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THE WEEK

THE BEST OF THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

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Editor's letter

Losing can be a beautiful thing. That's the message I took away from a *New York Times* report on the Chicago White Sox's historically bad season, which has seen the team match the 1962 Mets' record of 120 losses—a record they may have shattered by the time you're reading this. *Times* writer Sam Anderson details how the White Sox have “explored the full spectrum of losing,” like “the way a jazz saxophonist probes every note in a scale.” They've gone down in squeakers and in routs, on sunny days and in the rain, and in games in which the entire team played like All-Stars and in one where “the White Sox hit their catcher in the groin with the baseball three separate times in a single inning.” Despite those many humiliations, a group of dedicated fans continues to show up in Section 108 of the White Sox stadium to gripe and (occasionally) cheer. Those loyalists say they're now rooting for an all-time loss record; one is selling T-shirts that declare, “We witnessed history.” Meanwhile, the players themselves have shown remarkable grace, Anderson

writes, a willingness to talk about losing and then “stride forward into the next potential loss.”

At this fraught political moment, the “White Sox” might be the role models America needs. In MAGA world, it has become a sin to lose. After trying and failing to overturn Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election, Trump and his allies are now aiming to head off the possibility of defeat in November by changing the rules of the game. GOP activists are attempting to toss tens of thousands of voters from the rolls in critical battlegrounds (see Last Word, p.36) and are pushing for last-minute changes to election procedures in Georgia and other swing states (see Talking Points, p.16). Chaos and ugliness seem all but certain in November because our two-party democracy needs one side to admit defeat and walk away. Swallowing a loss is miserable, as the fans in Section 108 can attest. But as Anderson notes, it's also “a civic miracle that keeps us from tearing each other's heads off.”

Theunis Bates
Editor-in-chief

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Harris, Trump battle for edge in tight race

What happened

Donald Trump and Kamala Harris jockeyed for advantage this week as polls showed a neck-and-neck race for the White House, with former President Trump promising new tariffs and a crack-down on immigration and Vice President Harris unveiling plans to protect abortion rights and spur domestic manufacturing. With less than six weeks until Election Day, some polls showed a post-debate bounce for Harris. An NBC News poll had the Democratic nominee up 5 percentage points nationally on her Republican rival, 49 to 44 percent, with her approval rating climbing 16 points since July to 48 percent. A Morning Consult survey put her up by 5 points nationally over Trump; other polls showed her up 5 points in Michigan and Pennsylvania and 7 points in Wisconsin. But a CNN/SSRS poll put her 1 point ahead of Trump nationally, and a *New York Times*/Siena College poll showed Trump with rising leads in Sun Belt swing states: up 5 points in Arizona, 4 in Georgia, and 2 in North Carolina.

In a Pittsburgh speech on economic policy, Harris promised “a new way forward” for the middle class and cast herself as a pragmatist not “constrained by ideology.” She promised to cut taxes for working people and expand “good union jobs,” while casting Trump as a friend to “those who own the big skyscrapers, not those who actually build them.” Harris said she supported ending the filibuster so Congress could pass a bill protecting abortion rights, a stance assailed by moderate Sens. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia; Manchin said he wouldn’t endorse Harris as a result.

Trump outlined his own economic plans at an event in Savannah, Ga., vowing that a mix of tariffs and corporate tax cuts would spark a U.S. “manufacturing renaissance.” He told a crowd in Wilmington, N.C., that immigrants are “stealing your jobs” and “attacking villages and cities all throughout the Midwest.” Trump, who is polling badly among women, vowed in a pair of speeches and a Truth Social post to be their “protector.” Women will be “happy, healthy, confident, and free” under a Trump presidency, he explained, and will “no longer be thinking about abortion.”

What the editorials said

A “desperate” Trump is doubling down on alarming rhetoric about immigrants, said *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. He claims Venezuelan gangs are taking over Colorado towns, Haitians are eating Ohioans’ pets, and that immigrants are “animals” who are “poisoning the blood” of the nation. The truth is that immigrants make us a “richer and stronger” nation, and Trump’s plan to deport millions of undocumented migrants would devastate our economy. But this isn’t about the truth—“it is about who belongs in Trump’s America.”



The Republican and Democrat are tied in national polls.

What next?

As Election Day looms, a growing number of Republicans are fretting over the Trump campaign’s ground game, said **Brett Samuels** in *The Hill*. The campaign is relying on an “untested strategy” of outsourcing its get-out-the-vote operations to dozens of outside groups, including Turning Point USA and the Elon Musk-backed America PAC. This setup will allow “Republicans to reach voters more efficiently,” says the campaign. But some Trump allies “are unsure if it will pay off”—and fear the campaign is too focused on poll watching and launching legal challenges at the expense of door knocking that “could prove critical.” Adding to concerns, “Republican activists in swing states say they’ve seen little sign” of the outside groups at work, said **Thomas Beaumont** and **Joey Cappelletti** in the *Associated Press*. Dozens of Republican officials and operatives in Michigan, North Carolina, and elsewhere “say they have rarely or never witnessed the group’s canvassers,” despite the outside effort being “portrayed as a sophisticated operation.” “I don’t know what the PACs are doing,” said Mark Forton, the GOP chair in Macomb County, Michigan.

Harris is “still keeping most of her agenda incognito,” said *The Wall Street Journal*, but she tipped her hand when she endorsed blowing up the Senate’s 60-vote filibuster rule. She is “couching this procedural coup” as a means only to protect abortion. But that’s an obvious “ruse.” Once the filibuster is gone, it’ll be open season for ramming through hard-left priorities such as packing the Supreme Court and tossing out voter-ID laws. Swing voters: You’ve been warned.

What the columnists said

Facing a yawning 20-point gender gap, Trump is “spiraling when it comes to women,” said **Joan Walsh** in *The Nation*. Thus his “deranged” and “scary” vows to be our “protector.” We know a predator when we see one, and his creepy attempts to convince us otherwise just make him sound like “the world’s oldest incel.” Trump is spiraling in general, said **A.B. Stoddard** in *The Bulwark*. He’s railing against Jews—saying if he loses “Jewish people would really have a lot to do with that”—and claiming child care costs can be subsidized by tariffs. “If all of this seems like chaotic, political flailing, that’s because it is.”

We’ve been treated to weeks of media coverage depicting a joyful Harris “running rings” around Trump, said **Jim Geraghty** in *National Review*. But if Harris “keeps winning so many daily news cycles,” why is the race still a toss-up? Maybe her avoidance of interviews and press conferences has convinced swing voters she’s hiding something. And maybe offering up “generic platitudes” instead of detailed policy proposals isn’t a winning strategy.

The election is “coming down to which campaign can successfully define Harris,” said **Kristen Soltis Anderson** in *The New York Times*. At this point, most voters know exactly how they feel about Trump. But views of Harris “remain very fluid,” and both campaigns are trying to shape them with a blitz of ads in swing states—which could explain why national polls and state polls so often diverge.

There’s another reason for the “polling whiplash,” said **Robert Kuttner** in *The American Prospect*: Surveys just aren’t that reliable. They’re all “prisoners of subjective assumptions” about matters such as who’s a likely voter, and should be taken “with a ton of salt.”

Get ready for a nail-biter, said **Ed Kilgore** in *New York* magazine. A “game-changing” event can’t be ruled out, but at the moment the polls show “two huge and roughly equal voter coalitions with a lot of stability,” and two candidates with “multiple paths to 270 Electoral College votes.” It may or may not prove one of the closest elections ever, but right now it’s “among the most unpredictable,” especially given the likelihood Trump will contest any loss. “Hang on to your sensibilities, and if you care about the results, don’t relax for a moment.”

Israel pummels Lebanon ahead of possible invasion

What happened

Israel pounded Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon with hundreds of airstrikes and called up reserves this week as it prepared for a possible ground incursion, its first into its northern neighbor since 2006. Lebanese authorities said the barrage killed more than 550 people, including dozens of children, and sent hundreds of thousands fleeing northward. The Israel Defense Forces said it had destroyed tens of thousands of Hezbollah's missiles and rocket launchers—potentially half of the Iran-backed militant group's arsenal—most of them hidden in private homes. Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi told Israeli troops that the bombardment was intended “to prepare the ground for your possible entry” into southern Lebanon. “Your military boots,” he said, will “enter enemy territory, enter villages that Hezbollah has prepared as large military outposts.” Hezbollah responded by launching hundreds of rockets and missiles, some of them reaching deep into Israel; several hit near Haifa and one was intercepted over Tel Aviv.



Near Tyre, in southern Lebanon

Hezbollah and Israel have been trading fire since Hamas attacked Israeli last Oct. 7. But the conflict entered a new phase last week, when Israel said it aimed to ensure that the 60,000 people displaced by Hezbollah missile strikes in northern Israel could return to their homes. The detonation of thousands of Hezbollah pagers and walkie-talkies was followed by targeted killings of Hezbollah top brass, including special forces leader Ibrahim Aqil and missile commander Ibrahim Qubaisi. In the U.S., the White House said it was urgently seeking “a diplomatic solution” to the conflict, while the Pentagon said it was sending a small number of additional U.S. troops to join the 40,000 already in the region. “There is the potential for a wider regional conflict,” said Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Patrick Ryder. “It’s a dangerous situation.”

What the editorials said

Israel has repeatedly insisted that it wants to avoid all-out war in Lebanon, said *The Guardian*, but “what is this if not a war?” The pager attack may have been aimed at Hezbollah militants, but it also killed children, and Lebanese health officials said this week’s airstrikes “overwhelmingly” killed civilians. Israel believes it can “de-escalate through escalation,” intimidating Hezbollah into stopping the rocket fire. But “such attacks have their own momentum,”

and a humiliated Hezbollah will now have a harder time stepping back “without destroying its credibility.”

Faced with “the largest terrorist army on the planet” firing on its people, Israel had no choice but to act, said *National Review*. Since Oct. 7, Hezbollah has launched 8,000 rockets at northern Israel, rendering the area effectively uninhabitable. “No other nation would tolerate this.” Yet the Biden administration is still hectoring Israel about “seeking a diplomatic solution.” The U.S. should instead be grateful that Israel has taken out Aqil, who masterminded the 1983 Beirut bombings that killed 241 U.S. Marines.

What the columnists said

Israel deserves to defend itself, said **Bret Stephens** in *The New York Times*. Yet its leaders should think carefully before committing to another ground war. Hezbollah is merely one of Iran’s many proxy armies, and “Israel risks exhausting itself.” Even if it sticks to airstrikes, it should try not to “make an enemy of the Lebanese people.” They have also suffered under Hezbollah, a group that has “murdered their most beloved leaders” and “turned much of the country into a target.” Israel should avoid indiscriminate bombing.

Yet this already looks like a repeat of the Gaza war, said **Allison Kaplan Sommer** in *Ha’aretz* (Israel). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has apparently “forgotten about the hostages” still being held there. He once promised us that their rescue was the goal of the yearlong conflict, but 101 of them are still in Hamas custody. Now he says his priority is taking “whatever action is necessary” against Hezbollah to return northern evacuees to their homes. Will he use the same tactics as in Gaza—inflicting many civilian casualties without guaranteeing that Israelis end up safer?

The only party that would benefit from an Israeli invasion of Lebanon is Hamas, said **Marc Champion** in *Bloomberg*. Its leaders have long wished to “turn the war for control of Gaza into one for Israel, drawing in both Hezbollah and Iran.” Their designs to “eliminate the state of Israel” are furthered by Israel’s increasing global isolation, and invading Lebanon without a solid exit plan could deepen that isolation. “A multifront war” would pose “far greater risks to the Jewish state than Hamas alone ever could.”

It wasn’t all bad

■ Thousands of people in Nysa, a southwestern Polish city, worked nonstop through the night to prevent the Nysa Klodzka River from overflowing. Last week, residents including the city’s professional volleyball team formed a 1,600-foot-long human chain to pass dozens of sandbags. Together they built a barrier along the riverbank and shielded the city from the devastation of Storm Boris, which had already claimed at least 20 lives across Central Europe. “We were fighting for our friends, for our close ones, for our acquaintances. For Nysa,” said Robert Prygiel, the volleyball team president.

■ **Benny and Susanne Anguiano thought they would never see Rayne Beau, their cat, again after he disappeared during a camping trip to Yellowstone National Park in June. The California couple searched for their 2-year-old Siamese pet for five days, but finally left after a campsite worker warned them about grizzly bears and coyotes in the area. Amazingly, 61 days after he went missing, Rayne Beau was found in Roseville, Calif., less than 200 miles from home and more than 800 miles away from the Wyoming camping site. A local animal charity identified him through his microchip, and despite losing 40 percent of his weight, he has recovered, thanks to the Anguianos’ care. “We are ecstatic to have him back,” said Susanne.**



Susanne and Rayne Beau

■ Raheem Cooper, a UPS driver, was doing his regular route around Valdosta, Ga., last month when he saw Marie Coble lying in her driveway. He called 911 and took care of her while emergency services arrived, rubbing water on her face to keep her comfortable. The 78-year-old woman had suffered a brain bleed and had to undergo emergency brain surgery, but she survived thanks to Cooper’s quick response. Throughout her time at the hospital, he visited at least 10 times. One of Coble’s granddaughters calls Cooper “our angel,” and Cooper calls her kids and grandkids his adopted family. “She’s my grandmother now,” Cooper said.

'Black Nazi': Will North Carolina scandal drag down Trump?

"If you want to understand why Republicans keep losing elections," said *The Wall Street Journal* in an editorial, the case of Mark Robinson is "illustrative." Before last week, the vitriolic Trump-endorsed lieutenant governor of North Carolina was already trailing his Democratic opponent in the state's gubernatorial race by 14 percentage points. Then CNN published a trove of comments that the self-declared Christian conservative apparently posted on a porn forum from 2008 to 2012. In the posts, Robinson described himself as a "Black NAZI"; praised Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*; called for reinstating slavery, adding "I would certainly buy a few"; and admitted his love of transgender porn. Robinson's campaign is now in "meltdown." Most of his senior staff have quit. The Republican Governors Association has pulled its funding. And while Robinson denies writing the posts, saying unnamed foes concocted "salacious tabloid lies," he has declined offers of digital forensic help to prove his innocence. This scandal could "flip the state blue," costing Donald Trump the presidency, said **Mary Ellen Klas** in *Bloomberg*. North Carolina is a must-win for the former president, but he is now polling even there with Vice President Kamala Harris. Giddy Democrats are carpeting the airwaves with ads linking Robinson to Trump, who has previously praised Robinson as "Martin Luther King on steroids" and "a great friend of mine."

