

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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

— MARY BAKER EDDY

WEEK OF JUNE 8, 2026 | VOLUME 118 — ISSUE 29

CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITORS

At the beginning of Route 66, reporting on a shifting US1

NEWS: DISPATCHES

War taxes Iran's already-struggling economy.1

Trump settlement fund prompts legal pushback1

Mexico to host Iran's soccer team during World Cup training2

US renews threats against Cuba2

Uber and Lyft drivers in Mass. form union2

A friendship heralds new era of South Korea-Japan cooperation3

Worries about rising Islamophobia in US3

In Argentina, a jaguar cub signals a species comeback3

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS4

OUR WORLD4

NEWS: GLOBAL CURRENTS

Iran war opened doors for drone-savvy Ukraine. Zelenskyy is seizing the moment.5

Worst-case future climate scenario set aside.6

In 1649, it was a new idea. Today, it's a key American right. . .7

How America's buy-now economy is altering its heartland . . .8

Boots on the ground: World Cup's American moment10

THE EXPLAINER

Gen Z gets the clue: Crosswords are cool12

REPORTERS ON THE JOB.13

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Shear dedication: Barber Abdulmajid Bala gives boys an alternative to street life14

EDITORIALS

A first response to an epidemic: Calming fear15

A welcome spotlight on China's Christians15

Mercy for good apples if they expose bad apples.16

READERS RESPOND16

THE HOME FORUM

Fantastic film, terrible movie.16

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE17

BOOKS

Making a case for moral reflection in law practice18

Holding the powerful to account: Lessons from an LA fire . .18

IN PICTURES

The hands behind Côte d'Ivoire's culinary heritage.19

SUDOKU19

CROSSWORD20

At the beginning of Route 66, reporting on a shifting US

Reporter Harry Bruinius found a crossroads of America in the middle of Will County, Illinois, southwest of Chicago.

Not far from the legendary Route 66, Harry saw waving grasslands and bison-dotted vistas alongside a jumble of railroad tracks and cities of shipping containers. It is a place, he reports in this week's magazine, of contrasts and transformation; progress and disruption; of debates about what it is to be American and what is worth protecting, changing, or expanding.

The story of Will County, and of what it is experiencing as an army of trucks moves an ever-expanding supply of goods across the country, is fascinating. And it is exactly the sort of piece we had hoped Harry would find as he set out to travel the entirety of Route 66, which turns 100 years old this year.

When we first discussed Harry's idea to find stories along the celebrated roadway, he and I had both recently changed positions at the Monitor.

For almost two years, Harry was my editor, working with me on many of the stories that appeared on the cover of this magazine. Now, he was setting out to be our roving Heartland correspondent.



By Stephanie Hanes
Print Editor

I was the new editor responsible for this magazine, and my job was to help Harry and his editor, Scott Blanchard, figure out what sorts of stories Harry might look for, how we would package his reporting, and how all of this could fit into the Monitor's mission to give our readers the sort of news that expands one's understanding of the world.

I didn't have to do much. Harry and Scott embody one of our five guiding principles for putting the Monitor's mission into practice: to investigate ideals and endeavors, not just events. And Harry's story this week – the second of many we plan to include in these pages from along Route 66 – epitomizes that Monitor approach to news and storytelling.

Other stories in our magazine this week show similar insight. Simon Montlake reports on the American superfans who are hoping – one day, at least – to give U.S. soccer a home-field advantage. Howard LaFranchi writes about the way Ukraine's expertise in drones, hard-earned from more than four years of battling Russia, has turned the country from one begging for aid into a sought-after military expert. Story Hinckley writes about the complications of communicating climate science, and how even “good news” can be misinterpreted.

And don't miss Cameron Pugh's piece about the Gen Z delight for crossword puzzles. ■

War taxes Iran's already-struggling economy

Nearly three months after the United States and Israel launched attacks, Iranians measure the economic impact of war in soaring prices, lost jobs, and a prolonged internet blackout.

While Americans have felt the cost of the conflict in soaring gas prices – as costs surged globally for fuel, transport, fertilizer, and food – Iranians have been caught between severe economic challenges and a ruling regime that has now emerged more determined to resist its external enemies, and to control public discontent.

Even before the war, Iran's economy was in tatters, battered by years of sanctions – President Donald Trump's “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran began during his first term – and mismanagement.

Nationwide antigovernment street protests in January were sparked by economic grievances. They were put down by Iran's security forces with brutality, leaving more than 7,000 Iranians confirmed dead, and possibly thousands more.

But a shrinking economy does not mean Iran is unable to sustain another round of fighting against the U.S. and Israel.

“You could have a much smaller Iranian economy in the coming year, but that could still be enough to furnish Iran's leaders with the means they need to continue to harass shipping in the strait, or take the fight to the Americans,” says Efsandiyar Batmanghelidj, chief executive of the Bourse & Bazaar Foundation, a London-based economic think tank.

He cites the example of Ukraine, which continues to defend itself against Russia's 2022 invasion, despite economic contraction of around 30%.

“The notion that economic hardship will necessarily destabilize the regime, it just doesn't bear out,” says Mr. Batmanghelidj. “A lot of my research has been on how actually making Iranians poorer makes it more difficult for them to mobilize effectively against the state.”

The conflict has also put an estimated 2 million to 4 million people out of work.

“Since the war has broken out, prices have doubled, if not tripled,” says a Tehran homemaker with a master's degree in psychology and two children, who asked not to be named.

– Scott Peterson / Staff writer

Trump settlement fund prompts legal pushback

The Trump administration faces multiple lawsuits as it seeks to justify a nearly \$2 billion legal fund it established to pay individuals alleging they were unfairly targeted by what they described as politicized law enforcement.

President Trump and other administration officials justified the “anti-weaponization fund” as necessary for preventing investigations they say are politically motivated.

Critics, ranging from Democrats in Congress to the editorial

board of The Wall Street Journal, see the fund as its own form of weaponizing the Department of Justice. Some are calling it a corrupt and opaque mechanism for using taxpayer funds to reward the president's most loyal supporters, including individuals charged for participating in storming the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. (Those individuals, known colloquially as "J6ers," also received pardons from Mr. Trump last year.)

The unusual arrangement – which Justice Department officials say has precedent from the Obama administration – stems from a lawsuit that Mr. Trump filed in his personal capacity against his own government, and which he settled days before a judge had been scheduled to begin scrutinizing it.

In addition to creating the fund, the settlement includes a provision posted on the DOJ website in May that appears to offer sweeping protection to Mr. Trump and his family from any existing tax investigations.

Two police officers who clashed with protesters during the Jan. 6 attack filed a lawsuit to block the fund, arguing that it is unconstitutional. A group of nonprofits and individuals filed another a couple days later.

The proposed fund raised rare Republican backlash. Senate Majority Leader John Thune told reporters that he expects a "full vetting" of the settlement by members of Congress and that he's "not a big fan" of the deal.

"Safe bet that this Fund will generate outrageous abuses," wrote Ed Whelan, a conservative lawyer who served as deputy assistant attorney general during the George W. Bush administration, in a social media post.

As for the Obama administration precedent, Mr. Whelan noted that fund had been approved by the federal courts: "That approval provides some process protection against abuses. Here, by contrast, [the] settlement was designed to evade court review."

– Henry Gass / Staff writer

Mexico to host Iran's soccer team during World Cup training

Iran's World Cup soccer team will play matches in the United States – but sleep in Mexico.

With FIFA's approval, the Iranian team moved its training base to Tijuana, just across the border from San Diego, from its scheduled location in Arizona.

The United States has been at war with Iran since late February and as of late May still hadn't issued visas to the Iranian soccer team. Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo said she was approached by FIFA about the possibility of hosting the Iranian players.

"We said, 'Yes, no problem. We have no issue with that,'" said Dr. Sheinbaum. Mexico is facing its own tensions with the U.S., which has upped pressure on Dr. Sheinbaum to tackle drug trafficking.

The World Cup is to be hosted by Mexico, the U.S., and Canada.

– Staff

US renews threats against Cuba

The United States is turning up the heat on Cuba, renewing threats of military action and casting doubt on the possibility of reaching a diplomatic solution to a decadeslong stalemate.

Cuba announced that its oil reserves have been exhausted due to a U.S. blockade. As many as 2 million Cubans are believed to have fled the country over the past five years, as the island's tourism-dependent economy struggled in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the government violently cracked down on public protests over food shortages.

In recent months, electricity outages have become a fact of life. Food is rotting in refrigerators, schools and bus routes have limited services, and members of the public are speaking up, saying they have had enough.

The U.S. unsealed criminal charges against former President Raúl Castro on May 20 for his alleged orders to shoot down two civilian aircraft flown by Miami-based exiles in 1996. Mr. Castro, along with his late brother Fidel, led the Cuban Revolution that overthrew a dictator in 1959 and ushered in a communist government that has endured since the 1960s. The Trump administration has made repeated comments in recent months about the need for leadership change on the island.

"Currently, the only thing standing in the way of a better future are those who control your country," U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told the population in a Spanish-language video released in May on Cuban independence day. President Trump said U.S. leaders have sought a Cuban transformation for six decades, "and it looks like I'll be the one that does it."

– Whitney Eulich / Special correspondent
and Rudy Cabrera Arcia / Special contributor

Uber and Lyft drivers in Mass. form union

Massachusetts became the first state to grant rideshare drivers unionization rights after 54% of voters backed a statewide ballot initiative in 2024. The App Drivers Union will represent some 70,000 drivers. In statements, Uber and Lyft indicated willingness to negotiate with the union.

"Lyft does well when drivers do well, and we'll stay focused on helping drivers succeed while keeping rideshare affordable and dependable for everyone who counts on it," Lyft said in a statement to Reuters.

Similar efforts are underway in other states: California app drivers gained the right to unionize this year after legislation passed by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, and the Illinois legislature is mulling a similar initiative.

– Cameron Pugh / Staff writer

A friendship heralds new era of South Korea-Japan cooperation

Despite stark differences, Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae and South Korean President Lee Jae-myung are moving past deep-seated historical frictions to forge what appears to be a genuine friendship.

In May, the two leaders wrapped up their sixth meeting in less than a year, fueling hope that Japan and South Korea are entering a new era of cooperation.

Destabilizing geopolitical challenges, including the Iran war, have added urgency to the partnership, and domestic political shifts have helped pave the way. But the leaders' evident chemistry doesn't hurt, either. Their meetings have included an impromptu drum jam session in Ms. Takaichi's hometown of Nara, Japan, in January. In May, they listened to musical acts in Mr. Lee's hometown of Andong, a center of South Korean dance and storytelling. Ms. Takaichi invited Mr. Lee back to Japan for more talks, perhaps with a stop at hot springs.

"The fact that we've visited both of our hometowns within just four months is not only a first in the history of South Korea-Japan relations, but also a rare occurrence, even on the global stage," Mr. Lee told Ms. Takaichi.

On the surface, they might be considered an odd pair. Ms. Takaichi, a staunch conservative in the mold of her late mentor, Abe Shinzo, is known for supporting Japan's defense buildup and revisionist views of the country's aggression during World War II. Mr. Lee is a liberal who emerged during South Korea's 1980s pro-democracy movement, and, like many progressive politicians, has used anti-Japan rhetoric in campaigns.

Yet, for all their ideological differences, Ms. Takaichi and Mr. Lee have strong qualities in common. Both come from humble backgrounds, rather than from the political elite. Both are veteran politicians who have made careers out of being straight talkers, even iconoclastic. And they are pragmatic, willing to put practical goals for their countries first.

"They see in each other people who have come through long political careers, and proven that they can subordinate beliefs to political necessity," says Dan Sneider, a lecturer in East Asian studies at Stanford University and former Tokyo correspondent for the Monitor. "They have bonded over that."

