They looked like great candidates for the bookshelf tableau in my home office.

Once we returned home, though, I could see that the improvised art exhibit in my home office was getting cluttered. I felt greedy hoarding all those visual treasures, and I was beginning to understand that postcards don’t really reach their promise

A leader's prayer – and a prayer for leaders

When the news reports misuse of power by government leaders, it can feel like there's not a lot ordinary citizens can do to make things better. But history has often shown that wrong acts will yield to humanity's deep inclination toward justice – including a change of heart in leaders.

The famous ruler King David governed Israel in the 10th century B.C. The Bible relates that when he was a teenage shepherd he felled a giant of an enemy with one stone slung from his sling, while soldiers stood by, afraid to act.

But even remarkable people make bad choices. King David made big ones. He used his power to compel the wife of a soldier in his army to commit adultery with him, and then ordered that the soldier be killed, to hide what he had done and take the soldier's wife as his own.

Later, awakened by a trusted adviser to the need for deep remorse, David wrote a psalm that remains a powerful prayer for anyone who wants to help themselves, as well as others, be better. It includes: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. ... Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Psalms 51:10, 12).

Self-cleansing, or repentance, is an ongoing practice. Christianity refers to it as a sacrament, a commitment to living the goodness and purity natural to all of us. When we make an effort to let God cleanse our own hearts of anger, scorn, or despair, and replace such feelings with gratitude and support for unselfish and just actions, we become part of a movement of healers.

An account of Christ Jesus' healing work shows that someone out of their right mind can come to their senses (see Mark 1:23-27). Jesus authoritatively said to the disordered, unbalanced state of a man possessed with an "unclean spirit," "Hold thy peace, and come out of him." The man was restored to his right mind.

When any of us acts "uncleanly" – for instance, being concerned with what we perceive as our own personal benefit – we need to be restored to a sense of our goodness and purity as God's spiritual offspring. This is the purpose of the sacrament of the baptism of repentance.

It takes persistent effort to desire and maintain an expectation of good in the face of bad news and actors. Yet we are inherently capable of this, because God, good, expresses infinite goodness in and through all His children. As we, through prayer, repent and clean our own heart of hate, cynicism, and other unhelpful reactions, we can better trust that such repentance is possible for others.

Referring to Jesus, the Christian Science textbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," says, "First in the list of Christian duties, he taught his followers the healing power of Truth and Love" (Mary Baker Eddy, p. 31).

However great the need may be for kings and leaders to cleanse their hearts, the way each of us can best further this is to let God make our hearts clean. Then our prayers for others help them to better serve the welfare of all.

– Margaret Rogers

unless they're sent to someone else. Those beautifully colored miniatures – a snowy woodscape, a pink dog rose, an impressionist painting of two women on a sailboat – now struck me as oddly constrained in my bookcase, like tropical birds confined to a cage.

Fetching a ballpoint pen and a book of stamps, I decided to set them free. I addressed one to a friend who had recently lost his job, another to someone navigating new struggles at home. I inscribed a third postcard to my son in Massachusetts, and scribbled greetings on a fourth card to my daughter in California.

What I learned, in doing so, is that postcards are a perfect balance between a hastily composed email and the long, leisurely pace of a handwritten letter. Their compact format, which nudges writers to keep the message short and sweet, chimes with our hurried times. But the physical presence of a postcard, with its bright art and durable card stock, is a pleasure that abides more vividly than any message in an inbox.

Which is why, though most of the postcards from my shelf have flown the coop to other homes, I've continued to send them, and I now even buy them in bulk. A new box arrived this morning – luminous reproductions of masterpieces by Henri Matisse. I'm not yet sure where they'll end up, but I'm fortunate to live within a circle of friends and family who welcome whatever cheer might happen to land in their mailbox.

Who knows? I might even get a few postcards in return.

– Danny Heitman

POETRY

NO ONE

*And when they came for me
there was no one left
To speak for me
So, I learned to
Speak for myself
But when I no longer
Needed them*

There they were

– Fejro Okifo

John Constable captured the rhythms of rural life

The farms and fields of his native Suffolk county, England, provided rich material and spiritual sustenance for the painter.