Republicans knew exactly what they were getting in Robinson, said **Billy Ball** in *MSNBC*. Long before this scandal, he had a history of "unhinged" remarks: He has called LGBTQ people "maggots" and school-shooting survivors "media prosti-tots," described the Holocaust as "hogwash," and said women seeking abortions should have kept their "skirt down." Despite all this, GOP voters rewarded



Robinson: A 'great friend' of Trump

Robinson with a thumping 45-point victory over his normie conservative rival in the gubernatorial primary. "Republicans have made a virtue of the shallowest heuristic: The enemy of my enemy is my friend," said **Noah Rothman** in *National Review*. If the people they hate—the media, polite society—are against their candidate, they think he must be doing something right. "It is the sacrifice of logic and even self-interest to the demands of tribal loyalty."

The good news for Trump, said **Burgess Everett** and **Kadia Goba** in *Semafor*, is that North Carolina "is one of the last ticket-splitting states." Voters there are still willing to choose candidates from different parties for different offices when filling out their ballots. If Trump can quietly distance himself from the Robinson implosion—his running mate JD Vance this week declined to weigh in on what he downplayed as a "sex scandal"—he might avoid electoral pain. The lieutenant governor should just drop out, said **A.G. Gancarski** in the *New York Post*. He can't win, at this point, and "the Robinson distraction" is only hurting Trump.

Let's remember what Robinson is a "distraction" from, said **Jonathan Chait** in *New York* magazine. Yes, Robinson is a hateful, "conspiratorial maniac." But so is the GOP presidential nominee, an adjudicated rapist who is still "pushing the message that immigrants in an Ohio town are abducting and eating pets." Nine years ago, GOP voters elected Trump "in spite of his transgressions," said **David French** in *The New York Times*. Today, in their "nihilistic rage," they reject any candidate "who *doesn't* transgress." The only cure for this madness is electoral defeat. Either "Trump loses now or the Republicans are lost for a generation. Maybe more."

Only in America

■ A Georgia elementary school suspended a 9-year-old girl for pretending a banana was a gun. The girl's father, **Ryan Jachimowicz**, says he believes "several students were using bananas as guns at lunch" when his daughter "picked up her banana" and said, "Pew pew, you're under arrest." Jachimowicz said he initially laughed when school officials told him how his daughter earned a one-day suspension. But "they weren't laughing back."

■ A Florida man is suing his real estate broker for failing to disclose that the person buying his house was **Jeff Bezos**. Toy magnate **Leo Kryss** says if he'd known the billionaire Amazon founder was the prospective buyer of his Miami mansion, he never would have agreed to lower its price from \$85 million to \$79 million. The broker should pay Kryss \$6 million, his complaint states, for not passing along this "very important fact."

Good week for:

Shohei Ohtani, after the Los Angeles Dodger became the first MLB player to hit 50 home runs and steal 50 bases in a single season. Ohtani founded the "50-50 Club" in spectacular fashion, with a three-homer, two-steal performance against the Miami Marlins.

Poise, after the pilot of a small aircraft made an emergency landing on I-25 in Wyoming, tinkered with the engine on the hard shoulder, then took off again. Motorists who stopped to watch said the pilot's name was "Steve," and "there was something blocking the fuel line."

Crate diggers, after researchers discovered an unknown work by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a Leipzig library. The string trio was likely written by a teenage Mozart in the 1760s and is "absolutely beautiful," said a fan who attended its premiere at the Leipzig opera.

Bad week for:

Social distancing, after Dr. Jay Varma, New York City's former Covid czar, admitted to hosting sex parties and to attending a packed underground rave at the height of the pandemic. "I take responsibility for not using the best judgment," said Varma.

Liquidity, after a thief smashed the window of a car in Manhattan Beach, Calif., and made off with what the owner claims was a cardboard box containing \$1 million in cash. "It's unusual," said a police spokesperson, "but I can't give any more details."

Rodents, after New York City Mayor Eric Adams hosted the inaugural National Urban Rat Summit. "I dislike rats," Adams said in opening remarks, urging visiting officials from Boston, Chicago, and Seattle "to unify against what I consider Public Enemy No.1."

In other news

Congress strikes deal to avert government shutdown

House Speaker **Mike Johnson** this week defied Donald Trump and many Republican colleagues to join with Democrats and pass a spending bill to prevent a government shutdown. The stopgap measure, approved 341 to 82, will keep the government funded through Dec. 20 and does not include legislation demanded by Trump that would require people to prove their citizenship when registering to vote. Noncitizen voting is already illegal in federal elections, and Senate Democrats would have blocked that proof-of-citizenship requirement. With federal funding slated to run out in less than a week, Johnson said, a shutdown would be "an act of political malpractice" that would endanger the GOP's House majority and Trump's White House bid. The Senate was expected to swiftly approve the measure.



Albino, right, with Roger

Oakland

Found at last: A man who was abducted as a 6-year-old boy from a West Oakland park was reunited with his family

this summer after 73 years, the San Jose *Mercury News* reported last week. Luis Armando Albino was lured away from his older brother Roger by a woman offering to buy him candy in 1951. He was flown to the East Coast and raised by a couple who treated him like their own son, while his family held out hope he was alive. Albino's niece, Alida Alequin, took an online DNA test in 2020 that showed a close match with Albino, and she brought the case to the police this year after researching old news stories. Albino was living on the East Coast and had become a grandfather, but in June visited Oakland for a reunion with family including Roger. The kidnapping itself remains an open FBI investigation. With this "story out there, it could help other families going through the same thing," Alequin said.

Whitesburg, Ky.

Courthouse shooting: A Kentucky sheriff shot and killed a district judge last week after a disagreement in the judge's chambers. Letcher County Sheriff Mickey Stines turned himself in and was charged with first-degree murder. Circuit Clerk Mike Watts reported that Stines had eaten lunch with Judge Kevin Mullins that day. The shooting led to school lockdowns, but police said Mullins' death was an isolated incident. Mullins, 54, was elected in 2010, while 43-year-old Stines became sheriff in 2018. He was a defendant in a 2020 lawsuit, dismissed by a judge, in which a former employee claimed Stines eliminated her job after she supported a different candidate for sheriff, and in an ongoing case about a former sheriff deputy accused of sexually abusing an inmate. "This community is small in nature," said State Police Trooper Matt Gayheart, "and we're all shook."

New York City

World gathering: President Biden gave his final address to the United Nations this week, touting his administration's efforts to restore U.S. relations with allies and the role NATO played in defending Ukraine from Russian invasion. We "ensured the survival of Ukraine as a free nation," he said, but "we cannot grow weary, we cannot look away" as Russia continues to threaten the region. His 20-minute speech also addressed the plight of civilians in Gaza, who he said "didn't ask for this war." The annual U.N. General Assembly meeting brought the full range of world leaders to New York, including Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, who tried to set a conciliatory tone. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky sought to rally world opinion, warning of Russian plans to attack Ukraine's nuclear power plants, while Argentine President Javier Milei derided the U.N. as a "multi-tentacled Leviathan" in a fiery speech.



Biden at the U.N.



Bonne Terre, Mo.

Lethal injection: Missouri executed a man this week who maintained his innocence for over two decades after the U.S. Supreme Court, Missouri's Supreme Court, and Gov.

Mike Parson failed to intervene in the wake of new evidence and appeals. Marcellus Williams, 55, was convicted in 2003 of stabbing former reporter Felicia Gayle to death. He was executed by lethal injection over the objection of the St. Louis district attorney, Wesley Bell. Bell had filed a motion asking for Williams' conviction to be overturned because of evidence that prosecutors rejected a potential Black juror, plus detailed issues with the credibility of two key witnesses, including Williams' girlfriend, who Williams claimed had given him Gayle's laptop. A deal with the prosecutor's office that would have reduced Bell's sentence to life without parole was opposed by Missouri's attorney general, and both Missouri's top court and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to intervene.



Williams

West Palm Beach, Fla.

Gunman's note: Federal prosecutors this week filed charges of attempting to assassinate a presidential candidate against the man who allegedly sought to shoot Donald Trump on a West Palm Beach golf course earlier in September, just as the Senate issued a blistering report on Secret Service failures in the July attempt on Trump's life in Pennsylvania. Ryan Routh, 58, already faced federal gun and assault charges in the Florida case and was denied bail after prosecutors revealed a letter he'd written detailing his plans. "Dear World," it read in part, "This was an assassination attempt on Donald Trump but I am so sorry I failed you." The note, found in a box Routh left with an unnamed acquaintance months ago, further offered \$150,000 to anyone who could "complete the job." Routh had also compiled lists tracking Trump's whereabouts for weeks before he was spotted lurking in the trees near Trump International Golf Club with a semiautomatic rifle. The case was randomly assigned to Judge Aileen Cannon, the judge who recently dismissed charges in Trump's confidential documents case.



Routh

Meanwhile, an interim report from the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee cited Secret Service "failures in planning, communications, security, and allocation of resources" at the Butler, Pa., rally where a man opened fire on Trump, grazing his ear and killing a rallygoer. Agents tasked with securing the location fell short in coordinating with local police and drone teams; responding to reports of a suspicious person; and securing the rooftop from which the gunman fired. It was "a perfect storm of stunning failure," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.). The committee's investigation faulted the Secret Service for having no clear leader in charge of security at the site.



Mohamed Al-Fayed

London

Fayed rape allegations: A BBC documentary broadcast last week alleges that late Harrods owner Mohamed Al-Fayed was a serial rapist. Twenty former employees of the luxury London department store told the BBC that Fayed had assaulted them. Five of those women said the billionaire, who died last year at age 94, raped them, and one said she was a teenager at the time. She called Fayed—father of

Princess Diana's boyfriend Dodi Fayed and portrayed as affable on Netflix's *The Crown*—a “monster, a sexual predator” who viewed Harrods staff as his playthings. “We were all scared,” she said. After the documentary aired, the Justice for Harrods Survivors group, which had represented 37 women, added 100 more alleged victims. British prosecutors investigated Fayed in 2009 and in 2015, but concluded they could not get a conviction.

Paris

Right-wing government: Despite voting mostly for leftists in the July legislative runoffs, the French got a markedly right-wing new government last week. President Emmanuel Macron appointed a cabinet that includes centrists aligned with his party as well as right-wingers from the Republican party of his new prime minister, Michel Barnier.

There are no ministers from the left-wing New Popular Front alliance, which placed first in the election. And there are none from the far-right National Rally, the party whose strong poll numbers early on had prompted leftist parties to band together to create the NPF alliance in the first place. Macron said he was trying to end weeks of stalemate, but leftists were furious. Jean-Luc Mélenchon of far-left France Unbowed said Macron had seated “a government of election losers.”



Macron

Fort-de-France, Martinique

Food riots: Protesters in the French Caribbean island of Martinique set cars on fire and ransacked buildings last week in violent demonstrations against high food prices. Six police officers and a civilian were wounded by gunfire, and the government banned all protest. Groceries cost up to 42 percent more in France's overseas departments than on the mainland, but protesters were also angry about racial inequality. “In a majority-Black land, all of the people who hold the highest positions here are from France,” resident Shazi Chalon told *The Guardian*. “You have the local white population, whose grandparents and ancestors way back to slavery days owned plantations, who today wield most of the economic power.”



Fury over inequality

Brasilia

Musk capitulates: Elon Musk backed down last week in his standoff with Brazil's Supreme Court, which shut down his social media platform X in the country in late August. X has now agreed to appoint a local representative, pay fines, and remove offending accounts. In April, Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes had identified about 100 accounts that were questioning whether

Jair Bolsonaro, the far-right former president, really lost the 2022 election and had ordered X to take them down, saying they were undermining Brazil's democracy. Musk refused, even though X has bowed to such censorship in other countries, including India and Turkey. X may have given in because many of its more than 20 million users in Brazil had begun moving to rival services, such as Bluesky and Meta's Threads.



Musk

Schaffhausen, Switzerland

American dies in ‘suicide pod’: Swiss police this week detained several people, including a Dutch newspaper photographer, in connection with the death of a 64-year-old American woman in a “suicide capsule.” The case is the first use of the “Sarco” pod, developed by Dutch assisted-dying group Exit International. The 3D-printed, coffin-like device is designed to let a person in a reclining seat press a button to fill the sealed chamber with nitrogen gas, causing loss of consciousness and suffocation. Exit International said the woman had a severely compromised immune system and that her death was “peaceful, fast, and dignified.” Swiss law permits assisted dying but, rather confusingly, prohibits “external assistance,” and authorities said the capsule had not been cleared for use.



Like a sarcophagus

Dakar, Senegal

Boat of corpses: A boat carrying 30 dead migrants was discovered this week drifting 40 miles off the coast of Senegal. The Senegalese navy towed the wooden fishing canoe, or pirogue, to port and said the decomposition of the bodies indicated that the victims had been dead for days. With the route across the Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Italy heavily guarded, African migrants have been turning to a more dangerous route to Europe: a 950-mile Atlantic journey to Spain's Canary Islands. Fishermen working many miles off the coast say they often find floating bodies and boats with corpses. Some fishermen, no longer able to make a living because foreign trawlers are catching most of the fish, have rented out their own boats to human traffickers. “It's a sad fate,” fisherman Bassirou Mbengue told the BBC. “People are desperate.”

Plesetsk Cosmodrome, Russia

ICBM blows up on test: Satellite photos taken last week revealed a 200-foot-wide crater at Russia's Plesetsk Cosmodrome, indicating one of the country's prized RS-28 Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missiles had exploded on a test launch. "It's a big hole in the ground," said Pavel Podvig of the Russian Nuclear Forces project in Geneva. The Sarmat—known in the West as Satan II—is Russia's most modern ICBM. Ostensibly capable of flying 11,000 miles and carrying 16 nuclear warheads, it has had just one successful test flight, in 2022. China, meanwhile, claimed success in its own ICBM test this week, the first time in decades it had publicly announced such a test. It said its missile "fell precisely into the assigned seas" but offered no other information.



Another failed launch

Beijing

Economist purged: A leading economist at a Chinese think tank has disappeared after privately criticizing President Xi Jinping's management of the economy. Authorities arrested Zhu Hengpeng in April, shortly after he made the remarks in a personal conversation on WeChat, the Chinese text messaging service. Zhu, 55, was also fired as deputy director of the Institute of Economics at the state-run Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where he served as deputy party secretary. Since then, CASS staff have been forced to undergo an indoctrination campaign and sign loyalty pledges. Members should be "fearful in their hearts, careful with their words, and restrained in their actions," said CASS President Gao Xiang, a Xi loyalist. China's economy has been dragged down this year by a real estate crisis and high youth unemployment.

Rebun Island, Japan

Russian incursion: A Japanese fighter jet this week fired flares—the first time Japan's military has ever done so—to warn a Russian reconnaissance aircraft to leave Japanese airspace. Defense Minister Minoru Kihara said the Russian Il-38 plane flew three times over Rebun Island, near Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's main islands, a "provocative act" that was clearly not an accident. Japan has grown increasingly alarmed by Russia's displays of military cooperation with China. A joint fleet of eight Chinese and Russian warships sailed around Japan's northern coasts a day before the airspace breach, while a Chinese spy plane breached Japan's airspace off its southwestern islands in late August. Ties between Tokyo and Moscow have been strained since Japan imposed sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine war.