– Ann Scott Tyson / Staff writer

Worries about rising Islamophobia in US

A deadly attack on a California mosque has reignited concerns about rising Islamophobia in the United States and the radicalization of young people, often men, in extremist corners of the internet.

The shooting, in which the gunmen fatally shot three people at the Islamic Center of San Diego before killing themselves on May 18, appears to be the first ideologically motivated, lethal attack on a mosque in the U.S. this century, according to a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

There has been a sharp rise in Islamophobic rhetoric and incidents since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and Israel retaliated by declaring war against Hamas in Gaza.

"Islamophobia had been quiet in the United States for a while," says Corey Saylor, research and advocacy director at the Council on American-Islamic Relations, highlighting a 23% decrease in complaints between 2021 and 2022. "And then it was like somebody flipped a light switch."

CAIR, which fields reports of Islamophobic incidents, said it received 8,683 complaints in its 2025 report. That's the highest number the group has seen since it began tracking complaints three decades ago, according to Mr. Saylor.

Islamophobic rhetoric is a long-standing problem in the U.S., says Mr. Saylor, who has studied Islamophobia for three decades.

Mia Bloom, a professor at Georgia State University who studies extremism, cites a loss of trust. When people's core beliefs are challenged – such as by a loss of faith in their government – they become receptive to radical ideas, she says. Dr. Bloom also points to the polarization of online discourse as a source of radicalization for many young people.

"The online space allows people to curate the kind of information they're exposed to, and they never hear a different point of view," she says.

One solution would be friends, family, or classmates coming forward when they suspect someone might hurt others. "That is the best way for prevention of an actual attack," says Dr. Bloom.

Pointing fingers across political parties or demographic groups can exacerbate divides, researchers say.

Also key: time. Assumptions and conclusions tend to run rampant after an attack. But when investigators and the media take time to process and verify information, they can help decrease the likelihood for polarized discourse.

– Cameron Pugh and Victoria Hoffmann Staff writers

In Argentina, a jaguar cub signals a species comeback

A formerly captive female jaguar, released into the wild in 2019, has welcomed a healthy cub in Argentina's Gran Chaco forest.

The cub's birth marks the first time in 30 years that a jaguar has been born in the wild in Argentina, Lucila Pinto reports in bioGraphic magazine.

Facing a dwindling number of wild jaguars, Fundación Rewilding Argentina, a nonprofit conservation organization, has endeavored since 2019 to pair captive females with wild males whose wanderings have brought them near El Impenetrable National Park.

The project has also successfully reintroduced jaguars, known as *yaguaretés* in the Indigenous Guaraní language, into the wild.

An expert on jaguars at Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council, Verónica Quiroga, told bioGraphic that she's "extremely hopeful" that the wild cat will make a comeback.

– Staff

52%

The share of American men ages 18 to 49 who reported that they have an active sports betting account, according to a report by the Siena Research Institute in New York. Some 27% of Americans overall also report having an account. Respondents expressed concern with the online sports betting industry in the United States, with 74% calling participation of individuals as young as 18 years old a “very” or “somewhat” serious issue.

17%

The share of Americans who believe that artificial intelligence will have an overall positive impact, according to a recent University of Pennsylvania study. Forty-two percent of the group said it would have a negative impact, and 65% said the government has done too little to regulate AI.

1.3
BILLION

The number of people Africa has added to its population since 1950, according to a recent Pew Research Center analysis of United Nations data. The continent is expected to be home to 3.8 billion people by 2100. If population growth continues as projected, nearly half the world’s young people are expected to live in Africa by 2100.

20,000

The number of oysters released into Chichester Harbor near Portsmouth, England, as part of one of the U.K.’s largest oyster reef restoration projects. There is evidence of oyster harvesting in Chichester Harbor dating to Roman times. The restoration was an effort to revive the region’s oyster population, as well as its maritime heritage.

– **Victoria Hoffmann** / Staff writer

Sources: Siena Research Institute, Annenberg Public Policy Center, Pew Research Center, Good News Network

OUR WORLD

“We are spending this huge amount of money ...”

That is how Jeff Colgan, a professor at Brown University, described to the Financial Times the additional costs that American households have faced for gas and diesel since the start of the Iran war. Mr. Colgan helped put together a financial tracker on the war’s energy costs to U.S. consumers. The total as of May 21 was \$44 billion, which adds up to nearly \$340 per American household. Mr. Colgan said that level of spending would be equivalent to the cost of repairing the nation’s network of bridges.

– **Matthew Bell**

Behind an uptick in Putin’s numbers

Vladimir Putin’s public approval rating rose after the state-funded VTsIOM polling agency changed its methodology. Support for Mr. Putin increased by 1.2 percentage points (from 65.6% in mid-April to 66.8% in early May), and his trust rating rose by 1.1 percentage points (from 71% to 72.1% in the same period). His approval was at 77% at the start of the year. While Western politicians might be delighted with such numbers, the slide from 77% might have alarmed the Kremlin. In May, VTsIOM supplemented its customary telephone polls with door-to-door interviews.

– **Fred Weir**

Path opens for Starmer’s biggest challenger

Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham was confirmed as the Labour Party’s candidate for the upcoming by-election in Makerfield, officially establishing his path to return to Britain’s Parliament – and potentially lead the country. Mr. Burnham is widely expected to try to oust the increasingly unpopular Keir Starmer as Labour Party leader and prime minister. Mr. Burnham will first need to win the by-election, which will be fiercely contested by Reform UK’s Robert Kenyon, among others. The vote is expected to take place June 18.

– **Arthur Bright**

From Colombia to India? Hippos offered new home.

Colombia has the only wild herd of hippos outside Africa, after drug kingpin Pablo Escobar illegally brought four of the animals to his private estate near the town of Doradal in the 1980s. But since his property was seized without capturing the hippos, their population has exploded to approximately 200 and become a threat to locals and the environment, scientists say. An Indian billionaire now says he is willing to adopt 80 of them for his wildlife reserve in western Gujarat state, NPR reported. The offer poses logistical and other challenges, according to biologists.

– **Whitney Eulich**

KYIV, UKRAINE

Iran war opened doors for drone-savvy Ukraine. Zelenskyy is seizing the moment.

For years, Ukraine's leader begged foreign governments for help. Now, they buy drones from him, showing that Kyiv has become a valued partner.

By **Howard LaFranchi** / Staff writer

In Persian Gulf and Middle Eastern capitals from Riyadh to Damascus, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has recently found the red carpet rolled out for him.

He also has been warmly received by European leaders from Berlin to Ankara, courted as a valued partner.

What a contrast with the scene that played out in the Oval Office in February 2025, when U.S. President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance belittled Mr. Zelenskyy as a tiresome ingrate – and even denied him the luncheon that had been on the agenda.

In just one year, Ukraine has been transformed from a supplicant nation pleading for international support for its survival to a hot ticket on the international relations circuit. What changed can be summarized in two words: drone diplomacy.

Ukraine had already understood that in a world of mounting conflict and great-power competition, the battlefield innovations it has deployed and honed since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 – drones chief among them – would solicit widespread interest.

But efforts to leverage that drone technological know-how into stronger international standing advanced slowly. Until this year.

In February, a watershed moment occurred when the United States and Israel attacked Iran. As Iran started to wreak havoc on its Persian Gulf neighbors, deploying the same Shahed drones Russia uses in Ukraine, interest surged in Ukraine's battle-tested drone technology, now widely considered the global standard.

It wasn't long before Gulf states decided they needed to know more about the cheap but effective interceptor drones Ukraine has developed to counter the Iranian-designed Shaheds.

“Important transition”

Ukraine's drone diplomacy was born, creating for Kyiv not only the opportunity for lucrative exports, but also joint development projects and bilateral bridge-building.

“This is a very important transition for Ukraine: from recipient of international help to provider of desirable expertise in defense technologies and infrastructure,” says Volodymyr Fesenko, director of the Penta Center for Political Studies in Kyiv.

“If we see Zelenskyy talking about this all the time and pursuing his drone diplomacy wherever he goes,” he adds, “it's because he understands how this strengthens Ukraine's position.”

The Ukrainian leader had been trying for years to shift his country's image from one of a needy assistance recipient to more of an equal partner – certainly in Europe, but elsewhere as well. His initial efforts to expand relations with Middle Eastern countries were a

disappointment, diplomatic experts say, because Ukraine was seen as having little to offer other than the grains it has traditionally exported to help feed the region.

“Ukraine had tried for many years to demonstrate in different ways that we could be a security provider and a valuable defense partner, but for most countries – in NATO definitely – it was always, ‘what we can provide you Ukrainians,’” says Hanna Shelest, director of security studies and global outreach at the Ukrainian Prism Foreign Policy Council. “There was little interest in Ukraine's desire for partnerships and two-way goals.”

Then came war in the Persian Gulf.

“It's not only that this war triggered relationships with countries in the Middle East that Zelenskyy had been trying to cultivate,” Mr. Fesenko says. “But when these countries found out they were not prepared to respond to Iran's drone attacks – and when the whole world witnessed this – it opened a window of opportunity for Ukraine.”

The defensive technology Ukraine was offering was not only superior, but also cheaper. As Iran sent waves of relatively inexpensive drones slamming into Gulf military installations, swanky hotels, and vital oil and gas facilities, the Gulf countries responded with their expensive (and hard to replenish) American air defense systems. Ukrainian interception drones offered an alternative.

“If your adversary can produce cheap technology to attack you, there comes a point where you cannot sustain the use of expensive technology to defend yourself, and that is true for even the wealthiest countries,” says Olena Bilousova, strategic projects adviser at the Kyiv School of Economics Institute. “So the Iran war became a kind of demonstration project,” she adds, “an opportunity for Ukraine to show these countries under attack a better and cheaper solution, and for other countries around the world to take note.”

At the same time, the world has witnessed that Ukraine's drone-interception systems are not fail-safe. In early May, Russia launched one of its largest drone and missile barrages of the war, sending more than 1,500 drones and 50 missiles into Ukrainian cities, primarily Kyiv. At least 12 people were killed in Kyiv.

Ukrainian officials reported that more than 90% of the drones were intercepted, but about 1 of every 4 missiles got through, prompting Mr. Zelenskyy to acknowledge that the country's air defense systems still require improvement.

Deals and partnerships

Still, Ukraine's high interception figures have not gone unnoticed, prompting countries to seek a drone deal with Ukraine.

In late March, Ukraine signed security partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and last month reached defense and drone deals with Germany, Norway, and the Netherlands.

In May, Mr. Zelenskyy visited Bahrain carrying a drone defense deal and security partnership proposal in his portfolio. Then Ukraine and Germany reached an agreement to jointly develop long-range drones that could reach nearly 1,000 miles.

Even the U.S. is in early negotiations with Ukraine on a bilateral defense agreement that would open the door both to obtaining Ukrainian defense technologies and to joint ventures with U.S. defense companies for drone development and manufacturing.

Interest in Ukraine's drone technology is also rising in regions well outside the European and Middle East war theaters.

In April, Mr. Zelenskyy held a phone call with Chile's new president, José Antonio Kast, in which the two leaders discussed the role Ukrainian drones could play in surveillance of Chile's long, remote,

and often unguarded international borders.

Broader cooperation

Moreover, Ukraine has reasons to develop relations in the Middle East that go beyond weapons sales. “When Zelenskyy went to Damascus, many people noticed that here was Ukraine in Syria, a country that has been very important for Russia’s Middle East relations,” says the Penta Center’s Mr. Fesenko.

Mr. Zelenskyy discussed not just defense matters with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, but also energy, food security, and regional cooperation.