By **Heller McAlpin** / Contributor

“Painting is but another word for feeling,” the English landscape artist John Constable wrote to a friend in 1821. In “Constable’s Year: An Artist in Changing Seasons,” art historian Susan Owens delves into the painter’s deep feelings for his native Suffolk county, which are reflected in his art. Owens’ compact, beautifully illustrated book is an illuminating introduction to a man who devoted himself to capturing the rhythms of the seasons in his beloved rural corner of England.

The publication of “Constable’s Year” coincides with the 250th anniversary of the artist’s birth, which is being celebrated with a blockbuster exhibition at the Tate Britain museum called “Turner & Constable: Rivals & Originals.” The show pairs the two landscape artists, who were born just a year apart but whose lives diverged markedly. After reading this book, you’re unlikely to confuse J.M.W. Turner and John Constable again.

Turner was born in sooty London in 1775 to a family of modest means, but his star rose much more rapidly than Constable’s. Turner, a prodigy, enrolled at the Royal Academy of Arts at age 14, and exhibited his first watercolor there in 1790, when he was 15. By 1802, he was elected a full Royal Academician. Turner traveled extensively in Europe, and earned a steady income from sales of his idealized, romantic landscapes and raging seascapes.

Constable, on the other hand, who was born in 1776 into an affluent merchant family in East Bergholt, stayed close to home and set out on a less assured path to acclaim. His father, Golding Constable, a gentleman farmer who had built a lucrative business milling and transporting grain, expected his son John to succeed him. It wasn’t until 1799, when John’s younger brother Abram agreed to take over the family business, that Constable could enroll in the Royal Academy of Arts. His first painting was accepted for the Royal Academy’s summer exhibition in 1802. But to his frustration, he was not elected a full Royal Academician until 1829 – three months after his beloved wife’s death, and just eight years before his own, in 1837.

Constable’s insistent focus on realistic, detailed farming scenes was not a popular move. “East Bergholt was to Constable what the Alps were to J.M.W. Turner,” Owens writes. Turner’s work was considered poetical; Constable, in contrast, was drawn to “the prose of the agricultural year.” His paintings were dominated by vast skies and ominous clouds, conveyed with thick lashings of oil paint to capture the weather in all its moods.

Constable’s landscapes were dotted with farm laborers plowing fields and tending locks and windmills. Much of his work failed to sell, yet he balked at taking on commissioned portraits or teaching jobs. He avoided tailoring his vision for the sake of a paycheck. When he did take a commission in 1814 from a wealthy neighbor as a wedding present for his fiancée, Constable produced “The

Stour Valley and Dedham Village,” which featured a dunghill in the foreground. The artist was interested in all aspects of agriculture, even a heap of manure.

Constable met the love of his life, Maria Bicknell, in 1809, when she was 21 and he was 33. Alas, their marriage, like artistic success, was long delayed, because Maria’s grandfather, the wealthy rector of East Bergholt, vehemently opposed the union. His objections were financial and social: Constable had no steady income, and his family was not gentry.

The couple finally married in 1816. They settled in London proper and later Hampstead, with Maria giving birth to seven children in rapid succession. Constable returned to East Bergholt repeatedly to paint and sketch. Owens points out that the couple’s protracted courtship and seasonal separations had a silver lining: The reams of intimate letters they wrote to each other when apart are a gift to future biographers.

Owens’ close consideration of Constable’s paintings in the context of his life and times – and nature’s mutable seasons – is a gift to readers. For example, she enriches our appreciation of one of the artist’s most striking works, “The rectory from East Bergholt House, 30 September, 1810,” by pointing out that “Constable painted this view at dawn, from a back window of his family home,” looking out toward where Maria stayed when she visited her grandfather.

With that context, we come to understand that the dramatically streaked red-and-mauve sky over the darkened fields that separate the two lovers renders the artist’s emotions in paint.

Owens’ book is a testament to the emotional power and timelessness of great art. ■

BEST BOOKS OF FEBRUARY

Mule Boy

by *Andrew Krivak*

Ondro Prach, the 13-year-old sole survivor of a mine collapse in Pennsylvania’s Blue Mountain hills, mulls his life’s many imprisonments – guilt, fear, regret – in the decades since the 1929 disaster. Written in a flowing oral style in which “every clause is a thought and every comma is a breath,” Andrew Krivak’s novel is an extraordinary work of rescue, witnessing, and redemption.