Russia's Il-38

Singapore

Rare corruption plea: Former Singapore transport minister S. Iswaran pleaded guilty this week to receiving illegal gifts while in office. The case shocked Singaporeans, who have long believed politicians in their city-state are incorruptible. Singapore—rated by Transparency International as one of the top five least corrupt countries—pays government leaders handsomely to discourage any temptation to take bribes. A typical cabinet minister earns \$850,000, while the prime minister makes twice that. Iswaran was the first minister to be criminally prosecuted in nearly half a century, although the most serious charge, bribery, was dropped in his guilty plea. He has admitted to accepting gifts from a property tycoon worth over \$300,000, including fine whisky, a trip to the World Cup in Doha, and *Hamilton* tickets.



Nice gift

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Marxist president: Socialist Anura Kumara Disanayake won Sri Lanka's presidential election with 43 percent of the vote this week, beating candidates from the mainstream parties that have ruled since independence from Britain in 1948. Disanayake, known as AKD, leads the Marxist party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, which led armed uprisings in the 1970s and '80s but has rebranded as part of a leftist and social democratic coalition. "I assure the public," he said, "I am ready to showcase my maximum commitment for the protection of democracy." This was Sri Lanka's first election since the nation defaulted on its debt in 2022, which sent inflation soaring and ignited mass protests against then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. AKD has pledged to renegotiate the terms of the International Monetary Fund bailout that rescued the island's economy.



Disanayake

Tirana, Albania

Sufi microstate: Albania announced this week it would establish a Vatican-style mini-state for the Bektashi Sufi Islamic sect on a 27-acre compound in the heart of the capital, Tirana. Founded in the Ottoman Empire in the 13th century as an offshoot of Sufism, the Bektashi Order has had its headquarters in Tirana since 1929 but has never enjoyed its own sovereignty. It is Albania's fourth-largest religious community—after Sunni Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics—making up about 10 percent of the nation's 2.4 million people, and its leader, Edmond Brahimaj, is known as Baba Mondi. Tiny and poor Albania has a long history of helping the oppressed, taking in Jews fleeing the Nazis and Afghans fleeing the Taliban. "We should take care of this treasure, which is religious tolerance," Prime Minister Edi Rama told *The New York Times*, "which we should never take for granted."



Bektashi compound in Tirana

Yang's queer awakening



When he was 4, *Saturday Night Live's* Bowen Yang scandalized his family with a striptease to a Céline Dion song, said Michael Schulman in *The New Yorker*. During an especially emotional passage, he dropped his pants and flashed them. It was, says Yang, 33, his “first moment of queer discovery, revelry, joy.” In his senior year of high school in Colorado, his Chinese-immigrant par-

ents were even more dismayed when they discovered his online sex life in an open browser window. “They had printed out the entire log of that conversation, and they had circled specific things. It was like Alexis Colby Dexter throwing the receipts off the banister in *Dynasty*. I had never felt more terror in my life.” His parents would only allow him to attend New York University if he also went to conversion therapy. “I could tell it was quackery. But I was, like, You know what? Maybe I am this malleable thing.” At his last session, his therapist let slip that he was a gay man trying to overcome his nature. “That’s scar tissue that will never totally go away,” he says of the sessions. “This thing I love and cherish about myself—there was an effort to eradicate it.” Yang’s parents finally stopped worrying about his sexuality when he became famous. “Now they ask me if I’m dating anybody,” he says with a laugh, “and I say no.”

Herzog, the fluffy villain

To many, Werner Herzog is the great auteur filmmaker behind *Fitzcarraldo* and *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, said Ryan Gilbey in *The Guardian*. But the German-born director has a separate fan base, who know him for playing the baddie in action flicks such as 2012’s *Jack Reacher* and Disney’s *Star Wars* spin-off TV series *The Mandalorian*. “A villain is something that comes easily to me,” says Herzog, 82. “When you look at *Jack Reacher*, I’m so frightening. My wife has friends in Paris who saw it. They called her and said, ‘Lena, are you married to that man? We can give you shelter!’ Hearing that, I knew I was good. Although, as my wife will testify, I am a fluffy husband.” While Herzog enjoyed his dalliances with Hollywood villainy, he despises aspects of the industry. He has utter contempt for terms such as “backstory,” “inciting incident” and “three-act structure,” as well as the overly precious screenwriting world that spawned them. In the early 1970s, he punched out the screenplay for *Aguirre* in two days, Herzog says proudly, some of it during a bus trip with his Munich football team. “They were all drunk and chanting obscene songs. The goalkeeper vomited over my little typewriter that was on my knees. Two or three pages were beyond repair, so I threw them out of the window.”



Griffin's long list of troubles

Kathy Griffin has a name for the many woes that followed her 2018 photo shoot with a facsimile of Donald Trump’s severed head, said Mikey O’Connell in *The Hollywood Reporter*. The comedian calls them “the laundry list” and they include: being investigated for threatening the president, unemployment, death threats, anxiety attacks, PTSD, attempted suicide, lung cancer, vocal-cord damage, and divorce. Now mounting her first major comedy tour since 2018, Griffin, 63, only travels by private jet. “I know it’s spoiled, but it’s worth it,” she says. “I get to avoid the airport, where a lot of Trumpers still feel the need to tell me how horrible I am.” She knows she should care less about what anonymous strangers think, and says she was recently told as much by an acquaintance, R&B legend Chaka Khan. “She tells me, ‘I’ve been watching you for a long time, and your whole thing is, like, you don’t give a f---. But until you *really* don’t give a f---, you won’t be free.’ And Chaka’s right. Shit still bothers me.” Trump still bothers her, too. But she’s even angrier at the friends who abandoned her after that photo. “I did not whip out my penis like Louis [C.K.]. I wasn’t canceled. I was investigated by the Department of Justice for something I don’t regret.”

In the news

■ *New York* magazine suspended star political correspondent **Olivia Nuzzi** last week after she admitted to having a sexting fling with former presidential candidate **Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** After Nuzzi, 31, interviewed Kennedy, 70, for a profile last year, the pair allegedly began a digital affair, with a source telling *Puck News* that the journalist sent JFK Jr. “demure” nude images. While the relationship never became physical, Kennedy—married to *Curb Your Enthusiasm* actress Cheryl Hines—bragged to friends about receiving NSFW photos, reports *The Daily Beast*. That gossip made it back to *New York* editor-in-chief David Haskell, who placed Nuzzi on leave. Nuzzi—who has split from her fiancé, *Politico* reporter Ryan

Lizza—said she “deeply” regretted not disclosing the relationship sooner. A spokesperson for JFK Jr. denied the allegations and claimed Kennedy was a victim of Nuzzi’s relentless sexting, saying, “He was being chased by porn.”

■ Echoing misinformation that has circulated online and been amplified by Donald Trump, **Janet Jackson** said last week that she has “heard” that Vice President Kamala Harris is “not Black.” In an interview with *The Guardian*, the pop icon was asked how she felt that America could soon elect Harris as its first Black president. “Well, you know what they supposedly said?” said Jackson, 58. “That she’s Indian.” When the interviewer explained that Harris has mixed heritage—her mother was Indian, her father Black and Jamaican—Jackson said, “I was told that they discovered her father was white.” Adding to the swirl of misinformation, Mo Elmasri, a film pro-

ducer claiming to be Jackson’s manager, issued an apology after the interview stating that “Janet respects Harris’ dual heritage as both Black and Indian.” But Jackson’s camp refuted that statement, saying she is managed by her brother and that Elmasri was not speaking on her behalf.

■ Donald Trump Jr.’s engagement to Kimberly Guilfoyle is in doubt after he was spotted smooching with a Palm Beach socialite, *The Daily Mail* reported last week. The former president’s son, 46, was seen locking lips with Bettina Anderson—a 37-year-old model and influencer—during a brunch in the ritzy Florida enclave. “They were definitely on a date,” a source told the *Mail*. “The kisses were romantic.” In a recent Instagram post celebrating his sixth anniversary with Guilfoyle, 55, Don Jr. thanked the former Fox news host for “always being there no matter what the haters are throwing our way.”



Voting on abortion rights

A record number of abortion initiatives will appear on state ballots this year—many of them in presidential battlegrounds.

Where is abortion on the ballot?

Voters will be asked to make critical decisions about reproductive rights in 10 states on Election Day, ranging from liberal New York and Colorado to the battleground of Arizona to conservative Nebraska and South Dakota. Florida, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, and Nevada will also have abortion initiatives on their ballots. Many of these measures, which would amend state constitutions, have faced strong opposition from Republican lawmakers and anti-abortion groups. Twenty-two states currently ban terminations in all or most cases, but if passed these amendments will radically remake the country's map of abortion access, which has been shifting back and forth in a tug-of-war of restrictive laws and access-expanding ballot measures since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. "This is our best opportunity," said Kelly Hall of the Fairness Project, which promotes progressive ballot measures in red and purple states. "Now is the moment."



Signing a ballot petition in Missouri

What would the amendments do?

Some aim to enshrine reproductive rights that residents already have under state law, while others would scrap restrictions. In Arizona, Florida, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, and Nevada, residents will vote on the right to abortion until fetal viability, the point at which a fetus can survive outside the uterus, generally considered about 24 weeks. Montana already provides access until viability, and abortion is legal in Nevada until 24 weeks. In New York, where terminations are legal until viability, an equal rights ballot measure does not mention abortion but would prohibit discrimination based on "pregnancy outcomes." In Arizona, Florida, Missouri, and Nebraska, amendments would overturn strict bans, ranging from a total ban in Missouri to a 12-week restriction in Nebraska. Two competing measures will appear on ballots in Nebraska: one allowing abortion until viability and another that would prohibit abortion after the first trimester. If both win a majority of votes, the measure with more support will take effect. In South Dakota, which has a total ban with no exceptions for rape or incest, a measure would allow abortion during the first trimester. For abortion rights groups, the fact that such initiatives are appearing on the ballot at all is something of a victory.

What obstacles have they faced?

Activists say they have had to overcome legal challenges, administrative maneuvering by GOP officials, and at least one case of what pro-abortion rights campaigners describe as voter intimidation. In Missouri, Republican Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft this month pulled an abortion amendment from the November ballot only for the state's highest court to reinstate it. In Florida, the governor's election police unit recently went

door-to-door asking voters to confirm whether they'd signed a petition in support of a referendum to overturn the state's six-week ban. "The experience left me shaken," said Isaac Menasche, a Fort Myers voter. Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis defended the move, claiming petition-gathering groups had submitted the names of dead people—despite the state having previously verified the more than 900,000 signatures collected. Florida's health-care agency has also launched a website that states the amendment "threatens women's safety," and

GOP lawmakers in other states have tried to dampen voter support for pro-abortion initiatives. Arizona's Supreme Court in August approved an informational pamphlet about the state's ballot measure to be sent to all voters that calls fetuses "unborn human beings." Abortion rights activists say the language, authored by Republican lawmakers, equates abortion with murder.

Are the amendments likely to pass?

Polls show that about 60 percent of voters nationwide believe abortion should be legal in most or all cases, and majorities favor the passage of amendments in Arizona, Missouri, and South Dakota. An August poll also found that 56 percent of Floridians support their state's Amendment 4. But while other states' measures require a simple majority to be enacted, Florida's needs 60 percent voter approval. Still, recent history is on the side of abortion rights campaigners. Voters in all seven states that have had abortion questions on their ballots since 2022—from blue California to red Kansas—have backed expanded access for the procedure.

Will these ballot measures affect the presidential race?

Democrats hope that mobilizing voters around abortion will drive support for both Vice President Kamala Harris, who has put defending reproductive rights at the heart of her campaign, and down-ballot candidates. "Abortion is a winning issue for us," said Danielle Butterfield, executive director of Priorities USA, a Democratic Super PAC. The campaign arm of House Democrats is focusing intensely on 18 races in states with abortion ballot amendments where the party is playing defense or hopes to flip a GOP-held district. It could be a smart strategy: Among swing state voters, abortion is the second most important issue, after the economy. For women under 45, it's number one. But a *Politico* analysis of five state abortion rights initiatives passed since 2022 found the success of those measures was driven largely by Republicans voting for abortion access and for GOP candidates. Abortion measures aren't "necessarily a death knell for Republicans," said Stan Barnes, political consultant and former GOP state senator in Arizona. "But it is a net negative."

Blocking abortion from the ballot

In Arkansas, reproductive rights campaigners this year collected some 101,000 signatures in favor of an amendment that would legalize abortion until 20 weeks, overturning the state's near-total ban. That was roughly 10,000 more signatures than required to get the proposal before voters in November—but election officials in the GOP-led state tossed the initiative on a technicality. While the overwhelming majority of signatures were gathered by volunteers, officials said the campaign failed to properly file documentation about canvassers it paid and so the whole petition was moot. Campaign organizers submitted a signed affidavit with a list of paid canvassers, but the state maintained that the document needed to be signed by the canvassing company, rather than the initiative itself. The leaders of two Arkansas ballot measures related to medical marijuana and gambling defended the abortion rights campaign, saying their petitions had similar issues but were certified. Arkansas' Supreme Court upheld election officials' decision last month. "Regnat Populus—The People Rule—is the motto of Arkansas," Justices Karen Baker and Courtney Rae Hudson wrote in their dissent. "Today's decision strips every Arkansan of this power."

Harris' 2020 hangover

Mark Z. Barabak
Los Angeles Times

When she began her career as a San Francisco prosecutor and California attorney general, Kamala Harris was squarely center-left, said Mark Z. Barabak. But when she ran in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, Harris underwent a “liberal makeover” that’s now “dogging” her presidential campaign. To compete with the very liberal Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, Harris lurched leftward by supporting a national fracking ban, drastic cuts to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and replacing all private health insurance with Medicare for All. These positions, adopted in a “strategic miscalculation” to appeal to the liberals who dominate Democratic primaries, were dropped when Harris became vice president under Joe Biden, but “the hangover” still lingers. Her opponent, Donald Trump, calls her “Comrade Kamala.” A recent poll found that Harris’ “greatest weakness” is the perception that she’s “too liberal.” Yet during most of her public life, Harris has been a pragmatic progressive, not a “flaming lefty.” She insists that her “values have not changed,” but given her willingness to “genuflect so conspicuously to the political left” four years ago, “voters aren’t wrong to wonder how firmly she’ll stick to those values she professes to hold dear.”