Indeed, the test for Ukraine now will be its ability to transform itself from a circumstantial darling of drone technology cooperation to a long-term partner bringing a variety of interests to the diplomatic table, some experts say.

“The episodic visits by Zelenskyy to a few important countries is not going to be enough,” says Mr. Fesenko. “We really need an institutionalization of our diplomatic outreach that will allow us to build partnerships with more countries and in more areas of interest.”

Still, drone technology is likely to remain at the core of Ukraine’s diplomacy for some time to come.

Noting that it was only six months ago that Ukraine’s Parliament voted to allow some limited exemptions to a ban on arms exports, Ms. Shelest says Ukraine needs to pursue all the advantages its drone expertise has provided.

“We did not ask for this war, but it has allowed us to find our niche and to offer something that has many countries saying, ‘We want Ukraine on our side,’” she says. “Now we need to develop our drone diplomacy, and for that, we need to scale up our export sales to have the money to continue driving the innovation that makes us a valued partner.”

■ *Oleksandr Naselenko supported reporting for this article.*

Worst-case future climate scenario set aside

International scientists decided it is no longer useful to study the most extreme model of runaway global warming. So why are some people upset?

By **Story Hinckley** / Staff writer

For the past 15 years, scientists have studied a climate doomsday.

Under this worst-case scenario, referred to in the scientific world as “RCP 8.5,” humans continue to burn fossil fuels with abandon through the 21st century and the world heats up by almost 5 degrees Celsius – or 9 degrees Fahrenheit – above preindustrial levels. On a dystopian RCP 8.5 Earth, Florida’s coastline disappears under water, sub-Saharan Africa witnesses more than 85 million climate migrants by 2050, and half of the world’s plant and animal species go extinct.

It’s a grim forecast. It is also, scientists recently announced, now an “implausible” one.

In April, leading scientists for the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) announced that this particular scenario – one of four Representative Concentration Pathways that measure the amount of solar energy trapped in the Earth’s atmosphere under different levels of greenhouse gas emissions – is no longer a reasonable prediction, thanks to the growth of renewable energy and climate policies.

Some have cheered the news, even as scientists in the same report said that the lower-end emission scenario of RCP 2.6, which aligns with a goal of limiting future warming below 2 degrees Celsius, may now be unrealistic as well.

Others in the scientific community have rolled their eyes at this announcement of RCP 8.5’s retirement, arguing that RCP 8.5 has been improbable for several years now. Some even assert that this scenario was never indicative of any possible future, but was disingenuously propped up by climate activists who benefited from the grim attention it brought.

But almost everyone agrees on a fundamental issue: It’s challenging to communicate the complexity and nuance of science to politicians, activists, and the media – especially a science so complicated, and politically charged, as climate change research.

“After [RCP 8.5] was created, through a game of telephone, people started calling it the ‘business as usual’ scenario,” says Zeke Hausfather, a climate scientist who co-authored a 2020 paper arguing that RCP 8.5 was being incorrectly interpreted as our default future without stringent climate mitigation. “It’s useful to have worst-case scenarios. The problem for a while is that people were conflating the worst case with the most likely outcome.”

“Two things can be true”

Back when this model was published in 2011, the line chart of greenhouse gas emissions seemed to be rocketing to the sky with a 30% increase over the previous decade.

But even then, RCP 8.5 set out to show a high-end scenario that relied on an unprecedented fivefold increase in coal use by 2100. Today, “we live in a different world” that uses far less coal, says Dr. Hausfather. So what started as an unlikely worst-case scenario then has become outside of any likely realm of possibility now as renewable energy usage accelerates.

“Two things can be true,” he adds. “The [RCP 8.5] scenario was never intended to be the most likely outcome, and we also have made progress in making high-end scenarios less likely because of falling costs of clean energy, increasing global investments in clean energy, and moving away from fossil fuels.”

Some climate scientists say that the thousands of scientific studies that assessed a RCP 8.5 scenario were not only a waste of time and resources, but also distracted researchers from digging into more moderate scenarios that would be more relevant today.

RCP 8.5 was merely a way to test the model to see what happened when it was pushed really hard, agrees Steven Koonin, who served as Under Secretary for Science, Department of Energy in the Obama administration between 2009 and 2011. Quico Toro with the Anthropocene Institute compared the role of RCP 8.5 to an engineer simulating what would happen if 250 army tanks drove onto a bridge at the same time. That’s not going to happen, but it’s a useful exercise for the engineer to learn about structural weaknesses.

Dr. Koonin says some activists, journalists, and even scientists ran with this scenario to scare the public into reducing emissions, and some “destroyed the reputations of scientists who dared to

say, “Wait a minute.”

Not everyone agrees with that point of view, though.

Chris Field, a climate scientist at Stanford University who co-chaired an IPCC working group between 2008 and 2015, refutes any claims that the scientific community deliberately tried to “mislead people” or encourage climate action “by talking about RCP 8.5.” He credits simulations from this high-emission scenario as inspiring the world to help avoid such an outcome.

“We wanted to understand a wide range,” says Dr. Field. “It’s important to recognize that no one in the climate community, certainly not the climate modelers or economists, know what the future trajectory of emissions will be.”

Lessons from 8.5

Climate science is complicated. Not only are Earth’s energy systems complex and intertwined, but they are affected by human behavior. And that, climate scientists say, is incredibly hard to calculate or predict – even if models did not have to consider unknown future societal motivations or policy priorities.

But under current emission trends, the planet looks to be following RCP 4.5, one of the two middle scenarios, expected to bring an average global temperature increase of up to 3 degrees Celsius.

That is “still a very bad outcome,” says Dr. Hausfather.

Every additional bit of warming increases the risk of negative outcomes, he and other climate scientists point out. At just a 2 degrees Celsius increase, studies suggest that there is a greater likelihood of ecological damage such as ocean coral reef collapse. Some studies also suggest that as many as 1 in 4 plant and animal species in the Amazon rainforest and Galápagos Islands could face local extinction. Extreme heat could also impact millions more people and challenge food systems across the world.

And even the RCP 4.5 future assumes that the world continues on the same trajectory of burning less coal and flattening (and later reducing) fossil fuel consumption. The retirement of RCP 8.5’s much more extreme scenario is no reason to backtrack on clean-energy progress, say many climate scientists, even as coal proponents such as President Donald Trump celebrate the news as evidence that climate concerns are overblown.

“You have to provide positive pathways”

The real lesson from RCP 8.5 for the next climate model may lie in how it’s communicated to the public while balancing urgency with accuracy. Those activists who conflated the worst-case scenario with the most likely one may have had the opposite of the intended effect, say some scientists.

“[RCP 8.5] was such a scary scenario, requiring so much change of unknown character, that people kind of just threw up their arms and said ‘I’ll leave it to the next generation,’” says Hadi Dowlatabadi, who co-authored a 2017 paper questioning if the world even had the coal reserves needed to power an RCP 8.5 planet. “You have to provide positive pathways for the public rather than scare the bejesus out of them.” ■

ST. MARY’S CITY, MD.

In 1649, it was a new idea. Today, it’s a key American right.

Maryland settlers pioneered a form of religious liberty. Their Toleration Act didn’t last, but its spirit is present in America’s founding documents.

By Scott Baldauf / Staff writer

When the Second Continental Congress declared independence from the British crown on July 4, 1776, it would be another 15 years before the Founding Fathers adopted a constitution that enshrined the “free exercise” of religion.

But the yearning for that ideal – and the American distaste for established churches – had much earlier roots. In 1644, Rhode Island founder Roger Williams called for a “wall or hedge of separation” between the church and what he called “the wilderness of the world.” Five years later, Maryland’s General Assembly passed “An Act Concerning Religion,” which aimed to keep the peace among settlers of competing Christian faiths, at a time when Protestants and Catholics were killing each other back home in England.

The Toleration Act, as it became known, was a far cry from the First Amendment, and it only lasted about 50 years, says Anna Majeski, the Lilly Endowment curator of religious history for the Maryland Center for History and Culture in Baltimore.

Even so, the act still had the power to inspire European settlers to reimagine how society could be built. It proposed and field-tested a new way of behavior that created, briefly, a safe space for religious expression for both Catholics and Protestants. While the act was repealed twice and reinstated twice, it provided a precedent that later inspired the First Amendment.

“The 1649 act is the opening of a 200-year argument about religious liberty,” says Fatimah Fanusie, a religious historian and director of the Civic Leaders Fellowship program at the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies in Baltimore. “It has progressive language within it, but it also has religious exclusions for non-Trinitarian Christians, Unitarians, and Jews.”

Professor Fanusie says that free expression was a powerful concept that outlived the 17th-century restrictions of who qualified for religious liberty, just as the broader concept of liberty outlived the 18th-century limitations imposed when the Founding Fathers wrote that “all men are created equal.”

“We’re still having that 200-year argument today, but I do think we have moved significantly beyond the types of exclusions – at least legally – that existed in the 17th century,” Professor Fanusie says. Over time, those who were excluded from religious protection “helped to create the climate that produced the Declaration of Independence and Constitution.”

One major hurdle was that each of the 13 Colonies had its own dominant churches, with Puritans and Congregationalists in New England, the Church of England in the mid-Atlantic states, and Baptists farther south. Maryland’s experiments in religious tolerance sounded great on paper, but proved difficult to enforce in people’s behavior.

“This was an experiment born out of pragmatism,” says Dr. Majeski. Maryland’s founders, brothers Cecil Calvert (the second

Lord Baltimore) and Leonard Calvert, were Catholics and wanted to create a haven for Catholics from persecution back in England.

“They knew they needed people of other faiths to populate the colony. The only way to do that was tolerance.”

With the arrival of settlers in 1635, St. Mary’s City became a bustling town of inns and trading posts and taverns. It was a port town on the Chesapeake Bay, where ships would offload goods from Europe and take away the colony’s biggest cash crop, tobacco. It was also the home of the provincial governor. Today, this spot is an archaeological site, where excavators brush and trowel away the dust of time, sifting the soil for artifacts. Elsewhere, Historic St. Mary’s City is slowly taking form. Private donations have rebuilt the city’s chapel, a scattering of inns, and the State House, where the General Assembly met until the capital was moved to Annapolis in 1694.

By today’s standards, the Toleration Act would be considered deeply flawed. It only protected religious practices for Trinitarian Christians who followed “the father, sonne, and holy Ghost.” Those of other faiths, including Quakers, Unitarians, Jews, and followers of Native American faiths, enjoyed no such protection.

The act also proved unable to prevent the civil wars back in England from reaching Maryland’s shores. In 1654, after Puritan Parliamentarian Oliver Cromwell toppled King Charles I, Puritan settlers in Maryland toppled their provincial government and rescinded the Toleration Act. The pendulum swung back and forth between Catholics and Protestants over the next four decades, until it was rescinded for a final time in 1692.

Peter Friesen, director of education at Historic St. Mary’s City, says that Marylanders celebrate the role their state had in establishing the concept of religious freedom in the Colonies, but tend to forget the Toleration Act was made null and void multiple times.

“To me, it’s always important to remind people that rights can come and rights can go,” Mr. Friesen says. “It’s up to us to keep our rights and to fight for them and to be diligent with our rights, because as soon as you take them from other people, then it’s easier to take them from more people.” ■

ELWOOD AND MANHATTAN, ILLINOIS

How America’s buy-now economy is altering its heartland

By Harry Bruinius / Staff writer

On certain evenings in Will County, Illinois, from the raised overpasses that cross its highways, a contrast becomes apparent. Freight trains inch past long-grass prairie in long, metallic lines. Semitrucks stream through newly widened intersections and closed-loop designated routes. And beyond them, bison brought back to the region a decade ago graze quietly on protected land – land that once produced explosives for three American wars.