Kin

by *Tayari Jones*

Tayari Jones follows up “An American Marriage” with the vibrant tale of Annie and Vernice, “motherless girls that everyone felt sorry for” from Honeysuckle, Louisiana. As the best friends grow up and move away – Vernice to the privileged world of Spelman College, Annie to Memphis, Tennessee, and the school of hard knocks – they flourish, yearn, and struggle. Jones’ prose rings with truth, delights in detail, casts some side-eye, and provides rich ground for the novel’s vivid cast. The hurts and consequences keep coming, but Jones wraps both her characters – and readers – in a generous embrace.

Cold Zero

by *Brad Thor, with Ward Larsen*

“Ripped from the headlines” might sound clichéd, but applied to Brad Thor’s latest thriller, it’s more than apt. After a New York-bound plane carrying the inventor of an artificial intelligence superweapon gets taken down over the Arctic, a CIA operative and an ex-Air Force pilot must aid survivors, jury-rig shelter, and protect that

AI weapon (yes, it's in a briefcase) in the frigid cold. Help is on the way; so, too, are Chinese ships, a Russian sub, soldiers called Ice Wolves, and one big storm. The pages fly by.

Ashland

by *Dan Simon*

Dan Simon's family drama ponders life's joys and losses using a patchwork of first-person narratives from folks in small-town Ashland, New Hampshire. The novel is a refreshingly meditative, modern "Our Town" with a hat tip to the blessings of nature, books, and writing.

This Book Made Me Think of You

by *Libby Page*

Tilly Nightingale's grieving, brokenhearted life is about to change – month by month with 12 letters and 12 books, surprisingly gifted to her by her devoted late husband, Joe. In Libby Page's sensitive and life-affirming novel, Tilly embraces new adventures and friendships and discovers an unexpected kindred spirit in Alfie, the bookshop owner.

Autobiography of Cotton

by *Cristina Rivera Garza*,

translated by *Christina MacSweeney*

Cristina Rivera Garza superimposes a fictional story of her grandparents' experiences onto accounts of a Mexican cotton workers' strike in 1934 that also included author and activist José Revueltas. Exposing corruption and exploitation, the book is at once a novel, a family memoir, and a work of astute social commentary. The author gives a voice to people whose stories have been expunged from history.

Keeper of Lost Children

by *Sadeqa Johnson*

"Where was her life stored?" wonders Sophia, a Black teenager in 1965 Maryland with questions about her bare-bones past. "Who was keeping track?" Sadeqa Johnson intersperses Sophia's hunt for her true heritage with the stories of a U.S. Army volunteer sent to Germany in the late 1940s, and Ethel Gathers, a military spouse stationed in Mannheim in the early '50s. Ethel works to find homes for the offspring of Black U.S. servicemen and white German women left behind after the war. The story roars by, and the good-hearted characters search, stumble, and grow.

The Reservation

by *Rebecca Kauffman*

In her Midwestern mystery, Rebecca Kauffman's rich menu of characters – from the dishwasher and busser to the pastry chef and prep cook – offers its takes on a searing theft at Aunt Orsa's fine-dining establishment. Seasoned with the lingo and labor of a bustling restaurant, the story seeks to uncover who stole 22 rib-eye steaks from the walk-in cooler before a night of VIP bookings. Both peppery and poignant, it's an appealing brew.

The Midnight Taxi

by *Yosha Gunasekera*

In Yosha Gunasekera's winning debut, Siri, a 20-something taxicab driver in New York City, faces the unthinkable: murder charges for the inexplicable death of a solo fare in her back seat. With assistance from a criminal defense lawyer – and fellow Sri Lankan

– she races to prove her innocence, relying on pointers from true-crime podcasts, her immigrant family's support, and the restorative power of a chicken curry meal. Gunasekera's story of friendship and tenacity zips.

Luminous Bodies

by *Devon Jersild*

This captivating historical-fiction debut novel brings Nobel laureate Marie Curie to vibrant life. Devon Jersild imagines Curie's life, from her upbringing in Poland to her battlefield humanitarian work during World War I. The book illuminates her inner thoughts and experiences as a daughter, wife, mother, scientist, lover, immigrant, and friend.

Everyday Movement

by *Gigi L. Leung*,

translated by *Jennifer Feeley*

Gigi L. Leung dedicates her timely novel to "all who carry anger and sorrow," and touches on the hope and struggle for democracy. Set during the 2019 Hong Kong summer protests, Leung's kaleidoscopic story follows the lives of students, teachers, and others who encountered a devastating new political reality with China's crackdown. Leung's stirring novel echoes with humanity's courage, dignity, and resilience.