The fiasco of sports gambling

Charles Fain Lehman
The Atlantic

The evidence is now in, said Charles Fain Lehman, and it clearly shows that “legalizing sports gambling was a huge mistake.” Six years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a federal ban on commercial betting on sports such as football, basketball, and baseball, triggering a gold rush by states and private companies. Today, sports gambling is legal in 38 states. With placing a bet now as easy as pushing buttons on a smartphone, 1 in 3 Americans bets on sports. The sports gambling companies are hauling in more than \$10 billion a year—and that pot is growing fast. New studies show the dollars are often extracted from “the most financially precarious households,” creating a wave of addiction, “family misery,” and domestic violence. One new study by economists at UCLA and USC found that when people bet on online sports apps, the risk their households will declare bankruptcy rises 30 percent. As with nearly all gambling, the industry nets about 70 percent of its revenue from about 5 percent of bettors—problem and addicted gamblers. States that legalized sports gambling should reverse that decision, because we now see the results, “and they are uniformly negative.”

Trump’s plan to destroy Obamacare

Catherine Rampell
The Washington Post

“Thanks to GOP vice-presidential nominee JD Vance, we finally know what Donald Trump’s ‘concepts of a plan’ for replacing the Affordable Care Act might look like,” said Catherine Rampell. In a *Meet the Press* interview last week, Vance revealed that the “plan” Trump recently alluded to was to eliminate Obamacare’s protections of people with pre-existing conditions, and to create different “risk pools”—one for healthy people and another for older people with “chronic issues.” Insurers could again charge older, sicker people far more for health coverage. Young, healthy people could choose cheap plans that provide little coverage for serious illness, while in the high-risk pool, premiums would be so high many people would drop insurance, causing prices to rise even further “until the system falls apart.” In theory, the government could prevent this “death spiral” by subsidizing high-risk patients, but several states tried to do that before Obamacare and found it to be “extraordinarily expensive.” It’s unlikely Republicans would agree to pay such costs, particularly since House Republicans are already trying to kill *existing* premium subsidies for Americans who buy coverage through Obamacare markets. “Remember this next time Vance or other Republicans promise you ‘choices’ in your health insurance.”

It must be true... I read it in the tabloids

■ A California man puzzled by his high electricity charges finally learned he’s been paying his neighbor’s bill—for as long as 18 years. Ken Wilson of Vacaville bought a device to track his appliances’ energy use and cut way down on his use of electricity, but when his bills stayed high, he knew “something wasn’t right.” He called his utility company, and a worker figured out his apartment was linked to the meter for the adjoining unit, possibly since 2006, when Wilson moved in. “I just hope this story is going to help others,” he said. “I can’t be the only one.”



■ A pair of British nudists spent six days riding naked on a tandem bike across England’s southwest. Neil Cox, a 36-year-old finance worker, was “worried about a negative reaction” on the 260-mile ride with his female friend J Antic, 25, but found the response “overwhelmingly positive,” even when the pair went naked to bars. He notes that J is just a friend and that his longtime girlfriend approves. “It’s not a sexual thing,” he said. “I feel happier and less stressed when I’m naked.”

■ A Spanish man is offering himself as a professional “wedding wrecker” for brides with cold feet. Ernesto Reinares Varea posted an ad offering to spoil couples’ big day by objecting and claiming to be the bride’s true love—then “we’ll leave hand in hand.” It started as a prank, but he claims it produced a flood of takers willing to spend his fee of 500 euros (\$550) to escape matrimony. “I have weddings scheduled until December,” says Varea, who charges extra if assaulted in the line of duty: “Each slap is worth 50 euros.”

Viewpoint

“When JD Vance’s hillbilly antecedents came pouring out of the Appalachian Mountains into the factory towns of Ohio, they were looking for jobs and a decent standard of living. They were leaving something behind—something they loved but couldn’t live with. Vance knows all about that: He wrote an interesting and moving book on the subject of moving on. He is an intelligent and energetic man: If he had been born in Haiti, he’d have made it to Ohio a long time ago, and he surely would be thriving there. Some of these Haitian newcomers are going to send their children to Ohio State, the Marine Corps, and Yale Law, too.”

Kevin D. Williamson in *The Dispatch*

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LATVIA

Not fit to defend NATO's borders

Armands Puce
Latvijas Avīze

Latvia just revealed itself to be “the weakest link” in the entire NATO alliance, said Armands Puce. Earlier this month, a Russian drone carrying explosives crashed harmlessly in the Latvian village of Gaigalava, some 60 miles from the Belarus border. The drone, apparently intended for Ukraine, somehow strayed off course, yet our air defenses didn't notice it until it had already downed itself. Was this “a cunning plan by the Russian military to test the readiness of NATO countries to face a hybrid war?” After all, Russian planes have buzzed NATO airspace hundreds of times in the past year, mostly in the Baltics. Or perhaps it was not a

recon mission, “but rather a psychological maneuver meant to mock us.” If so, we certainly provided the laughs. Our government responded to this violation of sovereignty with “verbal diarrhea,” as official after official gave a different story: One said that the drone bore us “no malicious intent”; another that it was missed because drones are very hard to spot; another that it had been monitored the whole time. “Information warfare is decisive in modern conflicts, both to misinform the enemy and to lift our own spirits.” How is it that Latvia, a front-line country on Russia's border, “cannot apply this even in the most primitive way?”

UNITED KINGDOM

Why the prime minister needs a hefty raise

Simon Kelner
iNews

Prime Minister Keir Starmer makes a big deal of his “everyman credentials,” said Simon Kelner. That's why he can't be shocked he's being criticized for accepting the “fairly chunky sum” of \$143,000 in gifts in the past five years. It's more than twice as much as any other member of Parliament received. Sure, Starmer has complied with the rules and declared the gifts, which include Taylor Swift tickets, a “personal shopping experience” and free designer frocks for his wife, and box seats to watch his favorite soccer team, Arsenal. “But the transparency is not really the point here.” Even if perfectly legal, this is “not a good look, and betrays a certain lack of judgment.” Taxpayers scrutinize

every penny politicians get. Yet maybe that's part of the problem. Look at the overblown reaction to the recent news that Sue Gray, Starmer's chief of staff, makes \$4,000 more than he does. Gray is a highly experienced public servant who is responsible for the smooth running of our government. She doesn't earn too much—rather, “Sir Keir earns too little.” It's simply “ludicrous” to ask anyone to do a job like his for \$223,000 a year when the median salary for a top CEO in Britain is \$5.6 million. The state should start paying the prime minister a salary commensurate with the magnitude of his responsibilities. Maybe then he would “pay for his own footy tickets like the rest of us.”

France: Rape culture on trial in Pelicot case

Having suffered horrible sexual abuse, Gisèle Pelicot refuses to be a faceless victim, said **Violaine de Montclos** in *Le Point*. A grandmother who once worked for the state-owned electric utility, Pelicot, 72, had retired to Mazan, a tiny village in southern France, in 2013 with her husband of 50 years, Dominique Pelicot. Seven years later, when police arrested her husband for filming up women's skirts, her world collapsed. Investigators found on his phone and computer thousands of photos and videos showing him and dozens of other men having sex with her while she was drugged unconscious, “unaware of her fate.” Police say Dominique recruited strangers on an online message board under the heading “Without her knowledge” to rape his sedated wife more than 90 times over a decade. The courts and the press would normally have shielded Gisèle's privacy when Dominique and 51 other suspects—30 more remain at large—went on trial. But Gisèle insisted that her name be used and that the horrific rape footage be played in court. By “throwing open the doors of the courtroom,” she “masterfully regained control of her story.”

There is little doubt about the central facts in these “monstrous” crimes, said **Britta Sandberg** in *Der Spiegel* (Germany). Dominique already admitted to the court: “I am a rapist, like the others in this room.” Yet because some defendants claim Dominique told them his wife was a willing participant, their guilt or innocence will have to be decided in the coming weeks. That means Gisèle has to relive the trauma day after day, but she



Gisèle Pelicot, speaking out

does it with “her head held high.” She wants the world to grapple with the fact that her husband could recruit so many seemingly ordinary strangers—a truck driver, a journalist, a bricklayer, an IT specialist, a soldier—to join him in such a repellent act. The number of suspected predators is “dizzying,” but this is “not the trial of these men in particular,” said **Christelle Taraud** in *Le Nouvel Obs*. It is the “system that allows their existence that we must, as a society, confront.” Husbands still believe they have the authority to control the “bodies of women that they

use and abuse in the privacy of their home.” And defense lawyers still feel entitled to use “intimate photos” unrelated to the crimes to “sully a woman's reputation.” In this case, the defense has showed explicit photos of Gisèle apparently taken while conscious and smiling to imply that she consented.

France is being forced to confront the misogyny inherent in our society, said **Jonathan Bouchet-Petersen** in *Libération*. It is encouraging to see feminists marching in French cities waving banners saying “Thank you, Gisèle.” But men, too, should be making “more of a fuss.” We have to deconstruct our own preconceptions, above all the idea that any women, including our wives, owe us sex. “Because this trial is not that of monsters, entirely unlike the rest of us, but that of ‘good fathers’ integrated into society.” It's up to us “to question our way of being men in a modern society where gender inequality remains all too obvious.” The problem is “not all men,” to be sure—but it is “always men.”

Lebanon: Trapped between Hezbollah and the IDF

War has come to Lebanon, “with the roar of its drones and the thunderous sound of its planes,” said **Anthony Samrani** in *L’Orient-Le Jour*, and we have Hezbollah to blame. Ever since Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack triggered Israel’s invasion of Gaza, the Shiite Islamist militia has been holding Lebanon “hostage to the calculations of the Iranian axis,” dragging us into the conflict. Hezbollah has been firing rockets into northern Israel to support the Palestinians, while the Israelis have countered with airstrikes. Now the war is upon us in earnest. Last week, Israel exploded thousands of Hezbollah pagers, bombed the south, and struck a rare gathering of 20 leaders from Hezbollah’s elite Radwan force. This week, it seems “determined to continue the escalation,” unleashing the Israel Defense Forces to bomb southern Lebanon “with an intensity similar to that deployed in Gaza.” Tens of thousands are fleeing north to Beirut, hoping to find safety; others are cowering in their homes. Israel insists its goal is to bring Hezbollah to its knees. But the rest of us live here, too. “Hezbollah is not Lebanon,” yet it is “Lebanon that will be destroyed if Hezbollah is defeated.”

Israel’s “Deadly Call” attack, which exploded Hezbollah devices, was not mere provocation, said **Ibrahim Al-Amin** in *Al-Akhbar*. Targeting militia operatives in their homes, cars, and workplaces was a calculated move intended to show Hezbollah that it is outmatched. But “activating an operation targeting more than 10,000 people,” military and civilians alike, shows that Israel is ready to fight a “battle without limit.” Hezbollah might now



Israeli strikes have hit apartments in Beirut suburbs.

decide it has no choice but to go on the offensive. And that means that this time, the Israel-Lebanon conflict could “slide into a devastating regional war,” said **Abdullah Al-Sanawi** in *Al-Shorouk* (Egypt). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seems to be trying to prod Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah into crossing a red line first. If Hezbollah “remains silent,” it will look weak. If it unleashes its “ballistic missile capabilities,” it will ignite all-out war, with Israel assured of American backing “under the pretext of its right to defend itself.”

Already, “southern Lebanon is burning, and its towns and villages all the way to the Bekaa Valley are turning into scorched earth, and its people are being exterminated,” said *Al-Markazia* in an unsigned article. Hezbollah has “put Lebanon into the fire for no reason other than to support Gaza—and the Gaza war ended with Israeli superiority.” Meanwhile, Iran, Hezbollah’s sponsor, dared this very week to go to U.N. headquarters in New York and proclaim that it wants “peace and security” and is willing to re-enter nuclear talks. “What about the peace and security of Lebanon?” The one to blame is Netanyahu, said **Awni Al-Kaaki** in *El Shark*. Having “failed to achieve his two goals” of eliminating Hamas in Gaza and freeing the hostages, he has “taken revenge on Lebanon.” It’s delusional to think Israel is only bombing us because Hezbollah supported Gaza. Israel hates us because we are a diverse, multireligious society, and it wants to destroy us. All we can do now is “respond in kind.”

INDIA

Giving women a little bit of elbow room

Rama Bijapurkar
The Indian Express

Finally, women can fly without having to battle an “unthinking, entitled” man for a share of the armrest, said Rama Bijapurkar. The low-cost airline IndiGo, India’s largest carrier, is now letting women passengers select seats next to other women, and I could not be more thrilled. My joy is partly about the prospect of being free of the threat of harassment or groping for the duration of a flight, but it’s more than that. It will be heavenly to board without fear of being flanked by manspreaders. Indian men, with their “uncontested, automatic sense of entitlement,” assume that the lion’s share of the space is theirs. That’s why Indian women tend to

choose aisle seats. We endure “being bumped by service carts” and risk “brain damage from carelessly opened overhead bins” because we need the aisle to spill into if we’re seated next to “Mr. Space Hog.” Sure, there’s a danger the new policy will embolden ill-mannered male travelers who find themselves seated next to a woman. “Don’t protest about my hogging space,” they might say. “Travel in the pink seats or shut up.” But I trust the airline to make the men compliant. After all, they already get us all to “stand uncomplainingly in caged buses on hot tarmacs waiting for aircraft cleaning.” Surely they can handle this.

ARGENTINA

Why we must kill these Americans

Antonella Fonte and Dante Borzone
La Nacion

The environmental damage done by Pablo Escobar’s hippos in Colombia is nothing compared with the mess American beavers have made in the archipelago of Tierra del Fuego, said Antonella Fonte and Dante Borzone. Argentina imported 10 breeding pairs in 1946, in hopes of establishing a home-grown fur industry. It was a hideous mistake. “Freed from their natural predators,” those few beavers have multiplied to number some 100,000, and they are destroying the islands. The “thousands and thousands” of acres of Andean Patagonian forests they’ve gnawed down “will take centuries to recover,” because our beech trees

“don’t have the capacity to regenerate” like the aspens and poplars of North America. The dams they’ve built have flooded forests, grasslands, and peat bogs, killing many of the island’s native species. The four hippos Escobar inflicted on Colombia in the 1970s number about 170 today, and that country is talking about relocating them. But “utopian solutions like relocating or sterilizing” invasive species aren’t always feasible. Argentina’s beavers are far too numerous to be trapped humanely. There is no other option but to kill them. “Sometimes we have to choose between saving an animal or saving an entire ecosystem.”

Noted

■ In the first 59 days of her candidacy, Kamala Harris and running mate Tim Walz conducted seven interviews and press conferences with TV and print reporters—three for Harris and four for Walz. During that time, Donald Trump and running mate JD Vance did more than 70.

Axios

■ The number of women in Texas who died while pregnant, during labor, or soon after childbirth rose sharply after the state in 2021 banned nearly all abortions after six weeks. From 2019 to 2022, the maternal mortality rate jumped 56 percent in Texas, compared with an 11 percent increase nationwide over the same period.

The state has since outlawed abortion in all cases except to save the life of the mother. *NBCNews.com*



■ After decades of declines, gun ownership is now rising among Democrats. In 2022, 29 percent of Democrats said they had a gun at home, up from 22 percent in 2010. Concerns about personal safety and a volatile political climate have motivated “a group of people who five years ago would never have considered buying a gun,” said anthropologist Jennifer Hubbert.