Old U.S. Route 66, too, passes right through it.

Along this stretch of the road, two very different parts of America exist side by side. One is the remnant of what Cyrus Avery imagined a century ago, when he first proposed Route 66 as the “Main Street of America”: local, optimistic, built around the freedom of the open road and the vast landscapes it crossed. The vision was to connect thousands of local businesses and far-flung communities in a national marketplace.

The other side is a logistics system of astonishing speed and precision, and it is central to the current geography of American commerce. Here, that same vision of a connected national marketplace has become less a destination than a continental-scale conveyor belt beneath an American way of life.

CenterPoint Intermodal Center sits at the center of this logistics system in a corridor just southwest of Chicago. It receives imported goods from West Coast ports and then delivers them into the American heartland.

In just 20 years, CenterPoint has become the central node of the American retail economy. More than 3 million shipping containers pass through the facility every year, carrying an estimated \$100 billion in goods before being fanned out, in every direction, to storefronts and family front doors across the Midwest and beyond.

It is served by two Class I railroads and two interstate highways. It has 10 square miles of land holding a latticework of rail spurs, regimented stacks of intermodal containers, and rows of wide-span gantry cranes. There are millions of square feet of warehouse space and thousands of big rigs moving goods around the clock.

“You are in the heartbeat of the country here,” says Adam Roth, a longtime leasing agent for CenterPoint and executive vice president of NAI Hiffman, a commercial real estate firm.

Logistics hubs do not draw the public fascination of artificial intelligence or futuristic robotics – or even the nostalgia that surrounds Route 66. But CenterPoint and hubs like it reveal something equally important about the country Americans have built for themselves.

Here, fresh fruit arrives year-round from thousands of miles away. Press a digital “Buy now” button, and online orders appear at front doors within a day, sometimes hours. A product unloaded from a container ship in Los Angeles can be sitting on a store shelf in Ohio before the week is out.

“My dad said to me, ‘It’s really interesting that we eat better than pharaohs did,’” Mr. Roth says. “Because they ate whatever was in season, whatever they could get their hands on. Whereas we can go and get almost anything, even more, any time of the year.”

But such abundance also brings an American dilemma – at least on the Main Street level of the country. CenterPoint has already established itself as the largest inland port in North America. Now, another developer, NorthPoint, has plans to nearly double the warehouse capacity of the region – and thus the number of trucks.

This land the proposal covers is mostly farmland, including small, rural towns that also serve as quiet bedroom communities for professionals throughout the Chicago metropolitan area.

There are conflicts, competing visions clashing, and the stakes are high. As America’s logistics machine keeps expanding, the benefits include lower costs and greater convenience for U.S. consumers. That expansion might be progress – another stage in Avery’s original vision of a grand national marketplace.

That progress, however, can be measured against the disruption of the daily lives of the people who live here – some of them in a small town just a few miles down the road.

II.

On a sunny Friday afternoon in May, John Kieken and his brother-in-law, Ron Adamski, are driving down a historic stretch of Route 66, now Illinois Route 53, pointing out the new NorthPoint warehouses that line parts of the road.

Both men have been fighting the developer’s planned expansion, which, according to current proposals, would impinge upon their

homes in Manhattan, Illinois, less than 10 miles away.

“A quiet community, great people. They take care of each other, always willing to help out,” says Mr. Adamski, a Gulf War veteran who served on the aircraft carrier USS America and a retired air traffic controller. “It’s that type of community – and we’re getting swallowed up by outside forces.”

NorthPoint is seeking to acquire some 4,000 acres, or about 6 square miles of farmland and other residential areas, and expand the existing landscape of warehouses and truck routes into parts of their small, rural town.

Not everyone in the surrounding communities is against the plan. Some who agreed to sell their land saw deals fall apart after Mr. Adamski and Mr. Kieken brought legal challenges. They weren’t happy with them, the men say.

Mr. Kieken has lived in Manhattan for nearly 40 years. In the 1980s, he was an electrical engineer at Inland Steel in East Chicago, Indiana. The 40-mile commute was brutal, he says. But he came home to the prairie every night because the prairie was the point.

“Go outside day or night, and all you hear are the sounds of either farming or nature,” he says from the back seat during the drive. “You don’t hear the trucks. You don’t hear the sounds of a city. And this is going to change all that.”

He has already been a part of a major transformation of American industry. Inland was bought out in 1998, as the U.S. steel industry waned. Mr. Kieken switched careers, teaching himself web design at a crucial moment of social and economic change, and founding Midwestern Industries, a tech company he still runs today – without a commute.

Mr. Adamski arrived just seven years ago, seeking the quietude of rural life, and buying a house in a new subdivision of modest homes. It has become something of a bedroom community, the town being the southern terminus of a commuter railway connected to Chicago’s Union Station.

“You should have more say when someone wants to put a monstrosity right at the edge of your boundaries,” he says, gesturing at hundreds of acres of farmland on Cherry Hill Road, not far from where he lives.

In 2020, the two men co-founded the grassroots organization Stop NorthPoint, and, today, they are part of an ongoing “quality of life” lawsuit against the developer.

It coalesced after Mr. Adamski won a seat on the village board – part of a wave election that replaced supporters of economic development and brought in leaders broadly sympathetic to the anti-warehouse cause.

Three years after Mr. Adamski’s election, the Manhattan Village Board voted 6-0 to formally join the Stop NorthPoint lawsuit against the developer and the city of Joliet.

Mr. Adamski, whose name is on the lawsuit, abstained from the vote, seeing a conflict of interest as a public official. He had given the movement its foothold in village government. Now, in a final act of civic scruple, he stepped aside and let the village carry it forward on its own.

III.

Large forces of history have converged in Will County before. Decades ago, CenterPoint’s land was occupied by the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, which opened in 1940. To build it, the U.S. government displaced those living on 450 family farms – most through negotiated purchases, but others through eminent domain.

At its peak, the Joliet arsenal employed more than 10,000 people

and produced more TNT than any facility in the world. It made the majority of American munitions for World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Most work at the arsenal stopped in 1976, the nation’s bicentennial, and it was later abandoned and declared a Superfund site.

In 1996, Congress subdivided the land. Almost 20,000 acres were used to create the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, a nature preserve, to bring back the original landscape before the farms came. (Bison were brought here in 2015.) Another 1,000 acres were used to create the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, now the second-largest military cemetery by acreage in the country.

The transformation of the toxic site included granting CenterPoint about 2,000 acres of land as part of a wider agreement with federal, state, and local officials to clean it up. The company also received at least \$150 million in public tax financing along with agreements that local authorities would provide necessary infrastructure.

Its proposal to the small town of Elwood in the early 2000s promised an economic boom. The pitch included an estimated 12,000 well-paying new jobs. Elwood was enthusiastic, and it gave the developer 20 years without having to pay property taxes.

By 2013, however, Elwood sued the center. It claimed the project had produced only about 3,800 jobs – most of them low-wage warehouse work – and brought in less than half the projected tax revenue from economic activity.

Instead, the lawsuit said, truck traffic and road maintenance had overwhelmed the village. On top of that, the town was \$30 million in debt from costs of providing infrastructure.

That lawsuit marked an important turning point: Elwood shifted from an enthusiastic partner to an increasingly vocal critic of the logistics hub it had helped build. The city of Joliet also had legal disputes with the developer over the years. But in June 2025, the city council unanimously approved a settlement resolving years of regional litigation.

Under the settlement, truck traffic must now flow through a closed-loop road network designed to keep semis off residential streets – a major concession to community opponents. Critically for taxpayers, the city shed what attorneys estimate as hundreds of millions of dollars in road and bridge maintenance liability.

But that’s nearly 10 miles from Manhattan, through which more and more trucks are already starting to pass. Many carry the intermodal containers that have dramatically changed how quickly a shirt, or a TV, or a bunch of bananas can arrive at a neighborhood supercenter or be left on a front porch.

IV.

For most of the nation’s history, the great choke points of commerce sat at the water’s edge: Baltimore, New Orleans, New York, Los Angeles. Then came the intermodal container – the standard-size steel box that crosses oceans on a ship, transfers to a railcar without being unloaded, and then arrives by truck at a warehouse.

That single invention made a second generation of ports possible, far from any ocean.

BNSF Railway joined CenterPoint to launch the new intermodal center in 2002. Walmart was among the first large retailers to see its efficiencies in 2006, and it now occupies 3.5 million square feet of space. Union Pacific Railroad connected its spurs to the facility in 2010, and Amazon came in 2015. The center now has 4 million square feet. Dozens more retailers and third-party shippers have arrived during the past decade.

“People say Walmart is really a logistics company disguised as a retailer, that’s how important logistics is now,” says Mr. Roth, the leasing agent who was instrumental in bringing the nation’s largest retailer to the complex.

“It used to be: ‘Oh yeah, this is the person that books trucks,’” Mr. Roth says. “Now, it’s about the rise of the chief supply chain officer as one of the most important executives in any retail company.”

During a drive through the complex, as Mr. Roth explains the site’s history and current occupants, his phone rings often. CenterPoint still has hundreds of acres on site to develop, and he’s working on another deal.

V.

After driving through parts of Joliet and Elwood, Mr. Kieken and Mr. Adamski head back to their hometown of Manhattan. They note the truck traffic. At least two or three semis pass through every minute or so. At one intersection on State Street, they point out a corner where a 14-year-old boy was struck and killed by a truck. “That stop sign was the result of that accident,” Mr. Adamski says.

About 20,000 trucks pass through neighboring Joliet every day, according to a recent analysis. While many use the interstates and direct routes to the intermodal center or surrounding warehouses, about 6,000 per day use local routes and highways, passing through communities such as Manhattan.

Mr. Adamski recalls incidents in which truck drivers, disoriented by the maze of access roads, were regularly turning into the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery by mistake – and, in at least one case, driving over graves.

“That gets you fired up if you’re a veteran,” he says. As a result of the accidental truck traffic, the cemetery built a roundabout so they could safely turn back to the road.

Joliet’s legal settlement has frustrated the two men. But they got a recent boost. After much of the Stop NorthPoint lawsuit was tossed, an appellate court reinstated its quality-of-life claims.

Mr. Kieken sacrificed to make Manhattan his home. After four decades living here, he’ll fight to the end, he says.

“We go to Midewin [National Tallgrass Prairie] all the time,” Mr. Adamski says. “I’m a veteran, and so I’m connected to Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery. There’s just beautiful places here where we live. We want to keep them.”

VI.

CenterPoint and the logistics corridor it anchors is not an ugly place. Most of the warehouses here are less than 15 years old. Trains enter slowly, surrounded by restored prairie. It is massive, but it is not loud.

“We’ve had people over the years come and tour, and they’re expecting it to be more of a beehive, and it’s kind of not,” says Mr. Roth.

For generations, Americans have repeatedly remade this landscape in pursuit of new forms of prosperity and connection: canals, railroads, highways, factories, suburbs, logistics hubs.

Each transformation brought growth and disruption at once, creating wealth and mobility while reshaping the lives of the people who happened to live where the next system needed to go.

And it’s true, trucks are essential in this logistics system that has risen up to serve the demands of the new digital economy.

“In any development, especially anything of this magnitude, you’re going to have proponents and you’re going to get people that aren’t in favor of it,” Mr. Roth says. “Some people are going to look at the larger economy. It’s really a matter of your perspective

and what benefits that person.”

West Laraway Road connects CenterPoint to the intersection of old Route 66, about a mile from the site. On a late Friday afternoon in May, a line of semitrucks and other vehicles stretches for hundreds of yards, driven by the ceaseless demand of a new American economy. ■

ATLANTA

Boots on the ground: World Cup’s American moment

Star-spangled superfans hope their raucous support might give U.S. soccer a home-field advantage. Eagleman poses for selfies.