Playmakers

by *Michael Kimmel*

In "Playmakers," his fascinating, wide-ranging history of the American toy industry, Michael Kimmel makes a convincing case that the Eastern European Jews who immigrated to America between 1881 and 1924 helped change the nature of American childhood in the 20th century. Imagining an idealized childhood that had eluded them, they as well as their offspring dreamed up iconic comic book heroes, including Superman and Popeye, and thousands of popular toys, including teddy bears and Barbie – and created toy companies like Hasbro and Mattel that still exist today.

Starry and Restless

by *Julia Cooke*

The spectacular lives of three intrepid women journalists and solo travelers – Rebecca West, Emily "Mickey" Hahn, and Martha Gellhorn – come into focus in Julia Cooke's "Starry and Restless: Three Women Who Changed Work, Writing, and the World." Cooke offers readers a whirlwind tour behind the headlines and a fresh perspective on the origins of literary journalism. ■

Cannes festival favorite ‘The President’s Cake’ offers insights into Iraq

Dictator Saddam Hussein expects grateful citizens to give him presents on his birthday, despite the hardships wreaked on them by the first Gulf War.

‘The President’s Cake,’ set in early 1990s Iraq during the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, is a fable with a startling, real-world immediacy. Watching it, we are aware that the odyssey of its 9-year-old protagonist, Lamia (the remarkable Baneen Ahmed Nayyef), represents something much larger. And yet we never lose sight of the fact that Lamia’s story also belongs to her alone.

Written and directed by Hasan Hadi, who grew up in Iraq before studying film at New York University, ‘The President’s Cake’ was the first Iraqi film to compete in the Cannes Film Festival, in 2025. There it won both the Caméra d’Or for best first feature and the audience award. A crowd-pleaser in the best sense, it overflows with empathy for its beleaguered people.

Lamia lives with her grandmother, Bibi (Waheed Thabet Khreibat), in a tight-knit, marshland community. Paddling a canoe to school each day, Lamia is extraordinarily resilient and yet still very much a child. Her closest companion, apart from her mischievous, conniving classmate Saeed (Saja Mohamad Qasem), is her beloved pet rooster, Hindi. Like Lamia, Hindi is eye-catching and headstrong.



By Peter Rainer

The United Nations sanctions in the wake of the first Gulf War, along with the American aerial bombardments, have severely impacted the general population. Despite all this, Saddam requires his people every year to shower him with birthday gifts.

Lamia is tasked with baking the president a cake in less than two days, though her village doesn’t have all the necessary ingredients. If she doesn’t carry out the assignment, she could be expelled and placed in harm’s way.

She and Bibi venture into the city ostensibly to barter for eggs and baking powder and sugar. When Lamia discovers that the weary Bibi secretly plans to leave her to be raised by a sympathetic city couple, she flees, Hindi in tow, and meets up with Saeed at a local fairground.

Evading the authorities, they become petty thieves, although neither will admit that is what they are. And so begins an odyssey that takes Lamia through a series of scrapes that demonstrate both her unquenchable spirit and the corruptions of the society that enfolds her.

Hadi, the filmmaker, doesn’t underscore those corruptions for us, although the city is plastered with posters and murals of a broadly smiling Saddam. The children in Lamia’s classroom may be instructed to belt out chants of “Long live our leader,” but it’s clear that the ritual means little to her, or to Saeed.

What’s so poignant about Lamia’s plight is that, without her being aware of it, the war she is caught up in has taken a toll

on her innocence – as it is with all wars in which children are embroiled. The adults she encounters in her journey all have their own agendas; they cut her no slack. The one exception is Jasim (Rahim Alhaj), a kindly postal carrier who goes in search of the errant Lamia when Bibi frantically reports her missing to the unconcerned police.

If not for Jasim, the society we see might resemble a congregation of con artists. He humanizes the clamor and makes us aware that, even in the direst circumstances, goodness can somehow still prevail.

Hadi’s unsentimental treatment of his key players is especially sensitive. These are no lovable Hollywood tykes. Their street smarts are integral to their being. Lamia and Saeed have a favorite game: They stare into each other’s eyes and wait for the other to blink first. It seems harmless enough, but the game represents something more profound – a way to lock souls as the adult world, and the bombs, rain down upon them.