The Wall Street Journal

■ U.S. overdose deaths fell 10 percent from April 2023 to April 2024, to about 101,000, according to CDC data, the first drop in five years. Experts say possible reasons for the drop include increased availability of the anti-overdose drug naloxone, expanded treatment programs, and greater public awareness about the dangers of opioids.

ABCNews.com

Senate: A tough fight for Democrats

As Donald Trump and Kamala Harris battle for the presidency, their parties are locked in a tight race for Senate control, said **Robert Tait** in *The Guardian*.

And right now, “the GOP has the edge.” Democrats currently hold a 51-49 majority, and the retirement of centrist Sen. Joe Manchin means an easy GOP pickup in red West Virginia. So even if Harris takes the White House in November—with a newly elected Vice President Tim Walz as the tie-breaking vote in a 50-50 Senate—seven Democratic incumbents in highly competitive races will need to win for Democrats to hold the chamber. And two of them, Sens. Jon Tester of Montana and Sherrod Brown of Ohio, are “particularly vulnerable.” Brown has held his seat since 2007, but once-purple Ohio has taken a rightward swing, and some recent polls show him trailing GOP challenger Bernie Moreno.

Montana is Democrats’ biggest problem, said **Hayes Brown** in *MSNBC.com*. Since Tester squeaked out his first win in 2006, the third-generation dirt farmer has defied the demographics of a state Trump won by 16 points in 2020. But the moderate Democrat is now polling behind aerospace entrepreneur and former Navy SEAL Tim Sheehy, and the nonpartisan *Cook Political Report* has moved the race from toss-up to



Tester: The most vulnerable incumbent?

“leans Republican.” The stakes couldn’t be higher for Democrats, who under a Harris presidency would see much of her agenda blocked without Senate control. “It’s too early to count Tester out,” said **Burgess Everett** in *Semafor*. Sparsely populated Montana is “hard to poll,” and elections can turn on a small handful of votes, leaving plenty of

“unknowns to potentially tip the race.”

As Tester teeters, another potential route to a Democratic majority is gaining attention, said **Paul Kane** in *The Washington Post*. Some Democrats are pushing party leaders to pump money into Florida and Texas, where incumbent GOP Sens. Rick Scott and Ted Cruz hold slim margins. The races are considered “long shots for Democrats.” But polls show former NFL linebacker Colin Allred running even or just behind Cruz, and some Democrats think the seats can be won with an advertising push. Such efforts wouldn’t come cheap, though, and many are skeptical. They should be, said **Jim Geraghty** in *National Review*. Winning in Florida and Texas is a pipe dream, and Democratic leaders seem to know that, since they have yet to shift money to those races. That leaves Ohio and Montana—and hopes of a Democratic majority in January “hanging by a thread.”

Trump: Planning for election chaos?

Donald Trump’s latest plan “to subvert democracy has hit a major roadblock” said **Ari Berman** in *Mother Jones*. For months, Trump and allies such as Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) have pressured lawmakers in GOP-led Nebraska to switch their state to a winner-takes-all electoral vote system. Currently, Nebraska and Maine are the only states to award some of their Electoral College votes by congressional district. And the single vote allocated to the blue-leaning district around Omaha could prove decisive in November. Should Kamala Harris win it along with Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin she’d reach the 270 Electoral College votes needed to claim the presidency. But under a winner-takes-all scenario, Harris and Trump would be tied 269-269. The election would then go to the House, where each state delegation would get a vote, and Trump would likely be declared victorious. But that scheme was dealt a seemingly fatal blow this week when a key Nebraska Republican, state Sen. Mike McDonnell, said he wouldn’t support a switch so close to Election Day.

The Nebraska plot may be dead, but elsewhere Trump continues “to mess with the 2024 vote,” said **Richard L. Hasen** in *Slate*. In Georgia, the state election board—“dominated by Trumpian elec-

tion deniers”—has passed a string of last-minute changes that could delay the release of vote tallies, creating space for partisans to spread disinformation and try to block the certification of results. Among those new rules is a requirement that ballots be hand-counted on Election Day, even though heavily Democratic urban areas like Fulton County lack the time and personnel to meet this demand. “These rules aren’t being proposed because there’s some widespread problem,” said **Chris Purdy** in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. MAGA loyalists just want to “sow doubt about our electoral process,” because they are the ones “who benefit from making democracy seem chaotic and inefficient.”

Chaos is guaranteed in November, said **Jonathan Blitzer** in *The New Yorker*. “In 2020, Trump supporters were effectively improvising when they challenged the election return.” This time, they are better prepared. In a third of the country, an election denier is now responsible for administering the election at state level. Meanwhile, Republicans have filed more than 100 lawsuits against voting procedures and “mobilized 100,000 volunteers to stand watch anywhere votes are cast or counted.” The groundwork is being laid “to dispute the certification of the Electoral College vote on Jan. 6.”

Tagovailoa: A case study in NFL brain injuries

The football season is only in its fourth week, “and already the issue of concussions has interrupted our regularly scheduled programming,” said Jason Page in *MSNBC*. Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa’s career—and brain health—are in jeopardy after he suffered a concussion two weeks ago, his third diagnosed concussion since 2022. He crashed headlong into a defender and fell hard to the turf, with his arms going into a stiff pose called “the fencing response,” indicating serious brain injury—the second time that’s happened to him. “In an era of heightened awareness of concussions,” Tagovailoa, 26, may be the greatest “walking case study.” He’s on injured reserve for a month while neurologists study his injured brain. His mother encouraged him to quit, as did Las Vegas Raiders coach Antonio Pierce. But Tagovailoa reportedly has no plan to retire. At what point does the league “need to protect Tua from Tua?”



Tagovailoa in ‘the fencing response’

The NFL “isn’t going to save Tagovailoa from himself,” said Jemele Hill in *The Atlantic*. If doctors insist he retire, he gets \$167 million of the \$212 million contract he recently signed, but if he’s medically cleared and chooses to walk away,

he may forfeit most of it. It’s “a small sign of progress” that prominent voices within football are advising him to retire, bucking “the old hyper-macho culture of playing through any injury.” Still, players continue to sign up “to play a violent game” despite the risk of long-term brain damage—“and if you think the sight of Tagovailoa writhing on the ground is enough to turn fans off,”

you underestimate the degree to which football remains a “national obsession.”

But there’s no longer any “plausible deniability about the consequences” of playing this “irredeemably unsafe” sport, said Nathan Kalman-Lamb and Derek Silva in *The Guardian*. Every 2.6 years that an athlete plays tackle football, studies show, his risk of developing the neurodegenerative disease chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) doubles—“and kids start playing this sport at 5 years old.” The NFL essentially has a “PR approach to concussions,” said Dave Zirin in *The Nation*. It adopted loose concussion protocols to protect its billions in profits, not the players. “Head injuries are part of the product,” and if Tagovailoa returns, every game he plays “will be stalked by the possibility of tragedy.”

Springfield: Why Trump plans to go

Hasn’t Donald Trump “punished Springfield enough?” asked Eugene Robinson in *The Washington Post*. The former president announced last week he will soon go to the Ohio city whose residents have endured dozens of bomb threats and Ku Klux Klan fliers after Trump falsely claimed at his debate with Kamala Harris that Haitian immigrants are “eating the dogs, they’re eating the cats.” Springfield Mayor Rob Rue, a Republican, said his city “is hurting” and that the divisive circus of a high-security Trump visit would “put an extreme strain on our resources.” But Trump and his vice-presidential pick, JD Vance, couldn’t care less about Springfield; they’re cynically exploiting their “garish caricatures” of the city’s Haitians for their anti-immigrant message.

Trump and Vance have already inflicted “significant and lasting” damage with their “disgusting” lies, said Ray Marcano in the Dayton, Ohio, *Daily News*. Springfield is scared and divided, and no one knows when the hardworking Haitian community will feel safe again—or when schoolchildren will “stop asking their Haitian classmates what dog tastes like.” Vance was told by city officials that the pet-eating rumor was false before he injected it into the campaign, said Greg Sargent in *The New Republic*. He’s admitted

he “created” a big media story to draw attention to the burdens the influx of about 15,000 Haitians have placed on Springfield. Some problems and friction have inevitably occurred, but both Rue and Gov. Mike DeWine say the immigrants have filled needed factory jobs, started businesses, and revitalized the community. Despite the fact the Haitians entered the U.S. legally, under the Temporary Protected Status program or with green cards, Vance is still portraying them as an “alien invasion” and insists they should not have been admitted into the country. “I’m still going to call them illegal aliens,” Vance said.

This grotesque slander has an obvious purpose, said Adam Serwer in *The Atlantic*. Gov. DeWine, Springfield’s city officials, and its business community all say the Haitian immigrants “helped spur an economic revival” in a heartland community with a declining population and a sagging downtown. Trump and Vance, however, believe that “America belongs to white people.” They are stoking racial hatred and disgust to frighten swing-state undecideds into voting against their own economic interests. The operative Trump-Vance theory is that the country “would be better if it were poorer and weaker, as long as it were also whiter.”

Wit & Wisdom

“You campaign in poetry; you govern in prose.”

New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, quoted in MSNBC

“The function, the very serious function of racism, is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being.”

Toni Morrison, quoted in The Washington Post

“The Truth must dazzle gradually, or every man be blind.”

Emily Dickinson, quoted in The Atlantic

“There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.”

Karl Marx, quoted in The New York Times

“Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.”

Alfred Hitchcock, quoted in The Statesman (U.K.)

“Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city.”

George Burns, quoted in The Knowledge

“War is too important to be left to the generals.”

Statesman Georges Clemenceau, quoted in The Conversation

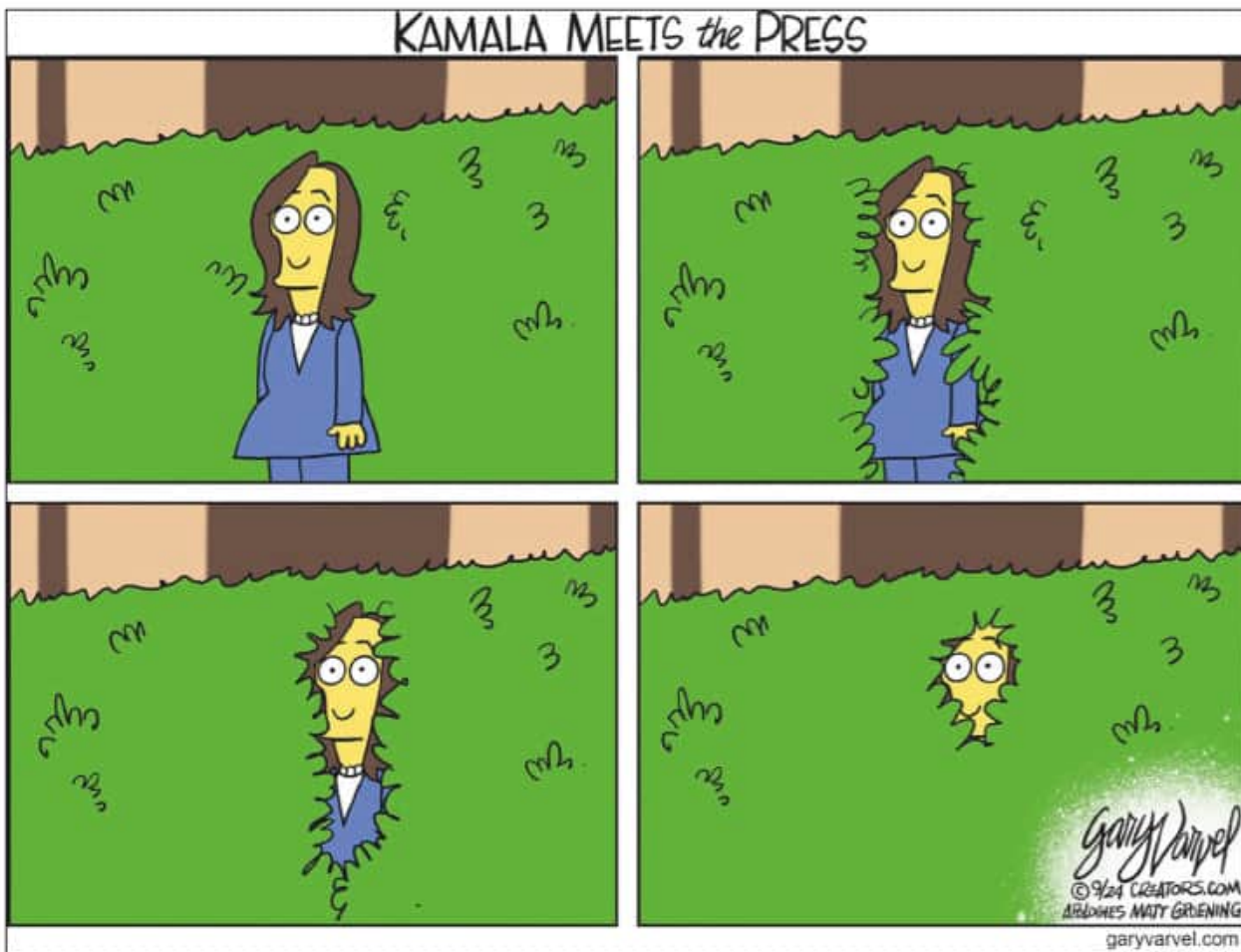
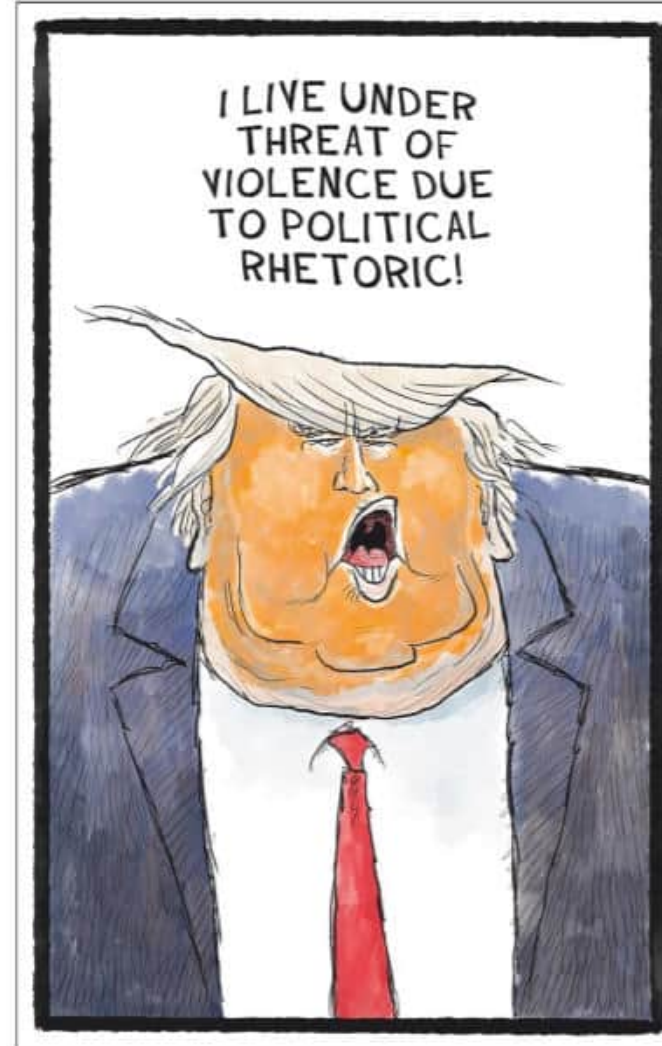
Poll watch

■ Only **32%** of Americans think the job being done by the Secret Service is good or excellent, down from **55%** last year. After two assassination attempts of Donald Trump, the share of people who say that the agency’s work is poor has risen from **13%** to **36%**.