By Simon Montlake / Staff writer

Marcus Cranston is a retired U.S. Air Force doctor who lives in Las Vegas. In U.S. soccer circles, he goes by another name: Eagleman.

At a recent tailgate ahead of a U.S. Men’s National Team (USMNT) game, he arrives wearing his trademark American eagle outfit. Fans flock to take selfies with him and his wife, Lila, who is dressed as Wonder Woman.

But they’re not the only superfans dressed to impress. There’s Uncle Sam in his striped pants. And hundreds of fans are clad in red, white, and blue.

Their stars-and-stripes bandannas are both practical accessories for the sunny afternoon in Atlanta and a shoutout to the organizers of this gathering: the American Outlaws.

The soccer supporters group has 25,000 paid members in more than 200 chapters. Started in 2007 by two college students in Nebraska, its Wild West name still references the defiance central to being an American soccer superfan.

“We’re trying all we can to take over a little piece of the soccer fandom in the world, so we’re a little bit outlaws,” says Mr. Cranston.

Indeed, Eagleman and his comrades are rebels standing against the U.S. sports establishment. They are also taking on the giants of world soccer and their supporter armies. And with the FIFA World Cup starting June 11, jointly hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, they are fighting to do what many in the game believe is impossible: give the U.S. team a crowd-fueled, home-field advantage.

Lords of the pitch

Held every four years, the monthlong World Cup tournament is the most-watched sporting event in the world. This is the first time since 1994 that a U.S. team will play a World Cup on home soil. But in a nation of immigrants, many from countries where soccer, better known as football, is a way of life, the U.S. national team can’t always count on home-field support.

Luis Ibarra, a police officer and American Outlaws member from Amarillo, Texas, traveled to Houston last summer to watch the U.S. take on Mexico in a Gold Cup final. Mexico won the game 2-1. “It was probably only our section in the whole stadium going for the U.S.,” says Mr. Ibarra. “Which is usually like that in most games, to be honest.”

That isn't going to stop Eagleman from trying. He joins a circle for warmup chants for the upcoming match against Portugal. At the center is Phil Labas, a bald, hulking Outlaw from Chicago who is one of tonight's capos. Mr. Labas passes out cards with printed lyrics.

"This is a new one," he bellows.

The group lines up for an all-singing, all-dancing parade to the stadium gates, where they pause on a partly paved bridge.

"Jump for the USA! Jump for the USA! Olé, olé!"

And they jump. Three hundred soccer fans pogo in unison and the bridge, somewhat alarmingly, vibrates with them.

In a sports-saturated country that valorizes success, the USMNT faces a chicken-or-egg quandary. It needs all the superfans it can muster to cheer its players on to victory. But first, it would help to win big games to convert more casual fans into soccer superfans.

"We need the people," says Mauricio Pochettino, an Argentinian coach hired in 2024 to lead the USMNT into the World Cup. "We need the fans. The fans have one year to realize how important are the fans in soccer."

Roar of the underdogs

The last time the U.S. hosted the World Cup in 1994, soccer had a tenuous foothold outside of immigrant communities. The United States had no professional league, and aficionados who wanted to follow leagues in other countries couldn't watch live games. When U.S. sports channels showed soccer clips, it was usually to get a rise out of the antics of players.

But Major League Soccer has grown from 10 teams in 1996 to 30 teams, which mostly play in dedicated soccer stadiums. A generation of Americans has grown up watching international games on streaming platforms. Youth soccer has boomed around the country and has fed growing interest in college and club games. While soccer ranks fourth behind football, basketball, and baseball as a spectator sport in the U.S., its audience skews young: 38% of adults ages 25 to 34 are interested in soccer, compared with 14% of people over age 55.

The last World Cup final, in 2022, in which Argentina – led by Lionel Messi – lifted the trophy, was the most-watched soccer game ever in the U.S., with nearly 27 million viewers. Mr. Messi now plays for Inter Miami, a top MLS club.

This year's World Cup expands its format from 32 to 48 teams that play in a group stage, from which the top teams proceed to a series of playoffs. The final will be played July 19 at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Only the most starry-eyed boosters expect the USMNT to make it to that final; being a fan of the U.S. men's soccer means rooting for the underdog and not minding defeats. (For the U.S. Women's National Team, the opposite is true: It has won four World Cups, most recently in 2019.)

When American sports fans ask Travis Thomas, the USMNT leadership and team dynamics coach at the last World Cup, how long before the men's team lifts the trophy, assuming that it's just a matter of time, he replies, "Maybe never." He points out that only eight countries have won the World Cup since it was first held in 1930.

That isn't what they expect to hear, he says. "The American bravado is that we should be good at everything."

Mr. Thomas no longer works for the team but still coaches individual players. He says Mr. Pochettino, the American team coach, is right to urge fans to show up. "Home-team advantage is always giving you that extra boost. ... I don't think you're going to run into

a player that tries to say it doesn't give him a boost."

Chris Reid, who runs the Outlaws chapter in Boston, still remembers watching the USMNT play Poland in Chicago. "It was probably 80% Poland supporters," he says. When the U.S. played South Korea last year in Harrison, New Jersey, the stadium was a sea of South Korean fans in face paint singing K-pop-derived chants. Millions of visiting fans are expected at the World Cup.

This fervor and intensity, which Mr. Pochettino, the USMNT manager, so envies, is what hooked Mr. Reid, who's attended 53 U.S. national games, including in Mexico and El Salvador.

"It's the atmosphere. The passion of the fans, the passion they create in the stadium," he says.

Waivers of the Red, White, and Blue

Elliott Montalvan grew up watching soccer with his Ecuador-born father. During the World Cup, he saw his neighbors in New York pull on jerseys from Brazil and Mexico, and cheer for their teams at bars and restaurants. Today, he's a die-hard U.S. soccer fan, something his late father came to appreciate. "He told me, 'I came to this country to give my kids a better opportunity. Don't be afraid to wear the U.S. jersey,'" says Mr. Montalvan.

He remembers watching a televised game between the U.S. and Ecuador with his father, who wore his Ecuadorian jersey while Mr. Montalvan wore his USMNT jersey. Before the game, the two took turns to separately stand and sing the national anthems. "That was my father's generation. You're going to follow [the country] you came from," he says.

Mr. Montalvan joined an American Outlaws chapter and watched games with other members, but it didn't gel with the soccer milieu he was raised in. When he heard about Barra 76, a new U.S. supporters group set up by Spanish-speaking Latinos, he wanted in.

Barra 76 is much smaller than the Outlaws. Both are recognized as official supporter groups by U.S. Soccer though, allowing members to buy discounted tickets and bring their banners into stadiums. Barra 76 doesn't attend every USMNT game, but when the group does, it brings its culture and intensity, says Mr. Montalvan, a paramedic who heads its chapter in New York City.

He adds, "I'm never afraid to step to people and say, this [Ecuador] is where I came from. I'm here supporting the USA, but we're all diverse here."

The Outlaws were not the first fan group.

Before them, there was Sam's Army, a group started in 1995 by a high school teacher from Buffalo, New York. Back then, soccer was even more of an oddity, says John Sousa, a teacher and soccer coach from Massachusetts. He used to mail scarves to members to bring to games so they could recognize each other. "Sam's Army was a way for fans to get together and party," he chuckles.

Since then, the torch has passed to the American Outlaws. It costs \$30 a year to join, which includes a T-shirt. Different chapters tweak the logo with a local icon: a peach for Atlanta, a bridge for Jacksonville, Florida. In Atlanta, where the U.S. was playing Portugal in a doubleheader just days after a match against Belgium, fans from at least 50 chapters turned out to cheer.

These fans don't always get much respect from their rivals in historic soccer nations who dismiss American fandom as cosplay. To earn respect, they're dialing up the sort of raucous soccer partisanship that gets credibility in this world.

"I don't want to go into a game where they look at us and say, 'Oh, how cute,'" says Mr. Montalvan. "Hopefully, they'll start to see that we mean business."

That even means putting a stake in the sport's American name. During the 2022 World Cup, when the U.S. played England, the American Outlaws hung banners that read: "CALL IT SOCCER."

'I wanted at least one goal.'

At the Portugal game, the U.S. supporters section is packed and loud. A row of six drums the size of tractor tires halfway up keeps the beat going for the chants, and most fans are on their feet for the entire game. Other sections of the stadium, which holds nearly 73,000 attendees, are a sea of red Portugal jerseys, mostly those of superstar striker Cristiano Ronaldo. Families of Portuguese descent have traveled to Atlanta from across the country for the game.

In the first half, the USMNT goes toe-to-toe with Portugal, but it's the visitors who score first, a lightning-fast strike on the goal below the U.S. supporters. Cheers erupt around the stadium. In the second half, Portugal dominates and scores a second goal, and this time the whooping is much louder. The game ends 2-0 to Portugal.

It's the second defeat of the doubleheader, after Belgium won 5-2. Both Belgium and Portugal are favored to do well at the World Cup, and the U.S. might encounter them in the playoffs.

But the score line doesn't seem to faze the Outlaws, who keep cheering until the end. Mr. Labas, the capo, has missed most of the game because he faces away from the field. Mr. Ibarra and his two friends from Amarillo, Texas, who drove 18 hours to Atlanta, are still on their feet, American flags wrapped around their shoulders. Eagleman sits a few rows away, catching his breath.

"It was a fun time," says Jenna Pempiller, one of the Atlanta Outlaws. "There's so many people showing up on a Tuesday night." But, she adds, "I wanted more. I wanted at least one goal."

Mr. Sousa no longer follows the U.S. team around. Now retired, he lives in Tampa, but he flew to Atlanta to watch the game – in the Portugal section. His family immigrated in 1966 from the Azores, he explains. He still roots for the U.S. team when it's not playing Portugal and even made a banner for the game that combines both teams' flags.

Mr. Sousa was delighted to see roving supporters cheering on the USMNT, as he once did in Sam's Army.

He's also traveled to Brazil and Argentina to watch their home games, and the intensity of the crowds and their identification with those teams has stayed with him.

Those fans aren't casual sports watchers. They're soccer diehards, and nothing else counts.

"We can't match that. We never will. Because that's all they've got," he says. ■

Gen Z gets the clue: Crosswords are cool

Young people are finding fulfillment in filling out the iconic grids. We puzzle out the pastime's history and what's behind its renaissance.

By Cameron Pugh / Staff writer

People are doing crossword puzzles everywhere these days. On the train. During a break at work. In bed before turning in. Crosswords have leapt from their traditional home in the newspaper and taken over phone and computer screens.

And no generation is more thrilled about it than Gen Z.

Fifty percent of Gen Zers say they do crosswords regularly, according to a poll by Unscrambled Words, a website that helps users solve anagrams. That's the highest share of any generation surveyed, outstripping baby boomers at 38%, Gen Xers at 31%, and millennials at 15%.

"We are living in the golden age of puzzles," says Will Shortz, who has edited crosswords for The New York Times since 1993. He holds perhaps the world's only degree in enigmatology, or the study of puzzles, which he obtained in a self-created program at Indiana University. "They're not just for old people anymore; they're for everybody."

When Mr. Shortz started at the Times, which printed its first crossword in 1942, the paper had run puzzles created by teenagers six times. Today, Mr. Shortz says he has published puzzles by at least 75 teens. In 2021, Soleil Saint-Cyr, at 17 years of age, became the youngest woman to publish a crossword in the Times.

Crosswords have also swept through student newspapers, demonstrating their growing appeal among younger audiences. The Cavalier Daily at the University of Virginia launched a puzzle section in 2024. Student Life, which covers Washington University in St. Louis, began publishing mini crosswords in 2022. Staff members upped the cadence from roughly weekly to daily in 2024.