In a sense, Lamia lives her entire life as though it were a kind of glorified staring game.

She is cognizant of all that surrounds her, out of both fear and an intense curiosity about how her world works. But she is also open to enchantment.

Early on, Bibi tells her that, if you look deeply into the river, God promises the pure in heart that they shall see the image of their loved one. In the film’s most heartrending passage, when her odyssey has ended, this little girl, in a moment of quiet grace, sees just that.

■ *Rated PG-13 for strong language, some suggestive material, and smoking.*

CULTURE

Minneapolis inspires protest songs from The Boss to Billy Bragg

The singers are part of a lineage that includes Woody Guthrie, Billie Holiday, and Marvin Gaye, whose music rallied people to envision a more just world.

By Stephen Humphries / Staff writer

Woody Guthrie famously painted the slogan “This Machine Kills Fascists” on his guitar – a pithy summary of the songwriter’s belief in the power of his political songs.

“He wasn’t much of a guitar player,” says Billy Bragg, Britain’s most famous contemporary protest songwriter. “He was, bottom line, a communicator by any means necessary. ... And I’m the same.”

That’s why, when Mr. Bragg heard about the shooting of Alex Pretti by U.S. immigration agents in Minnesota on Jan. 24, he was inspired to write, record, and release the song “City of Heroes” on Jan. 28. It’s one of several recent protest songs about Minneapolis, including one by Bruce Springsteen. Mr. Bragg’s “City of Heroes” lauds citizens in the North Star State for their bravery in standing up for their neighbors. His song also draws historical parallels to

other resistance movements. That's why Mr. Bragg says that if his guitar had a slogan on it, he would choose a different phrase than Mr. Guthrie's. Mr. Bragg's motto would be "Death to Cynicism."

It's a riposte, he says, to people who have given up. To those who believe nothing will ever change or that no one else cares about helping the world. Like other political musicians – whether it's Thomas Mapfumo calling attention to corruption in Zimbabwe, Egypt's Ramy Essam giving voice to the 2011 Arab Spring protests, or Les Amazones d'Afrique's calls to empower women against female genital mutilation – Mr. Bragg is continuing a lineage of utilizing song as a rallying cry for those envisioning a more just world.

"During times when protest feels necessary, those who are protesting need ways to feel encouraged," says James Sullivan, author of "Which Side Are You On?: 20th Century American History in 100 Protest Songs." "The reason why we sing at protests is that it builds this sense of community, and it's a morale booster."

Mr. Bragg isn't alone. Indie rock band My Morning Jacket issued a protest album, "Peacelands," and cited a need to find "a new path together to safe and humane immigration policy and reform rooted in peace and love." Mr. Springsteen dedicated "Streets of Minneapolis" to Renee Good and Mr. Pretti, the two U.S. citizens killed by immigration officials in separate incidents last month.

"We need new songs. We can't keep going back and singing 'Ohio,'" says Mr. Bragg, referencing the 1970 Neil Young track about the Kent State students shot by the Ohio National Guard.

Mr. Bragg's lyrics draw connections to Martin Niemöller. The German Lutheran minister penned an often-cited poem about not saying anything when the Nazis first rounded up the Communists, then the Socialists, then the Trade Unionists, and finally, the Jews.

Mr. Bragg thought about how, in contrast to Niemöller's lament about what happened in Germany and Poland in the 1930s, Americans have rallied to defend their communities against what the songwriter calls "acts of impunity." The artist's song – and views – won't resonate with everyone. Public outcry over the deaths in Minneapolis has been broad-based, but many Americans support some level of immigration enforcement, particularly against those who commit crimes.

Protest songs are intended to provoke thought. Mr. Sullivan, who co-hosts a live music series with performances of political songs, cites Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit." It spotlighted the horrors of the lynching of Black Americans. In a social media age, in which one can become desensitized to injustice through watching endless videos, songs have the potential to cut through numbness.

Mr. Bragg says his politics are rooted in empathy. When it comes to religion, he describes himself as a nonbeliever, but he nonetheless cites Jesus' command to "Love God with all your heart," and also "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Mr. Bragg hopes that songs such as "City of Heroes" will send a positive message. He wants protesters to realize three things: "One, that they're not alone," he says. "Two, that they are not the first people that have ever faced this. And three, that what they're doing is exceptional."