Gallup

■ **72%** of Americans think artificial intelligence companies should be more regulated. **66%** want more regulation of the pharmaceutical industry, and **60%** want more regulation of social media companies. Only **38%** support more regulation of the cannabis industry.

YouGov





Teen tech: Instagram tries to limit the damage

Instagram is at last taking kids' safety seriously and "it's about time," said Katie Notopoulos in *Business Insider*. The photo- and video-sharing app owned by Meta rolled out a slew of changes last week aimed at its youngest users. The biggest change is that "Meta will now designate users under 18 as 'Teen Accounts'—by default." Meta head of global policy Nick Clegg has admitted that "just offering parents the option to use content controls hasn't worked." That's probably because Instagram previously "buried" those controls "deep in the app settings," where most parents couldn't find them. Now all Teen Accounts will automatically have "more restrictive settings for who can message them, who can comment on their posts, and what kind of sensitive content is recommended" to them. They will also have a "Sleep Mode" at night that prohibits notifications—a source of anxiety and sleep interruptions—and pop-ups that tell them to take breaks from the app. It's "a smart move" by Meta to finally admit its mistakes.

"The new safeguards will almost certainly make for a less engaging Instagram for minors," said Kaitlyn Tiffany in *The Atlantic*. That's a good thing. Teens "live on their phones," and "for many years," they were "totally unsupervised" on apps like Instagram, "much to their detriment." Meta, in particular, has been under the microscope since whistleblower Frances Haugen leaked in-



Critics liken Instagram to addictive drugs.

ternal documents in 2021 that suggested that Facebook and Instagram knew about the impacts they were having on kids' mental health and failed to fix them. Given such reluctance, these new features are "a cause for celebration." Shifting 100 million teens into guard-railed accounts is going to produce a few outbursts, said Julie Jargon in *The Wall Street Journal*. But Instagram head Adam Mosseri said, "Earning some trust from parents and giving parents peace of mind will help business in the long run," even if teen growth and engagement on the platform suffers in the short term. Instagram isn't just stopping there: It plans to unveil artificial intelligence that "will identify children who are lying about their age."

The teen techlash has "reached a tipping point," said Adam Clark Estes in *Vox*. Meta's moves come as Congress steps "closer to passing the Kids Online Safety and Privacy Act." Seven states have now passed bans on cellphones in schools, and another 14 are considering them. But you have to begin to wonder where it all leads. U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy actually issued an advisory last month "on the mental health and well-being of parents," who are concerned about their kids' mental health. The hand-wringing over screen time is starting to "resemble an ouroboros of anxiety." Solving this mental-health doom loop "will require more than a crackdown on smartphone use."

Innovation of the week

Elon Musk's brain-chip startup Neuralink has received the FDA's "breakthrough device" designation for an implant that aims to help blind people see, said Sujita Sinha in *Interesting Engineering*. The implant, called Blindsight, uses a microelectrode array that is surgically placed directly into the brain's visual cortex, where it "activates neurons based on input from an external camera." That could potentially allow people without eyes or an optic nerve to perceive visual information. Similar implantable devices have been used for decades to "support vision in some partially sighted persons." But Neuralink is adding "more electrodes to the implant, which, in theory, could increase the vividness of the users' vision." The

FDA's designation isn't a form of approval; it simply signals "that the technology holds considerable promise and could contribute to future treatments."

Bytes: What's new in tech

The fusion of AI and nuclear power

Microsoft plans to revive the Three Mile Island nuclear plant to supply energy for its AI needs, said Tom Warren in *The Verge*. The software maker signed a 20-year deal last week that would give it "exclusive rights to 100 percent of the output" from the retired Pennsylvania power station. The reactor that Microsoft plans to use "is located next to a unit that was shut down in 1979 after the worst U.S. nuclear accident in history." Constellation, the owner of Three Mile Island, said the revived reactor can generate enough energy "to power more than 800,000 homes"—but that power will be going to Microsoft's data centers instead. Constellation still needs approval from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to bring the site back online.

Tech faces a sudden jobs drought

Job seekers in tech can no longer get in the door if they don't have AI experience in their resumes, said Katherine Bindley and Joseph Pisani in *The Wall Street Journal*. After a period when tech companies couldn't seem to be hiring workers fast enough, "firms have become laser focused on revenue-generating products and services"—and are jettisoning projects and jobs "in areas that weren't huge

moneymakers." The universal interest is developing artificial intelligence, and "people who have worked on the large language models that power products such as ChatGPT can easily find jobs and make well over \$1 million a year." Others are struggling to land interviews. "Postings for software development jobs are down more than 30 percent since February 2020, according to Indeed.com."

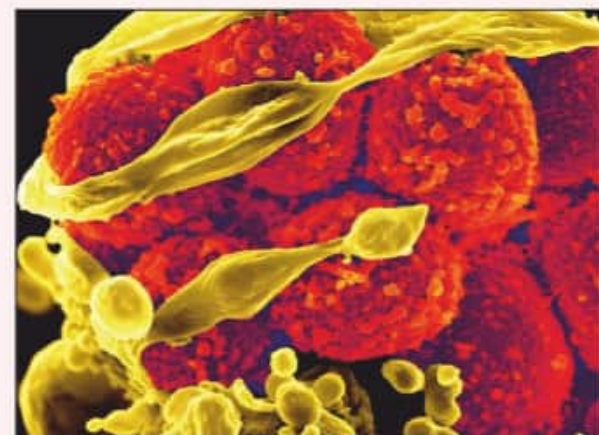
Board quits at DNA pioneer 23andMe

The entire board of the DNA testing company 23andMe resigned en masse last week, said Jane Thier in *Fortune*. CEO Anne Wojcicki is the only director left at "the embattled company, known for its mail-order DNA-testing kit." Wojcicki, who holds 49 percent of the voting shares of the company, has been under pressure since announcing in April that she wanted to take 23andMe private by acquiring all outstanding shares she didn't already own. The company, once a Silicon Valley darling and a pioneer in the field, briefly hit a market value of \$6 billion after going public in 2021. However, the stock was trading at around 36 cents a share this week as DNA test sales fell, a data breach affected some 7 million customers, and the promises made for broad DNA testing failed to materialize.

The growing threat of superbugs

Nearly 40 million people could die from antibiotic-resistant infections between now and 2050. That's the conclusion of a landmark new study of what the World Health Organization calls "one of the top global public health and development threats." The more we use antibiotics to kill bad bacteria, the more chances the bacteria have to evolve resistance, and they've been doing just that. When researchers analyzed 520 million datasets from 204 countries, they found more than 1 million deaths attributable to antibiotic resistance each year between 1990 and 2021. Worse, that number has been rising and its rise is expected to accelerate. The deaths

aren't evenly distributed. The fatality rate over that time fell by over 50 percent among children under 5, largely thanks to improved vaccination and sanitation programs, but rose by more than 80 percent in those ages 70 and older. So far, the two trends have balanced each other out, but the authors say that will change as the global population ages. The largest single jump in mortality rates was seen with the bug known as methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA; deaths from MRSA nearly doubled, from 57,200 in 1990 to 130,000 in 2021. "We need appropriate attention on new antibiotics and antibiotic stewardship," lead author Chris



MRSA: Deadlier than ever

Murray, from the University of Washington, tells *CNN.com*, "so that we can address what is really quite a large problem."



Musk ambrette is in soaps and lotions.

The scent linked to early puberty

Girls are going through puberty an average of six months earlier than they did in the 1960s. A small but growing number get their first period by age 9, which can increase the risk of breast cancer, diabetes, and heart disease in later life. Now researchers think they have found a possible reason for the early onset, reports *NBCNews.com*. Musk ambrette, a synthetic form of musk fragrance found in cheap perfumes, may send a signal to the brain that triggers the process early. The researchers combed through 10,000 chemical compounds to see how they affected the brain. They found several that might influence the timing of puberty, but the only one children were regularly exposed to was musk ambrette, which is used in everyday products including cosmetics, soaps, and even some artificially flavored foods. When the researchers tested that compound on human cells, they found that it triggered the release of GnRH, a hormone linked to the start of puberty. Co-author Natalie Shaw, from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, says that while more research is needed to confirm the link, parents may want to avoid products containing the compound. Musk ambrette is already banned in cosmetics in the EU and Canada.

Chemicals leach into foods

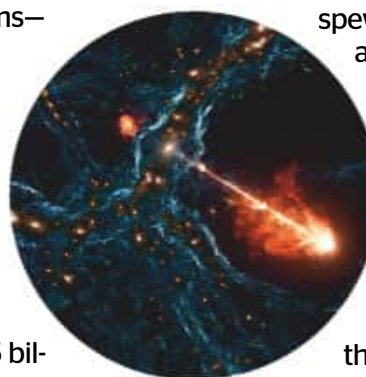
Of the 14,000 chemicals used in food processing and packaging, 3,601 leach into our food and end up in our bodies, a new study has found. These compounds are found in plastic wraps, coated paper, and hard plastics. Many of them are harmful, including metals, volatile organic compounds, PFAS, and phthalates, and some can disrupt hormones or cause cancer. Foods kept in small plastic containers—such as single-serve salad dressing or soy sauce packets—are most likely to absorb chemicals, because more of the food is in contact with the plastic. And high temperatures can cause the chemicals to pass from plastic to food more quickly, so scientists recommend microwaving a frozen meal on a plate rather than in the tub it came in. Packaging made from recycled paper is actually worse than plastic, the study authors say, because it often contains non-food grade inks that transfer to the food. "We need to be thinking about constructive ways forward, how we can ensure the safety of these materials," study co-author Jane Muncke tells *The Washington Post*. "What worries me a lot is that's not happening."

Adderall and psychosis

Psychosis and mania can occur in patients taking Adderall and other prescription amphetamines. Yet since just 1 in 1,000 patients are affected, these rare side effects haven't been studied in much detail. Now new research suggests that the trigger may be dosage, reports *The New York Times*. Researchers looked at psychiatric admissions for patients ages 16 to 35 at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts. They found that people who took high doses of the drugs—more than 40 milligrams of Adderall, 100 milligrams of Vyvanse, or 30 milligrams of dextroamphetamine—were five times more likely to develop psychosis or mania than those who weren't on the medications. For those on medium doses, the risk was 3.5 times higher. Notably, there was no elevated risk among patients taking the older methylphenidate drugs, such as Concerta and Ritalin, regardless of dosage. Still, many patients take high doses of the drugs with no ill effects, and lead author Lauren Moran notes that more research is needed to establish why the drugs seem to cause psychosis in certain patients. "There's really no information on who's at risk," she says.

Galaxy-spanning plasma streams

Scientists have spotted the largest pair of black hole jets ever seen, reports *PopSci.com*. The plasma streams—containing charged ions, electrons, and other particles—are a whopping 23 million light-years long, roughly 140 times the length of the Milky Way. Named Porphyryon, after a giant in Greek mythology, the jets are emerging from the top and bottom of a supermassive black hole in a galaxy about 7.5 billion light-years from Earth. They are one of more than 10,000



Unfathomably vast

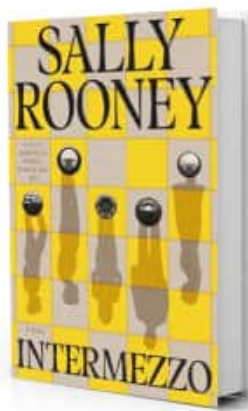
such plasma emissions discovered during a survey by Europe's Low Frequency Array radio telescope. Astronomers say their colossal size and age suggest that such jets—which spew out huge amounts of material and energy—may play some role in the evolution of the universe. "Up until now, these giant jet systems appeared to be a phenomenon of the recent universe," says lead author Martijn Oei, from Caltech. "If distant jets like these can reach the scale of the cosmic web, then every place in the universe may have been affected by black hole activity at some point in cosmic time."

Review of reviews: Books

Fall fiction: Five of the season's buzziest new reads

Intermezzo

by Sally Rooney (FSG, \$29)



Sally Rooney's latest "has a lot of hype to live up to," said Abby Sliva in *The Minnesota Star Tribune*. The twin successes of *Conversations With Friends* and *Normal People* have turned the 33-year-old Irish author into one of the buzzi-

est names in fiction. Fortunately, her new novel is one that her fans "will want to read again and again to catch every sly nuance." It toggles between the points of view of two brothers, a 32-year-old human rights attorney and a fading 23-year-old chess prodigy, who are grieving their father's death as they carry on with life and its other complications. Peter, the lawyer, is torn between two women and his chapters are rendered in stream of consciousness, while young Ivan's voice is "less scatterbrained, more stoic." A rift develops between the brothers; otherwise, "nothing much else happens," said Shahidha Bari in the *Financial Times*. Still, "what Rooney offers instead is enough: characters rendered in a kind of literary pointillism, interiorities that feel so real they vibrate, inwardness turned utterly out."

Entitlement

by Rumaan Alam (Riverhead, \$30)



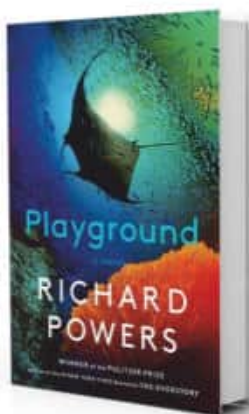
"Rumaan Alam is particularly skilled at depicting the forces that unite and divide us," said Tope Folarin in *The Atlantic*. In his "barbed, voluble" new novel, the author of *Leave the World Behind* chronicles the relationship between two char-

acters who are "opposites in almost every sense." Asher, a white octogenarian billionaire hoping to bolster his legacy, has hired Brooke, a 33-year-old Black former teacher, to assist his philanthropic efforts. Brooke is uncertain who she wants to be, and when she makes the pursuit of privilege her goal, the effort strains her other relationships and eventually reveals how the circumstances of a person's birth dictate individual fate. While we're following Brooke, "it almost

seems possible that she'll turn positive thinking and fearless self-assertion into some version of the American dream," said Laura Miller in *The New Yorker*. But as Alam explores the noxious effects of proximity to great wealth, "the tone of this novel grows darker than that of any of his previous works, even the apocalyptic *Leave the World Behind*."