As more young people are filling in those iconic black-and-white grids, here's a look at some of the factors spurring the crossword renaissance.

Q: What's driving the popularity of crosswords among Gen Z?

Crosswords saw an explosion in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, says Natan Last, who last year wrote "Across the Universe," a book that charts the history of crossword puzzles. That includes Gen Zers such as Luke Schreiber, a rising junior at Princeton University in New Jersey.

"It started off as a bit of a pandemic hobby. My dad liked solving crosswords, and so that gave me the idea to try my hand at creating them," Mr. Schreiber says.

Mr. Schreiber is one of two head puzzles editors at the Daily Princetonian, the school's student newspaper. He has also published puzzles in The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and USA Today.

Some of the crossword's success with Gen Z traces back to news organizations, which during the pandemic began to see games as

a way to grow their audiences. In 2022, The New York Times acquired the viral word puzzle Wordle, in which users guess a five-letter word, for an undisclosed sum in the “low seven figures,” the paper reported at the time. The following year, the paper launched Connections, a game in which players try to group similar words or terms, and it quickly became an online sensation.

By 2021, the Times Games section had 1 million subscribers; in 2024, a spokesperson for the Times told AdWeek that more than 10 million people played the paper’s digital games each day.

Other outlets have hopped on the trend. Vulture, an offshoot of New York Magazine, launched a crossword in 2022. Defector, a news site covering sports, politics, and internet culture, started one in 2023, as did Apple News. And Time magazine recently announced that it would offer digital games.

For students, Mr. Schreiber says, the crossword acts as a needed break from homework.

“Students are looking for something that isn’t work – you know, isn’t studying or homework or something like that – but also isn’t a video game,” he says. A crossword is “considered a little more intellectual than a video game, but it still is fun and not quite work.”

Q: What’s some of the history of crossword puzzles?

The now-defunct New York World is credited with publishing the first crossword on Dec. 21, 1913. Created by Arthur Wynne, the “Word-Cross” took the shape of a diamond and lacked the now-familiar black squares. Yet its huge success cemented it as a regular feature of the newspaper.

A “crossword craze” swept the country after World War I as industrialization gave Americans more leisure time, says Mr. Last, who, in addition to studying the history of crosswords, regularly creates them for The New Yorker. People attended crossword-themed galas and wore crossword-patterned clothes. In 1924, a nascent Simon & Schuster boosted the puzzle’s profile even further by publishing “The Cross Word Puzzle Book,” a collection of the New York World’s puzzles and the first such compilation in the United States. By the next year, the crossword puzzle had even inspired a Broadway musical.

Though the Times is now one of the world’s foremost crossword publishers, in the 1920s, the paper dismissed them as “a primitive sort of mental exercise.”

Today, crosswords are the subject of yearly competitions and interest groups – many of them managed by or affiliated with Mr. Shortz. Examples include the National Puzzlers’ League, a non-profit that holds yearly crossword conventions, and the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, which Mr. Shortz founded and still directs.

Q: How has the crossword changed over time?

Young people have long been interested in crosswords – and have pushed them to change.

Mr. Shortz sold his first puzzle at 14, springboarding his now-storied career as a cruciverbalist. (That’s the shorthand for a crossword aficionado.) When he started at the Times, he endeavored to draw in a wider audience. “I think the crossword should reflect the life, language, and culture of everybody who reads the Times, and that’s everybody from smart teens up to the oldest people,” he told The New Yorker in 2023.

Many young cruciverbalists agree with that sentiment. In the mid-2010s, independent bloggers began to infuse crossword puzzles with their takes on current events and cultural references, accord-

ing to Mr. Last.

“Because you have a bunch of young, iPhone-toting solvers, they start to get into the puzzle once it’s become app-ified,” he says. “And they start to develop strong opinions about what at the time felt like a kind of dusty, occasionally arcane, and at times outright offensive cultural object.”

A crop of puzzle enthusiasts who turned to the game as young adults in this era of blogs are now leaders in the crossword community.

That includes Erik Agard, who this year won the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, and Paolo Pasco, who recently won the “Jeopardy!” Tournament of Champions. Ada Nicolle, who started a crossword blog in the 2010s, recently published “A-to-Gen Z Crosswords: 72 Puzzles That Hit Different.” (One clue asks for the real name of a “BTS rapper who also goes by ‘Agust D.’”)

These young creators, Mr. Last says, have driven a cultural renaissance for a pastime that sometimes came off as stuffy and uptight.

“They treat the puzzle like a mixtape, and they treat language as powerful and arbitrating,” he says. “They are very, very focused on an inclusive puzzle – where inclusive is both political and cultural.” ■

REPORTERS ON THE JOB

WASHINGTON



Caitlin Babcock

While reporting on Capitol Hill one April

afternoon, I decided to pop in on what is known as a “pen and pad.” These are opportunities for Capitol Hill reporters to chat with lawmakers, but without broadcasting – creating a more conversational tone when viral videos are the norm. Reporters crowded

around sofa chairs in the Senate press gallery, notepads out but cameras off, as Democratic Sen. Adam Schiff of California spoke about a war powers resolution he was sponsoring. I wasn’t planning a story about this, but I listened and asked a question. Senator Schiff’s resolution made news that evening, and I used his quote in my story. ■

METAIRIE, LOUISIANA



Story Hinckley

Having a Monitor photographer on a reporting

trip is a game changer. (One helped me save face in Texas when my broken Spanish meant I had ordered 100 tortillas.) Without them, I find myself wishing I had eight tentacles, like an octopus, because I have to record interviews, take notes, and focus a camera simultaneously. On a recent solo trip covering a Louisiana Senate primary in Metairie, a dark room made it impossible to capture candidate photos while taking notes. Luckily, an Associated Press photographer saved the day by snapping the exact shot I needed. ■

BEIJING



Ann Scott Tyson

Reporter Ann Scott Tyson knew it would be

tough getting access to President Donald Trump during his talks with Chinese leader Xi Jinping last month. Unlike Chinese leaders in past decades, Mr. Xi doesn’t hold real news conferences. Rarely, he appears before assembled reporters and makes a

statement, but takes no questions. Chinese state visits are tightly choreographed, and Mr. Trump was expected to follow the script, which he largely did in Beijing. Homeward bound on Air Force

One, however, he held forth with reporters in his usual stream-of-consciousness style. Ann tuned into CNN on an old television set in the Monitor's Beijing bureau – and Chinese government censors were watching, too. As soon as Mr. Trump started speaking about political prisoners, the feed was interrupted, replaced on the television screen by a rainbow-colored “no signal” sign. ■

– Stephanie Hanes / Print editor



Taylor Luck

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

“Where are the Emiratis at?” was not the question I expected to be asking in the United Arab Emirates. In Dubai and Abu Dhabi, I came across British, European, and Indian residents who proudly call the UAE home and tourists flocking back weeks into a U.S.-Iran ceasefire. But I could not find Emiratis for passerby interviews – not in cafés, parks, or outdoor markets. And then, on Day 4, I entered a mall. There, large groups of Emirati friends and families were sitting at eateries, shopping, and ice skating. When I asked one Emirati, “Why the mall?” he simply said, “It’s over 104 degrees outside.” ■

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

KANO, NIGERIA

Shear dedication: Barber Abdulmajid Bala gives boys an alternative to street life

Cutting hair is not the point of Mr. Bala’s mentoring at his shop in Nigeria. Instead, the real lessons are structure and a reason to be somewhere.

By Ogar Monday / Contributor

In a narrow room that smells of talcum powder and aftershave, four boys are crowded around a chair. With electric clippers buzzing in one hand, Abdulmajid Bala tends to a customer, who sits with his eyes closed in complete trust.

Suddenly, the clippers stop. Nothing is wrong; the barber just wants the boys to take in the lesson.

“You see what I did there?” Mr. Bala says in Hausa, the local language, as he tilts the clippers toward the curve behind the customer’s ear. The boys inch closer. Mr. Bala adjusts his grip and continues.

“Soft hand,” he says quietly. “Always soft hands near the skin.”

Mr. Bala has plied his trade in Kano’s Brigade neighborhood for more than two decades, and many say he is one reason that some boys here have not been swallowed into a life of crime. When a boy first wanders in from the streets lacking direction, Mr. Bala sits him in a chair, gives him a haircut, and talks. Then, when the boy keeps coming back, Mr. Bala puts clippers in his hand and teaches him a skill with which he can build a life.

“When a boy has a skill,” Mr. Bala says, “that life of crime is no longer attractive.”

A city and its restless sons

Kano is Nigeria’s second-most populous city and the commercial capital of the country’s north. It is also a place where many young men grapple with unemployment and substance abuse.

The city has one of Nigeria’s highest concentrations of *almajiri*, boys who have been sent away from home for Quranic education but often end up on the street with no supervision. These boys, and others like them, provide a steady supply for gangs that have long terrorized neighborhoods across Kano.

The *yan daba* gangs, for example, trace their origins to the 1950s and ’60s, when political parties recruited young men as enforcers. The gangs later took root in the streets, offering vulnerable boys money and a sense of belonging.

Mr. Bala knows this story from the inside. He grew up in Brigade, and some of the boys he knew joined gangs. Some are dead, he says; others are in prison. Mr. Bala says he was fortunate to discover barbering around 1997 while working as an apprentice at a game store.

“I was curious about what I was going to learn each day, and I came back every day,” he says. “It kept me away from the wrong crowd.”

First, show up

When Mr. Bala opened his shop in 2004, he immediately felt the pull to give something back. He says he began with the son of a neighbor, a boy who was always in bad company. Rather than watch him drift further, Mr. Bala took the boy under his wing. “I kept him busy,” he says.

He then began taking in other boys from the neighborhood, teaching them how to cut hair and how to understand what a customer wants. But barbering, he is quick to say, is not the point.

“I tell them, ‘This shop opens at 7. If you want to learn, be here at 7,’” he says. “That is the first lesson. Everything else comes after.”

The real lesson is structure. A fixed place to be. Someone who notices when you arrive and notices, equally, when you do not. Mr. Bala says he has trained at least 70 boys, ranging from 11 to 18 years old.

Some come in on their own. Others are brought by their mothers.

Hauwa Salisu lives a short walk from Mr. Bala’s shop. She brought her son Kabiru, who was then 13, after he began keeping company with older boys in the evenings. She was clear about what she needed.

“All I wanted was someone to help my son,” she says. “Someone to teach him not to end up on the street.”

A network bigger than one barber

Mr. Bala does not try to do everything himself. From time to time, he brings in respected members of the community to speak to the boys. That includes lawyers, doctors, even former gang members.

“One man cannot do it,” Mr. Bala says. “A boy needs to see many men who are living right. Many examples, not just me.”

Habeeb Muhammad Atta came through the shop as a teenager and never left. He now has his own chair inside the shop and is studying banking and finance at Kano State Polytechnic. “Mr. Bala did not just teach me barbering,” he says. “He taught me that I am responsible for my life and can make anything I want out of it.”

Some boys have gone back to the streets. Mr. Bala does not go after them. “I leave the door open,” he says. “They know where I am.”

Lawal Tukur has been a customer for six years and has watched

many boys come through the shop. “You can see the difference,” he says. “They are not the same boys you see on the street corners. They carry themselves different.”

Inside the shop

Every new boy starts by observing – sometimes for days – before he is allowed to touch the clippers. Then, he is permitted to practice cutting other kids’ hair. Mr. Bala corrects with love and praises when it’s deserved. Before a boy works on a paying customer’s hair, he has already practiced the same cut many times on a mannequin head fixed to a wooden stand near the back wall.