■ For the full story, visit www.csmonitor.com/protest-songs

Kenyan stylists are refashioning the future

Story by Diego Menjibar Reynés / Contributor

NAIROBI, KENYA

In Gikomba, eastern Africa's largest market for secondhand clothing, the daily hustle never stops. From dawn to dusk, trucks, motorbikes, and people weave through a maze of thousands of wooden stalls in a frantic buying-and-selling rhythm.

Here, not far from Nairobi's central business district, is where most of the West's discarded clothing ends up. For many of those who operate the crowded stalls, finding buyers for the cast-off pieces – known as *mitumba* in Swahili – is a daily challenge. "I haven't been able to sell any of these clothes for two years," one vendor complains, pointing to a pile of jackets above his head.

Kenya imports about 200,000 metric tons of *mitumba* each year. As much as 40% ends up in Kenyan dumpsites.

"No one is really checking the items before they're shipped here," Kenyan fashion stylist Luca Wakarindi says. "You'll often find that out of five pieces, three are waste."

Now, a growing group of local designers, including Ms. Wakarindi, is redefining the value of *mitumba*. In mid-October, Gikomba hosted its first fashion show, with 19 Kenyan models taking to the runway in reimagined secondhand garments.

The show highlights the need for creativity and ingenuity, says stylist David Kimani.

"What we try to do is give some of these pieces a second life," he says. "Some of the pieces we find are truly amazing." ■

Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. One hailed by city folk
- 4. "What a relief!"
- 8. Site for a bite
- 12. Feel remorse over
- 13. Hauled on board
- 14. Fierce feline
- 15. Metallurgist's material
- 16. Came in again
- 18. "A Fish Called ____"
- 20. Bear's lair
- 21. Hurry-up acronym
- 24. Brilliance
- 28. Some gym weights
- 32. Actor Alan of "Gilligan's Island"
- 33. Have liabilities
- 34. Itty-bitty
- 36. IRS concern
- 37. Cantata excerpt

- 39. Most pricy
- 41. Lip ____: mouth the words
- 43. Outer boundary
- 44. Complete boor
- 46. Keenly desiring
- 50. Beyond credit limit
- 55. Predating, in poetry
- 56. In ____ of (standing in for)
- 57. Hardly humid
- 58. Add years to one's life?
- 59. Evans or Carnegie
- 60. Douses
- 61. Nuclear-reactor component

DOWN

- 1. Rook's cousin
- 2. A star may have one
- 3. ____ around the block

- 4. Sentence units
- 5. Agricultural tool
- 6. Brink of Christmas
- 7. Proceed circuitously
- 8. Get a grip on
- 9. It's inspired
- 10. Competitor
- 11. Finish line
- 17. 20th letter
- 19. Soft touch
- 22. Charitable contribution
- 23. Home, e.g.
- 25. Running behind
- 26. "Woe is me"
- 27. High school handout
- 28. They constrict
- 29. Lopsided
- 30. Harness
- 31. Bob in the Olympics?
- 35. Lore of yore

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| 18 | | | 19 | | | | 20 | | | | | |
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| 50 | 51 | 52 | | | | 53 | 54 | | | 55 | | |
| 56 | | | | | 57 | | | | | 58 | | |
| 59 | | | | | 60 | | | | | 61 | | |

© Lovatts Puzzles

- 38. Build up
- 40. Splittable legume
- 42. Conway Twitty's "We ____ It All"
- 45. Word before back or bridge
- 47. Belongings
- 48. It logically follows that
- 49. Sax mouthpiece
- 50. Like Methuselah
- 51. The Italian way?
- 52. Slithery catch
- 53. Come as you ____
- 54. Bon mot expert

Sudoku difficulty: ★★☆☆

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Crossword and Sudoku solutions

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| E | G | A | D | A | R | I | U | L | I | E | U |
| E | R | E | N | A | R | A | R | D | R | E | R |
| R | E | A | E | C | A | D | C | A | D | C | A |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| S | T | E | D | E | H | C | N | S | Y | N | S |
| X | T | A | L | L | S | M | A | L | S | M | A |
| E | A | L | E | H | L | S | B | E | L | S | B |
| A | T | C | L | A | T | E | A | P | S | A | V |
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| D | E | R | E | D | N | D | E | A | D | A | N |
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| 7 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 5 | |
| 5 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 7 |
| 2 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 9 |
| 1 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 3 | 6 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| 6 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| 8 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 3 |
| 3 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 9 | 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.