Playground

by Richard Powers (Norton, \$30)



In his Pulitzer Prize-winning 2018 novel, *The Overstory*, Richard Powers taught us to be awed by forests, said Hamilton Cain in *The Boston Globe*. In his latest, "he's a literary Cousteau, immersing us in wonders beneath the waves." He does so by

braiding the stories of an ailing tech billionaire who devotes his last days to building floating cities outside existing governments' reach, a legendary 92-year-old oceanographer making her final scuba dive, and a middle-aged Polynesian artist whose island home may be sold to a billionaires' consortium. Though *Playground* never matches the propulsive force of *The Overstory*, "Powers on a slightly off day is still more proficient than 99 percent of American authors on their best." Even while trusting that this novel's many parts would eventually cohere, "I wasn't prepared for the astonishing resolution that Powers delivers," said Ron Charles in *The Washington Post*. "In the now-vast library of fiction and non-fiction books reminding us of the planet's imperiled condition, I can't think of another novel that treats Earth's plight with such an expansive and disorienting vision."

Rejection

by Tony Tulathimutte (Morrow, \$28)

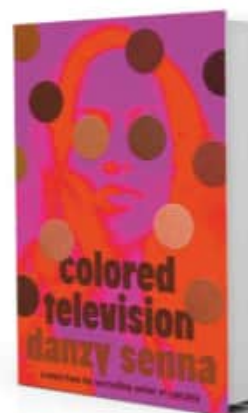


Much of Tony Tulathimutte's new book of seven linked short stories "would be annoying if it wasn't also so smart," said Madeline Leung Coleman in *NYMag.com*. "It would be easy to call *Rejection*

an incel novel," since so many of its characters are resentful loners and "there's no one here who feels at home in their body, no one who doesn't spend too much time online." But these tales "go deeper and fouler than inceldom," digging into the protagonists' self-hatred and shame before ending with a bracing manifesto and a clever meta touch. "The psychic torment of these characters can be as disturbing as graphic horror," said Sam Sacks in *The Wall Street Journal*. "It can also be snortingly funny." The book's first story, "The Feminist," about a young man driven mad by his inability to convert female friends into lovers, was "a cause célèbre" when it was first published in 2019, and Tulathimutte's "startlingly good" completed collection has now been longlisted for a National Book Award. While Tulathimutte is "devastatingly fluent" in of-the-moment jargon, these stories feel built to last because they affect "a devastating hold on the mind."

Colored Television

by Danzy Senna (Riverhead, \$29)



"*Colored Television* is an exhilarating yet poignant riff on the struggling artist as a wannabe middle-aged sellout," said Carole V. Bell in *NPR.org*. Danzy Senna's "ungentle satire" features as its narrator a struggling biracial novelist who

makes a play for financial stability by allying herself with a powerful Black TV producer who's been tasked with adding diversity programming to a diversity-challenged network. "All sorts of shenanigans ensue," as Jane, the protagonist, pitches a family comedy about "mulattos"—her preferred term. "But what stands out is the virtuosity of Senna's writing, which is endlessly quotable and intensely, *meaningfully* provocative." Senna's characters are "wonderful talkers," said Dwight Garner in *The New York Times*. "They're wits and improvisers who clock the absurdities of the human condition. You often feel you're listening in on a three-bottles-into-it dinner party," and "you'd want to be the last person to leave any room these people are in, lest the door hit you on the way out and you become a target for their poison-tipped darts."

Best books...chosen by Rivers Solomon

In Rivers Solomon's new novel, *Model Home*, three adult siblings revisit traumas, some supernatural, that they experienced while growing up in the sole Black family in a gated suburb. Below, the author of *Sorrowland* recommends other family horror.



A Mercy by Toni Morrison (2008). Brazenly intricate, Morrison's ninth novel interrogates the mythos of family and the bonds—literal, in the case of the enslaved narrator Florens—that hold families together. A mother's love, easily mistaken for a mother's hate or ambivalence, isn't always the mercy it was intended to be.

Mothers Don't by Katixa Agirre (2019). A journalist, pregnant with her first baby, discovers that an old childhood friend is on trial for the murder of her twin children. A novel about what mothers "don't" and "wouldn't" and "couldn't" ever do—but do.

The Fifth Child by Doris Lessing (1988). A haunting and propulsive short read, Lessing's novella tells the story of a conservative family in 1960s England whose perfect fantasy life is upended upon the birth of a fifth child. Questioning the limits of a mother's responsibility and devotion, *The Fifth Child* is an unsettling fable about the inherent horrors of the nuclear family.

Baby Teeth by Zoje Stage (2018). Seven-year-old Hanna loves her daddy to pieces but hates her mother. Suzette is a devoted and loving parent but becomes increasingly unable to cope with Hanna as the girl's violence against her escalates. It's a mother-daughter face-off that brings to mind Mervyn LeRoy's 1956 film, *The Bad Seed*.

Butter Honey Pig Bread by Francesca Ekwuyasi (2020). Born an *ogbanje*—an evil spirit that's meant to die in childhood to haunt its mother—Kambirinachi breaks the order of the spirit world by choosing to live. This is of great consequence to herself, as she longs for return to the spirit realm, and to her twin daughters, who suffer unspeakable tragedy as a result of her untetheredness.

The Need by Helen Phillips (2019). The relentless neediness of children doesn't go away even when there's an intruder in the house. Phillips' novel manages to be both a gripping psychological thriller about the isolation of motherhood and an accurate account of the sheer drudgery.

Author of the week

Robert Caro

Robert Caro still can't get over his first book's enduring success, said Alexandra Alter in *The New York Times*. When the onetime newspaper reporter was writing *The Power Broker*, a project that consumed seven



years, even he doubted its prospects. "I must have heard a hundred times, nobody's going to read a book about

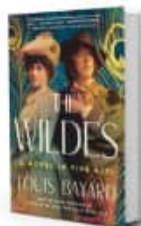
Robert Moses," he says. "And I really did believe what people said." But 50 years after its publication, Caro's 1,286-page Pulitzer Prize winner about a previously little-known New York City urban planner is arguably more popular than ever. Sales this year have topped 40,000. The first several episodes of a podcast about the book have scored 4 million downloads. And a museum exhibition about Caro's first masterwork opened last month, shortly before a *Times* critic called the book "the nearest thing we have to a consensus Great American Biography."

For Caro, visiting the New York Historical Society's exhibition feels bittersweet. "Writing *The Power Broker* was not a happy process," he says. His book advance ran out quickly and, to keep the project rolling, he and his wife sold their home and moved into a Bronx apartment. Caro also fought bitterly with his editor over everything from punctuation choices to major cuts, and it still pains him that some of his best writing was lost in the 350,000 words excised. Moses hated the book. "He said it was filled with hundreds of careless mistakes," Caro says. "I said, 'Name one.'" Today, with the book securely established as a consummate portrait of power's misuse, Caro recently agreed to the release of an eBook version, hoping to extend the book's reach. "You don't want just one generation to know those things," he says.

Also of interest...in the lives of writers

The Wildes

by Louis Bayard (Algonquin, \$29)



Oscar Wilde's wife is often seen as merely a sadly oblivious victim in the 1890s scandal that engulfed her husband, said Wendy Smith in *The Washington Post*. In his empathetic new novel, Louis Bayard "successfully establishes the Wildes' marriage as a love match between intellectual equals," then tracks Constance Wilde and her two sons as they grapple with the fallout of Oscar's homosexual affairs and obscenity trial. While hewing close to the known facts, Bayard "enriches them by providing vivid inner lives for these wounded souls."

A Wilder Shore

by Camille Peri (Viking, \$35)



"A dual biography can work only if both personalities depicted are equally fascinating," said Tobias Grey in *Air Mail*. That's "certainly the case" in Camille Peri's new biography of author Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife, Fanny. He was a sickly Scot; she was a gun-toting American who helped juice up such Stevenson classics as *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. "Peri convincingly argues that without Fanny, there would have been no Robert Louis Stevenson as we know him."

Christopher Isherwood Inside Out

by Katherine Bucknell (FSG, \$35)



Because Christopher Isherwood left behind "the dishiest and most vividly alive literary diaries of the 20th century," said Marc Weingarten in *The Boston Globe*, any biography of the British-American novelist may seem unnecessary. But Katherine Bucknell's effort "goes beyond the diaries, gathering up the many strands of the writer's personal and public lives to create a masterful portrait." A gay son of privilege who found freedom in prewar Berlin before settling in California, Isherwood remained forever "a brilliant, charismatic seeker of artistic truth."

Survival is a Promise

by Alexis Pauline Gumbs (FSG, \$35)



Alexis Pauline Gumbs' new biography of activist poet Audre Lorde "expands the limits of what a biography can be," said Danielle Amir Jackson in *The Atlantic*. Composed of 58 "short, lyrical, often essayistic chapters," which readers are invited to read in any order, the book "covers enormous ground while also moving in multiple directions at once" as it examines Lorde's poetry, prose, and cancer-shortened life. "The result is a prismatic work of art that invites more questions," as more biographies should.

Diddy: Will his arrest remake rap culture?

“Diddy’s indictment isn’t just an indictment of Sean Combs,” said **Wayne Washington** in *The Root*. “It’s an indictment of an era, an ethos.” When Combs, the 54-year-old music mogul formerly known as Puff Daddy, was arrested Sept. 16 on charges of sex trafficking and racketeering, not all of his supporters disappeared, and that’s understandable. Diddy’s business success had made him a hero to many, and “Black distrust of the criminal justice system is high.” Maybe, just maybe, though, “this can be a turning point.” For far too many years, hip-hop has eluded a MeToo reckoning, a moment when abusive men who hold power in the industry are held accountable and the women who make credible accusations against them are heard and believed. If this is that moment, maybe it’s also finally time that Black women in the business were themselves entrusted with power. “Would Black women remain ‘bitches’ and ‘hos’ in every other rap song if the president of the label was a Black woman?”

None of the current charges against Combs should come as a surprise, said **Cortney Wills** in *The Wrap*. “From his lyrics to his rap sheet,” the Harlem-born rapper, producer, and record executive “has not hidden the fact that he’s capable of violence.” Federal prosecutors now claim that for 16 years of his more than 30 in the business, Combs operated a criminal enterprise that used violence



Combs: Using power as a shield

and threats to force women to “fulfill his sexual desires.” He’s accused of hosting sex parties, which he called freak offs, in which drugged women were forced to engage in sex acts so draining that IV drips were supplied to aid in recovery. Combs denies all charges, but his public image had already been shattered in May when a 2016 video surfaced that showed the Bad Boy Records founder beating his then girlfriend, singer Cassie Ventura. Ventura, followed by several women and one male producer, have sued him over such abuse. Until now, a “culture of silence” has protected Combs, in part because people feared him, in part because “hip-hop has always applauded those who don’t take no for an answer.”

Reform is obviously needed, said **Craig Jenkins** in *NYMag.com*. But as Diddy’s business partners have scrambled to sever their ties to him, the industry seems “most interested in damage control.” If so, fans of the genre could be its best hope. Clearly, “we cannot continue on as before,” trading jokes online when we learn about alleged sex crimes and forgiving the abusers when we decide the music that they’ve made is too good to give up. As listeners and consumers, “we can’t let wealthy men treat everyone in the vicinity like chattel.” In the end, “there is no hit single worth degrading another human being. Hip-hop is 50 and old enough to know it.”

Exhibit of the week

Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist and All that It Implies

Brooklyn Museum, through Jan. 19

The U.S. government declared Elizabeth Catlett an “undesirable alien” in 1962, but “this hardly chilled her drive,” said **Siddhartha Mitter** in *The New York Times*. Catlett was, in her own words, “a Black revolutionary artist,” a leftist who’d been put under federal surveillance years earlier, and she wasn’t going to change her ideological beliefs or her work methods after settling in Mexico City almost 20 years earlier. Born in Washington, D.C., in 1915, Catlett had taught and made art in New Orleans and Harlem until 1946, when she traveled to Mexico to study printmaking, eventually joining an artists’ cooperative and “espousing its collective ethos and engagement with social issues.” Living in Mexico, where she was free of racial discrimination, proved transformational for Catlett: The “majestic” art she produced there includes powerful linocut portraits of Black farm workers and dazzling later sculpture. The “exhilarating” retrospective of her work now showing in Brooklyn “places her radical politics front and center,” where it belongs.

Beginning her career at a time when she



Catlett’s ‘Sharecropper’: Almost saintly

routinely encountered “an avalanche of racist, misogynistic images,” said **Alex Greenberger** in *ArtNews*, Catlett responded by producing “pictures of strength, endurance, and proud femininity.” The Howard University graduate “took styles associated with European modernism, then applied them to Black women”—and later to the struggles of Indigenous Mexicans. In the exhibition’s first gallery, visitors encounter Catlett’s “legendary” 1946–47 print series, “The Black Woman,” in which she explored the Black female experience, “showing how

the past continued to wear on women like her in the present.” *Sharecropper*, a 1952 linocut that’s “arguably Catlett’s most famous piece,” depicts a Black female field worker, and in its simplicity and close-cropped composition, “recalls religious icons of the medieval era.” By the late 1960s, Catlett was focused on sculpture inspired by the Black Power movement, such as 1971’s *Political Prisoner*. A tribute to Angela Davis, the Black activist who had been arrested on murder charges in 1970 only to be acquitted two years later, the life-size cedar female figure has handcuffs on its wrists but comes across as “defiant and largely unfazed.”

“The exhibition climaxes in its penultimate gallery,” where each array of powerful sculptures is “an example of her sure sense of line and beauty,” said **Judith H. Dobrzynski** in *The Wall Street Journal*. *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* (1968), a “dynamic, abstracted woman” with arm raised and fist clenched, “most clearly defines Catlett’s Black Power spirit.” Nearby, though, 2008’s *Torso* is “pure, alluring marble abstraction,” while *Stargazer* (1997) is an elegant full-length supine figure lost in contemplation of an invisible night sky. Clearly, Catlett “almost always had social activism on her mind.” Fortunately, “her art frequently rose above that. Rather than didactic, it feels poignant.”

Megalopolis

Directed by
Francis Ford Coppola

(R)



A visionary artist seeks to shake up a debauched status quo.