The boys are not paid during training, but they are fed. And they receive what Mr. Bala considers more valuable: time, attention, a reason to be somewhere.

At the end of each week, the boys sit together for what Mr. Bala calls simply “the talk.” No agenda. The conversation moves from how to handle a difficult customer and how to save part of every payment, to bigger questions about what kind of men the boys want to become.

“I do not give them all the answers,” Mr. Bala says. “Some answers, they have to find on their own. But I am here to offer them guidance.”

In the shop on a recent Saturday, one of the younger boys settles into the chair. He sits straight, chin up, trying to look unbothered. An older boy – clippers in hand, still learning – takes his position beside him. Mr. Bala stands back and watches, arms folded. The boy with the clippers glances over, and Mr. Bala nods for him to begin.

The clippers start buzzing again. The other kids giggle.

Outside, the noise of the city continues. But this boy is learning to keep his hand steady. ■

EDITORIALS

A first response to an epidemic: Calming fear

Before its annual meeting began May 18, the World Health Assembly was poised to make difficult decisions on a proposed treaty that could “reshape the architecture of global health security,” as some participants put it.

Instead, a big announcement the day before ended up reshaping the discussions at the assembly, the world’s highest-level health policy forum.

The World Health Organization made an unprecedented declaration about an epidemic of a rare type of the Ebola virus in Central Africa. The WHO added that the regional emergency was “of international concern” because of the outbreak’s “scale and speed.”

At the assembly, WHO officials helped shift the discussions by highlighting lessons learned from previous Ebola outbreaks, especially nonmedical steps such as alleviating fear and building community trust.

Caring, fast response

They praised the caring and courageous efforts of frontline healthcare workers in countries affected by the crisis – Congo and Uganda – saying it was hard to recall a previous response that was so quick and decisive.

“Ebola is a very serious disease, but it is one that we know how to control,” said Mohamed Janabi, the WHO’s director for Africa, according to UN News. “It does not mean people should panic. It means the global system is working as it should be, detecting and responding very decisively.”

“Fear by itself is an outbreak,” Mr. Janabi said.

Additionally, the WHO now encourages health officials to work with each community, especially religious and traditional leaders, as well as healers.

“We are not going to come and dictate our science ... but rather work with them,” Dr. Marie Roseline Belizaire, the WHO emergency director for Africa, told UN News. And the agency has learned in recent years not to name each outbreak of a disease with a term that is likely to incite fear.

Taking such calming actions has been called “fear-guarding.” As a global report stated after the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa: “Responding to fear and misinformation will be one of the most critical challenges in handling future pandemics.” ■

A welcome spotlight on China’s Christians

One unexpected result from May’s China-U.S. summit was that Chinese leader Xi Jinping told President Donald Trump that he would “consider” releasing the country’s most prominent Christian pastor, Ezra Jin Mingri, from detention.

Whether or not the release happens, the mere fact that Mr. Xi had to respond favorably to the U.S. leader’s request confirmed an obvious point to the country’s religious faithful: The Chinese Communist Party does not control the narrative of what their persecution means. God does.

Last October, when police rounded up Mr. Jin and more than 20 other pastors in a major crackdown, his Beijing Zion Church issued this statement: “The Church belongs to God, not to any political power.”

Such conviction of faith might help explain why, by some estimates, the number of Christians in China remains close to the party’s total membership despite decades of repression.

Another pastor at Zion Church, Sean Long, told *The Wall Street Journal*, “It’s the highest honor for a Christian, for people like Pastor Jin, being put in prison. That’s exactly the mark of following Jesus.”

Researchers have been exploring reasons for Christianity’s popularity in China over recent decades. In a new book, “China’s War on Faith,” co-author Sam Brownback gave one reason: “The Chinese have long been a very spiritual people,” searching for meaning despite the party’s forceful suppression of all religions.

Mr. Brownback, a former U.S. senator from Kansas and a former ambassador for international religious freedom, talked with many survivors of such persecution for his book. “Their stories have moved me to tears,” he wrote.

In a report released in February by the Switzerland-based Religioscope Institute, researchers asked believers in China about the resilience of Mr. Jin’s church since its founding in 2007.

“The story of the Beijing Zion Church, and indeed, many other unregistered churches, is not only a story of the faithful persevering through oppression. It is one [in] which hope and faith are challenged and in turn, given meaning to, by suffering and sacrifices,”

wrote the report's author, Kwan Yuk Sing.

For China's Christians, spiritual growth comes through suffering, Mr. Kwan wrote, and "challenges the authority of the state to determine the meaning of punishment."

Or as Fenggang Yang, a Purdue University sociologist, told *The Wall Street Journal*, Christians in China "feel they have to be the light."

Perhaps even from a prison cell. ■

Mercy for good apples if they expose bad apples

For American executives who spot fraud and financial misconduct among workers and then quickly report it, the U.S. Justice Department has a refreshing message: Your alertness to right-doing can bring a reward – in mercy.

Federal prosecutors were recently handed expanded powers to be lenient toward companies that voluntarily report wrongdoing by individual employees in a "timely" manner, make amends to those wronged, and shape up internal rules – with such tools as hotlines, audits, etc.

The accused individuals are then prosecuted, not the companies, preventing a hefty fine or forfeiture. Shareholders and employees also benefit from the avoidance of some kinds of negative fallout, such as bankruptcy.

Faster, greater detection of company fraud

The biggest result so far, according to Jay Clayton, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York – which includes Wall Street – has been faster and greater detection of fraud. "That's what the American people want from their companies and their justice department," he told the *Financial Times*.

"If you know [about fraud], and you don't tell us, that's bad," he told a conference May 13.

Such conditional leniency in enforcement is not necessarily new. Yet it is now being refined as prosecutors discover that most firms much prefer honesty and accountability in their work culture.

The new rules also strike a finer balance between mercy and justice that helps a firm better expose a crime, allowing for correction, restitution, and renewal, rather than mere punishment.

The new federal incentives for voluntary self-disclosure also put a greater focus on individual justice (rather than collective penalties) and on restoring the victims of a crime. One potentially larger result: greater public confidence in the integrity of the financial markets.

"The self-reporting program rests on a simple principle: prompt corporate disclosure and cooperation in rooting out and remedying wrongdoing is in the best interest of victims, shareholders, employees, and our markets generally," wrote Mr. Clayton.

Mercy can go a long way to save companies when they expose wrongdoing and realize the reality that honesty helps build a business. ■

Something to chew on

"Where inflation is felt the most: The checkout counter," an article in the May 11 *Weekly*, was interesting but left me with a lot of questions.

I'm the person in our family who purchases all the groceries and prepares most of the food. None of what was reported in this article was illuminating. I want to know what portion of the inflationary food prices reflects increased, unavoidable costs and what portion is due to price gouging or tariffs. I want to know if there are alternatives to conventional grocery stores that can offer a better food-supply model, such as farmers markets or bulk-buying clubs.

We're spending about \$1,000 per month on food for two adults. We're on a fixed income. We eat very simply and modestly. We don't eat out. We cook a lot from scratch. I save paper and digital coupons. I comparison shop. It takes a lot of time.

I'd like to hear from other people about how they're coping with these crazy prices. It seems as if there must be many stressed-out moms, grandmas, and aunts trying to make ends meet. Shopping used to be a chore; now, it's scary. Prices jump a dollar in a week, and you're left kicking yourself that you didn't stock up last week.

Are we consumers ever going to get paid back for the illegal tariffs, whose costs we've borne?

Lauren Davis
Sisters, Oregon

Fantastic film, terrible movie

Serious and sublime, or commercial and action-packed? Take your pick.

With four young kids, I'm operating on a bit of a lag, like springtime in New England. Oscar season blew right by me this year. But finally, my wife and I eked out time for a couple of movie nights recently. "Sentimental Value," a Norwegian film, floated to the top of our choices as it had won the Oscar for best international feature film and was nominated for eight others.

Fantastic film.

Not a very good movie, though.

To me, there's a not-so-subtle difference between a film and a movie, and I'm making it my self-appointed task to unpack that here. Let's start by examining a particularly poignant scene from "Sentimental Value."

Stellan Skarsgård plays a famous director, Gustav Borg, estranged from his actor daughter, Nora, played with a fragile fortitude by Renate Reinsve. In the scene, Gustav offers Nora the role of a lifetime in a film he has written for her – and she wants nothing to do with it. Now, when this scene was not immediately followed by a car chase through downtown Oslo and an explosion in the Parliament building, I knew in all probability that I was watching a film.

That's because, generally speaking, movies can be identified

Immortality now? Yes!

Are you immortal now? People generally believe that immortality comes after death. But Christian Science shows us we can experience immortality here and now.

The biblical account of Enoch says that he “walked with God” (Genesis 5:22) and lived 365 years before he “was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). Walking with God means obeying, trusting, and communing with God, who is Love divine. Clearly, Enoch, who “pleased God” throughout his life, continued walking with Him spiritually following his translation – his disappearance to human sense and removal to heaven without being subject to death (see Mary Baker Eddy, “Miscellaneous Writings 1883-1896,” pp. 67-68).

Christ Jesus constantly walked with God. His understanding of being one with his Father enabled him to perceive man as the reflection of God, immutable and immortal. When multitudes of sick people came to him, Jesus’ clear perception of man as God’s image and likeness healed them.

In the Bible, there’s an account of Jesus communing with God and speaking with Elias and Moses, both of whom had lived centuries before him (see Mark 9:2-9). How is it that these men were present? Man, the reflection of God, divine Principle, exists without a beginning or an end. Jesus demonstrated this.

While these examples are some of the very highest of evidencing immortality here and now, step by step we, too, can glimpse immortality. As we relinquish timelines of birth and death and views of man as separated from God, we will increasingly see ourselves and others as evidence of God’s expression of Himself – spiritual, whole, and immortal. Often this takes persistence, courage, and a pure desire to walk with God.

As the birth of our second child neared, my husband and I were informed by the doctors that my life and my child’s would be in danger if I did not have an operation and blood transfusion. They also feared that even if we went through with these procedures, it might already be too late to prevent my child from being brain-damaged.

Based on what I understood of God and of myself and my child made in God’s image and likeness, I knew this assessment was not the final word, and I didn’t go through with the procedures. During the entire pregnancy, I had endeavored to walk with God – to really understand my child’s and my present immortality. Now was the time to fully trust God as the divine Principle and Life. During the next two days, as a Christian Science practitioner and our family prayed with us, my husband and I gained a clear sense that all was well. And it was. The baby was born easily, there were no complications, and both of us were and remained healthy.

As we more consistently walk with God – listening, trusting, and expecting all good – we can experience more of the immortality that is truly ours, now and always.

– Cynthia Cowen

by the following: Tom Cruise, explosions every five minutes, Dwayne Johnson, elaborate chase scenes followed by hand-to-hand combat, easily identifiable “bad guys” with scars on their faces, Tom Cruise running.

Films on the other hand feature foreign languages and subtitles, moody, dimly lit rooms, and periods of sustained silence. Actors communicate via the subtle exchange of facial expressions instead of someone screaming, “THIS PLACE IS GONNA BLOW UP!!!” or “GET DOWN, MR. PRESIDENT!!!” or, more simply, “AAAAARRRRRRGGGGHHHHH !!!”

Films are driving loafers; movies are driving Crocs. Films are foie gras, movies Chipotle burritos. Films are family trips to the Amalfi coast, movies to the water park at Six Flags.

Like abstract art, films often have an air of impenetrability; seeing them with your own eyes brings you no closer to comprehension and, indeed, might even make you more confused and disoriented. A film will often end without you even realizing it; you might find yourself exchanging a quizzical glance with your spouse. (Was that it? OK, I’ll go run the dishwasher.)

On the plus side, films feature beautifully rendered performances by artists at the peak of their powers, multifaceted explorances of the human condition with all its nuances, contradictions, and ambiguities. With stunning cinematography, they express a timelessness in the way they force us to hold up a mirror to ourselves and ask the big questions about faith, hope, love, and the meaning and purpose of our days. Personally, I prefer movies.

Applying this to some recent cinema ...

“Perfect Days”: One of the best films I’ve seen in years. Not a movie I would ever watch, though.

“Top Gun: Maverick”: One of the best movies ever made, full stop. Subpar film at best.

“Past Lives”: Deep, thought-provoking film. Yawn-provoking movie.

“Mission Impossible”: Sign me up for 10 more of these movies. Disgraceful filmmaking.

“Happy Gilmore 2”: Terrible film. Terrible movie.

“Paddington 2”: Terrific movie. Terrific film.

It’s a complex topic, so let’s try one more thing. Would I recommend that you go see “Sentimental Value”? Yes, in a heart-beat. But also, not a chance.

If you regularly visit the Museum of Modern Art and listen to vinyl records, you’re gonna love this film. If your name is IHOP Hank or your favorite movie is “Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2,” not so much.

Bottom line: If you like films, you’re gonna love this movie. If you like movies, you can avoid this film.

If you found this exposition helpful, in my next piece I’ll unpack the difference between writing and literature. Hint: This is literature. ■

– Zachary Przystup

Making a case for moral reflection in law practice

Law professor Shaun Ossei-Owusu dissects the shortcomings of the American legal system and holds it to a fairer, more humane standard.

By **Terry W. Hartle** / Contributor

Like many institutions in American society, the legal profession faces a raft of challenges. The high cost of legal services, unequal access to representation, long delays in resolving disputes, ethical lapses, and the politicization of the judiciary have each been widely examined. But rarely has the role of lawyers been analyzed as comprehensively as in Shaun Ossei-Owusu's "Law on Trial: An Unlikely Insider Reckons With Our Legal System."

The author is well qualified to tackle this subject. He grew up in poverty in the Bronx, received both a Ph.D. and a JD from the University of California, Berkeley, and worked for a major law firm and also as a public defender in several cities. Now a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, he has seen the legal system from many angles.

Ossei-Owusu considers the phrase "Equal justice under law," chiseled into the facade of the United States Supreme Court, to be aspirational at best. His central point is that the practice of law – starting with law students and progressing to firms, prosecutors, municipal attorneys, and even public defenders – often reinforces and even magnifies systemic unfairness in the legal system.

Law school is devoted to teaching students to think like lawyers. He writes, "Part of their training ... involves processing human problems into technical questions." But such thinking has a downside: It "can strip away the sociopolitical, economic and moral factors that shape lawmaking and legal inequality." Students are rarely exposed to discussions of "the role of special interest groups like police unions or race-baiting, tough on crime politicians."

Ossei-Owusu systematically (as one would expect from a law professor) walks readers through seven major courses that nearly all law students take, and makes clear how each of them "treats emotional detachment like a professional imperative." He continues, "These conditions make it possible for blatant wrongs to become legally contestable or nonissues." Law schools "confer undue legitimacy on the American legal system in part by pushing questions about money, politics, power and history to the side."

Many lawyers begin their careers working in big law firms, where both "principled and problematic work" takes place. But in looking at the work such firms do in healthcare, environmental regulation, and workplace matters, he repeatedly points to the problematic aspects and finds little that is praiseworthy.

In healthcare, for example, hospital consolidations – a significant part of the mergers and acquisitions work at many law firms – often result in the closing of healthcare facilities, service reductions (like the closing of emergency departments and staffing cuts), and the elimination of community health programs. Often these consequences are most directly felt in rural and low-income urban areas where healthcare needs are especially acute. This does not happen

because the attorneys intend harm. Rather, it occurs because "these lawyers created the legal frameworks that make these outcomes economically rational for their clients" while overlooking or soft-pedaling the likely consequences. "These lawyers exist in professional ecosystems that reward technical competence while actively discouraging moral reflection," Ossei-Owusu writes.

He acknowledges that his political leanings fall to the left of center, but his analysis is evenhanded, clear, and accessible. This is a rigorously researched book that makes its points and places blame on the entire legal system – not simply on rogue actors. The system itself, he argues, bears responsibility for the inequities that are an unwelcome by-product of its operations.

For lawyers and those hoping to join the profession, "Law on Trial" should be required reading. Readers without a legal background will find helpful definitions and explanations. Ossei-Owusu's writing is bright, easily grasped, and the analysis never flags. The author even injects some humor into the text.

In the end, this is a sweeping, broad-based indictment of the American legal system. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the scope of the problem he lays out, the solutions he proposes seem small-bore and, to his credit, it's evident that the author would have preferred to have avoided the "What do we do about it?" chapter. But the first step in solving problems is a clear diagnosis of the nature and extent of the challenge. This book is a superb and convincing step in that direction and deserves to be widely read. ■

Holding the powerful to account: Lessons from an LA fire

By **April Austin** / Contributor

The 2025 Pacific Palisades fire started in the hills above Los Angeles, fed by record-high winds and drought conditions. The blaze spread quickly, eventually destroying thousands of homes and hundreds of businesses. (A man has since been charged by federal prosecutors with arson.) It was made worse by a cascade of errors that included poor planning, political maneuvering, and a breakdown in the chain of command.

In the aftermath, the decision of the governor and mayor to fast-track rebuilding efforts, according to CBS News correspondent Jonathan Vigliotti, has left residents and business owners vulnerable to future problems. "Torched: How a City Was Left To Burn, and the Olympic Rush To Rebuild L.A." is an indictment of public officials who, Vigliotti argues, failed to heed the lessons of LA's 2018 Woolsey fire and badly fumbled the response in the Palisades.

Compounding the missteps was an underestimate by civic leaders of the effects of rising temperatures, high winds, and prolonged drought on fire intensity and spread. This was true not only in California – which already had some of the most stringent building codes in the United States – but also beyond. Vigliotti writes, "Pacific Palisades isn't just a California disaster. It's a global warning. A parable of what happens when we fail to adapt to a changing world."

The author is at his best when talking to experts and analyzing breakdowns in systems designed to protect public safety. He also places the Palisades fire in a larger context, noting: "Nearly half of American houses predate 1980, before today's era of megafires, floods, and hurricanes. Yet even modern building codes lag behind

the pace of warming. Leaders still permit – and subsidize – construction in the riskiest places, while first responders are left to hold the line with aging engines, thin crews, and tactics designed for a milder past.”

He interviews a forensic wildfire investigator, Faraz Hedayati, who conducted fieldwork at the sites of homes that were *not* destroyed in the Woolsey and Palisades fires to understand how they survived. Hedayati found that greater resilience lay not only in newer building materials, but especially in the spaces *between* the houses. The more densely packed the development, the more opportunity for the fire to leap from one home to the next.

The author is critical of Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, who was on an official trip to Ghana when the Palisades fire began, and of California Gov. Gavin Newsom. Vigliotti argues that the two were more concerned about their respective political futures and that of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics than they were about the people affected. With an eye on federal disaster funds, they assured President Donald Trump that no slowdown in preparation for the Olympics would occur. And they lifted restrictions to speed rebuilding. In so doing, Vigliotti asserts, the door was left open for even denser neighborhoods than before the fire, as well as lingering safety concerns about toxic chemicals in the soil and air.

“Torched” offers a reporter’s keen take on an evolving story, and holds officials to account. ■

IN PICTURES

The hands behind Côte d’Ivoire’s culinary heritage

Story by Colette Davidson / Special correspondent

ANONO, CÔTE D’IVOIRE

On a wide avenue off the main road in this suburb of Abidjan, women sit fanned out in small groups, crouching over buckets as they chop and soak a homely brown root vegetable. Piles of what looks like couscous are spread across sheets of black plastic tarp.

At first, the scene appears haphazard, but what I’m seeing are actually highly efficient, open-air production lines of *attiéké* – Côte d’Ivoire’s national dish.

In one corner, a woman in a flowery purple dress shaves off the rough skin of the cassava root. Another woman soaks the smooth, white stalks in tubs of water. After the root gets ground down and fermented, the water is squeezed out from the pulp with a steel press. The granules then dry in the sun.

A woman known as Madame Hortense, who operates one *attiéké* production line, leads me into a simple cement house, where a woman is shaking the granules in front of a fan to remove leftover fibers. Another stands sweating over a metal pot, turning the *attiéké* with a wooden spatula as it steam cooks.

Attiéké can be paired with almost anything – fish, chicken, shrimp, boiled eggs, avocado – and is “best eaten with your hands,” says Madame Hortense. “It just tastes better that way.”

Attiéké production employs upward of an estimated 300,000 women, according to the Ivorian Ministry of Agriculture, and has pulled many out of poverty.

In 2024, UNESCO recognized the skill in making the fermented cassava dish as Côte d’Ivoire’s intangible cultural heritage. And though industrial production of *attiéké* exists on a small scale here, the artisanal way of transforming cassava does not appear to be going anywhere anytime soon.

“We do have machines that can do all this,” says Madame Hortense, pointing toward a woman squatting on the ground, sifting *attiéké* through a rectangular pan. “But people prefer the flavor of *attiéké* when it’s made like this, by hand.”

■ Albain Ade contributed reporting for this article.

SUDOKU

Sudoku difficulty: ★★★★★

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

How to do Sudoku

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

Crossword and Sudoku solutions

ANSWER KEY

S	R	O	S	N	S	K	S	D
R	E	O	R	E	R	E	N	T
E	N	T	E	N	O	N	P	I
O	T	E	R	O	F	A	C	F
S	O	S	E	U	R	A	N	M
		S	N	S	A		L	A
S			S	S	A		L	A
E			S	S	A		L	A
T			S	S	A		L	A
U			S	S	A		L	A
T			S	S	A		L	A
E			S	S	A		L	A
S			S	S	A		L	A
E			S	S	A		L	A
D			S	S	A		L	A

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

CROSSWORD

Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Explanatory drawing
- 8. Bit of evidence
- 13. Make bigger
- 14. Annoyance
- 15. Round-shouldered
- 16. Edgar's middle
- 17. Exult blatantly
- 18. 1930s architectural style
- 20. More than contents
- 22. ___ Misérables
- 23. Squirrel's snack
- 24. Office reward
- 26. Caddy's peg
- 27. Purse parts
- 30. Botches, with "up"
- 33. Palmas or Cruces preceder
- 34. Professional grps.
- 36. Wits end?
- 37. "___overboard!"
- 38. Continental dollars
- 42. Chapter 1 lead-in
- 44. Repetitious learning
- 45. Attach a tail to a donkey
- 46. International agreement
- 49. Between Parisians
- 50. Use the same supplier
- 51. Classroom furnishings
- 52. Motion detectors

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

© Lovatts Puzzles

DOWN

- 1. Frisbees®
- 2. "Inter" opposite
- 3. Astir
- 4. Sullen looks
- 5. Light knock
- 6. Consumed
- 7. Some awards
- 8. Minor altercations
- 9. Retained
- 10. Softens
- 11. Red Cross beneficiary, perhaps
- 12. Signifies
- 19. Anglers' gear
- 21. Crabapple juice?
- 25. Jacob and Esau's dad
- 27. Trimmed
- 28. Camp sight
- 29. Sanctions
- 31. Lowest sudoku digit
- 32. People like Shylock
- 35. Insinuating remarks
- 37. Pride of lions?
- 39. Mozart's "___ Alla Turca"
- 40. Stream critter
- 41. Advisers of old
- 43. Clubhouse utensil
- 47. Born overseas
- 48. Alleged workload