“Alternately dazzling and confounding,” Francis Ford Coppola’s *Megalopolis* is “one of the most unhinged things ever projected on a screen,” said Sam Adams in *Slate*. Set in a dystopian city called New Rome, it pits the utopian dreams of a Shakespeare-quoting architect named Cesar against the inertia of entrenched power brokers. It also grants Cesar the capacity to stop time and compels him to fall in love with the daughter of the city’s corrupt mayor. A quick summary, however, “doesn’t begin to convey the chaotic experience of watching *Megalopolis*,” which was mocked when it debuted at Cannes this spring but plays as “inspired lunacy”—a self-financed big swing from a legendary director that’s “a heck of a lot more interesting” than a conventional \$120 million production. The



Driver in love, and on top of the world

movie’s tone, said Jason Gorber in *A.V. Club*, fluctuates between “pompous grandiosity” and “pure camp,” as if each actor were reading from a different version of the script. With Adam Driver as Cesar and Giancarlo Esposito, Aubrey Plaza, Shia LaBeouf, Jon Voight, and Dustin Hoffman in supporting roles, “you have some of the finest actors of multiple generations gathering for something like

drunken community theater.” As for what it all means, “Coppola’s central preoccupation is that humans have the potential to build peaceful, beautiful societies, but generally fail to measure up to their own ideals,” said Stephanie Zacharek in *Time*. “You might want to laugh at *Megalopolis*. But I’ll take a messy, imaginative sprawl over a waxen, tasteful enterprise any day.”

The Substance

Directed by
Coralie Fargeat

(R)



An aging star pays dearly for recapturing her youth.

The Substance is more than the first chance in 15 years to see Demi Moore in a major film role, said Mick LaSalle in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “It’s a movie that’s so extreme that it makes you wonder—in the best way—if the filmmaker is crazy.” Moore plays Elisabeth Sparkle, an actress and fitness guru whose career appears to be over when she begins taking an untested drug that splits her into two people: her current self and a 25-year-old version, played by Margaret Qualley, who quickly becomes a TV sensation. As Elisabeth’s two selves wrestle for dominance while trading places each week, director Coralie Fargeat ensures that her “laugh-inducing yet shocking” body-horror fable gets “more wonderfully appalling” as it proceeds. “For an actor who has never shown much of a sense of humor about herself, Moore, 61, is remarkably in



Moore through the looking glass

on the joke,” said Ty Burr in *The Washington Post*. “Fearlessly and hilariously biting the hand of the entertainment industry that made her,” the 1990s superstar displays “total commitment to Elisabeth’s toxic insecurity, a need to be *seen*, and seen as forever young.” But while Fargeat’s Cannes award winner aims to be a scathing satire, “there’s very little substance to be found,” said Odie Henderson in *The Boston*

Globe. While Moore is “very good,” her bimbo of a younger self is “one-note as a silent movie villain,” and *The Substance* proves “only truly interesting when it’s filling the screen with images designed to make you retch and squirm.” The best part of the movie—its last 20 minutes or so—is “wall-to-wall, nonstop blood and gore,” mostly done with practical effects. “The delightful yuck factor made me forgive the film’s numerous problems.”

Lee

Directed by Ellen Kuras

(R)



A pioneering photographer heads to war.

“*Lee* is not the most formally daring or original biopic. It is, however, undeniably impactful,” said Wendy Ide in *The Guardian*. Kate Winslet plays Lee Miller, the 1920s fashion model who became a daring World War II photographer, and although the star is “a touch too old for the role,” her performance “captures the brawling, tough-broad aspects of Miller’s personality, as well as her considerable magnetism.” As a result, the film succeeds in delivering “a woman’s-eye view of a photographer who cast a woman’s eye over the war and its aftermath.” But while *Lee* is “the type of movie that Academy voters love,” said Nick Schager in *The Daily Beast*, it’s “a by-the-books affair in almost



Winslet’s Miller: Eyewitness to atrocity

every respect,” a blandly handsome production that saps the life and individuality out of side characters played by Marion Cotillard, Alexander Skarsgard, and Andrea Riseborough. The story “darkens considerably” once its heroine forces her way into Germany, said Natalia Winkelman in *IndieWire*. As Lee teams with a fellow photographer who shares her commitment to capturing history,

Winslet and her co-star Andy Samberg “build a genuine rapport.” Yet “clunky narration detracts from the power of these scenes,” robbing the movie of the ferocity its protagonist and its story beg for. All in all, *Lee* disappoints. “Though it is not an unpleasant experience, it is a limp one.”

Streaming tips

Focus on fashion

In Vogue: The 90s

The 1990s, in giving birth to the supermodel, grunge, hip-hop, and rising globalization, transformed fashion. This new six-part series revisits the decade through the eyes of Anna Wintour and other *Vogue* editors, along with A-listers such as Claudia Schiffer and Mary J. Blige. *Hulu*

La Maison

Looking for a show with beautiful Parisian backdrops and clothes, but more real drama than *Emily in Paris*? Cue up this new French series about a legendary, family-run fashion house in the throes of a power struggle. *Apple TV+*

Happy Clothes

Speaking of *Emily in Paris*: Those incredible, clashy outfits that a real-life Emily couldn't possibly afford? They're the work of Patricia Field. The legendary costume designer is a joy to follow in this celebrity-filled documentary charting Field's 50-year career. *\$9 on demand*

Invisible Beauty

Perhaps no one has done more for models of color than Bethann Hardison. A fashion icon who began her modeling career in the 1960s, she is a force throughout this documentary, which highlights her tireless activism and influence on models Naomi Campbell, Iman, and others. *Hulu*

The Tailor of Sin City

Sartorial savvy meets true-crime thrills in this docuseries about the life of A.J. Pratt, a gifted tailor employed by the Kansas City mob to dress Las Vegas' elite. Unsatisfied with a fashion empire, he branched into cocaine dealing, with fateful results. *AMC+*

High and Low: John Galliano

John Galliano, *enfant terrible* of Dior, lost it all in 2011 when a video of him spouting anti-semitic hatred went viral. What prompted the tirade? A deep dive into Galliano's career and psyche argues addiction. To forgive or not to forgive? You be the judge. *Mubi*

The Week's guide to what's worth watching**2024 Vice Presidential Debate**

It may be the undercard, but the showdown between vice presidential candidates Tim Walz and JD Vance promises to be a bout for the ages. Expect both Walz, Minnesota governor and avatar of Midwestern dad energy, and Vance, Ohio's junior senator and leading disparager of cat ladies, to take shots at each other's Middle American bona fides as they make their cases for their respective running mates. *Tuesday, Oct. 1, at 9 p.m., CBS and other major networks*

Chef's Table: Noodles

"Life is a combination of magic and pasta," the legendary Italian director Federico Fellini once said. The four chefs in this hunger-inducing edition of *Chef's Table* are masters of that very alchemy. You'll want to toss all your boxes of Barilla after witnessing the self-taught techniques of Italy's Peppe Guida, the tradition-bound artistry of China's Guirong Wei and Cambodia's Nite Yun, and the everything-from-scratch approach of Los Angeles-based Evan Funke. *Wednesday, Oct. 2, Netflix*

The Last Days of the Space Age

It's Perth, Australia, in 1979, and Skylab is falling. In this richly detailed period drama series, denizens of the Western Australian city anxiously look up to see pieces of the NASA space station falling from the sky. Other events, including a major power strike, hint at turbulent, changing times, but it's the small dramas of three diverse families that drive the story. Radha Mitchell, Jesse Spencer (*House*), Deborah Mailman, and Linh-Dan Pham co-star. *Wednesday, Oct. 2, Hulu*

Hold Your Breath

How better to kick off the Halloween season than with a low-key comeback from horror queen Sarah Paulson? Returning to the genre for the first time in three years, Paulson is the main reason to watch this scary but scattered tale, set on the Oklahoma prairie in the middle of the Dust Bowl era. Paulson plays a woman struggling with her mental health while protecting two daughters amid severe dust storms—and rumors of a dangerous drifter. *The Bear's Ebon*



Super friends unite—to save a trash movie.



Woodard confronts the undead in 'Salem's Lot.'

Moss-Bachrach co-stars. *Thursday, Oct. 3, Hulu*

Salem's Lot

Why not make it a horror double feature? After *Hold Your Breath*, get set to stream a new adaptation of an old Stephen King story, from the folks behind *The Conjuring* and *It*. Lewis Pullman stars as Ben Mears, a writer who returns to his Maine hometown in search of inspiration, only to discover that the humble burg has a vexing vampire problem. With Alfre Woodard, Makenzie Leigh, and Bill Camp. *Thursday, Oct. 3, Max*

Other highlights**Joan**

Game of Thrones' Sophie Turner stars in a six-part crime drama as Joan Hannington, a housewife who turned jewel thief in 1980s London. *Wednesday, Oct. 2, at 9 p.m., The CW*

Nova: Solar System

A six-part series offers a journey across the solar system, revealing the stunning landscapes and fascinating activity—including monster electrical storms, liquid-methane monsoons, and volcanic eruptions—in our celestial backyard. *Wednesday, Oct. 2, at 9 p.m., PBS; check local listings*

House of Spoils

Yes, chef? Ariana DeBose stars in an original frightfest feature as a chef who launches a high-end farm-to-table restaurant at a remote location that may have once been home to a witch. *Thursday, Oct. 3, Prime*

Show of the week**The Franchise**

There's nothing heroic about making a bad superhero movie. That's made hilariously clear in this new series—from *Succession* writer Jon Brown, *Veep* creator Armando Iannucci, and director Sam Mendes—about a flailing team's struggle to film a Marvel-like action flick about Tecto, a superhero who can conjure earthquakes. The crew melts down as studio heads begin ordering panicky changes and greenlight the filming of another version of the movie elsewhere. Come for the sharp-tongued dialogue; stay for inspired performances from a great cast that includes Himesh Patel, Aya Cash, and Daniel Brühl. *Sunday, Oct. 6, at 10 p.m., HBO/Max*

Critics' choice: Upscale Indian restaurants that don't pander

Bungalow New York City

"Indian cuisine has been many things in American culture," from "monotonous takeout order" to "exoticized curiosity," said Priya Krishna in *The New York Times*. At Vikas Khanna's new restaurant, "it gets to be itself." As the longtime former host of *MasterChef India*, Khanna is a bona fide celebrity. But the stately dining room of Bungalow isn't packed nightly merely because of his fame and charm. "His cooking is wildly interesting" and his menu "a lesson in regional Indian food and the creative possibilities contained within it." There are surprises to be enjoyed here even for the mostly South Asian crowds, which reliably include influencers in dangling *jhumkas* and aunties nodding approvingly at each bite. In a riff on Indian bakery cream rolls, Khanna fills puff pastry cones with "earthy sweet" shrimp *balchao*. He has also created a yogurt kebab by coating strained yogurt in *kataifi* shreds and dropping the morsels in a deep fryer. Meanwhile, his lamb chops, dusted with mango powder, are "pure primal satisfaction." Clearly, Indian restaurants "no longer need to cater to a white audience to find broad success." 24 1st Ave.

Kiran's Houston

Nearly two decades after it opened its doors, Kiran's is "as exciting as it's ever been," said Alison Cook in the *Houston*



Bungalow: Welcoming families and celebs alike

Chronicle. At a previous restaurant, chef-owner Kiran Verma had "served notice that Indian cuisine could easily move into the world of fine dining." And "she keeps reinventing herself, and her restaurant," becoming a James Beard finalist as she relocated Kiran's once, doubled its size, and invented a style of pizza called naanzas. "My old Kiran's favorite," the paneer-based *malai kofta* dumplings in a subtly spiced cashew gravy, are "as good as ever," and the word "magnificent" sprang to my lips as I enjoyed the lump crab with mustard seed, fresh coconut, and avocado slices. The naanza, particularly the modified Margherita with burrata and cumin, "knocked me out," and the wonders kept coming, including a "soulful" roasted duck dish with Luxardo cherry jus. By the time

my chai pot arrived at the end, I was in "a fog of pleasure." 2925 Richmond Ave.

Tamasha Raleigh, N.C.

"Tamasha has caught a sparkle of the national culinary spotlight," said Drew Jackson in the *Raleigh News & Observer*. With silver pinwheels hanging from its ceiling and a series of booths that combine green velvet and metal arches that evoke bird cages, Tina Vora and Mike Kathrani's labor of love recently made Open Table's 50 Most Beautiful Restaurants list. Equally enchanting, though, is chef Bhavin Chhatwani's cooking. A veteran of Michelin-starred Taj Campton Place in San Francisco, Chhatwani knows his way around classics such as butter chicken. But he's at his best using Indian spices and flavors to "seek out something new." He roasts lion's mane mushrooms in the tandoor for his mushroom risotto and riffs on "Chicken 65," a popular South Indian appetizer, by subbing in fried oysters. "The dips, sides, and small plates shine just as much as the main courses," said Eric Ginsburg in *Eater*. Still, the menu "brims with compelling choices," from the *dum ki nalli gosht* (lamb shank slow-roasted for 10 hours) to the dessert menu's *thandai* lemongrass gelato. Chhatwani could have chosen any city as his new home; Raleigh is lucky to have him. 4200 Six Forks Road

Recipe of the week

The next time you roast sweet potatoes, give this variation a try, said Kevin Clark in *Milk Street* magazine. Using unrefined coconut oil adds a tropical touch, while a squeeze of lime—added just as the potatoes emerge from the oven—supplies "a major flavor boost." The colorful side, served warm or at room temperature, pairs well with fish or chicken or can be paired with rice and beans for a vegetarian meal. Use cilantro leaves or chopped peanuts as a garnish.

Roasted sweet potatoes with scallions and lime

2 lbs orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into ¾- to 1-inch chunks • ¼ cup coconut oil, preferably unrefined, melted • kosher salt and ground black pepper • 2 tsp grated lime zest, plus 3 tbsp lime juice • 4 scallions, thinly sliced on the diagonal, greens and whites reserved separately • ⅛ to ¼ tsp cayenne pepper

• Preheat oven to 425 with a rack in the middle position. In a large bowl, toss sweet potatoes with coconut oil, ¼ tsp salt, and ½ tsp black pepper. Distribute potatoes in an even layer on a rimmed baking sheet; reserve the bowl. Roast potatoes, without stirring, until they are lightly browned at the edges and a skewer inserted into the largest pieces meets no resistance, 18 to 20 minutes.



• Meanwhile, in reserved bowl, stir together lime zest and juice, scallion whites, cayenne, and ¼ tsp salt. When potatoes are done, immediately transfer to the bowl, using a wide metal spatula. Toss gently, then let stand for about 15 minutes, gently tossing once or twice.

• Taste and season with salt and black pepper. Transfer to a serving dish and sprinkle with scallion greens. Serves 4 to 6.

Wine: Finger Lakes finds

New York's Finger Lakes region is known for top-flight rieslings, but riesling "isn't the region's only success story," said Emily Saladino in *Imbibe*. The area's small independent winemakers also cultivate several "lesser-heralded" grapes that fare well in cool climates and glacial soils. The results are often outstanding.

Dr. Konstantin Frank Rkatsiteli (\$19).

Rkatsiteli, a 4,000-year-old Georgian white grape, thrives in the Finger Lakes. This "easy-drinking" example offers "lively acidity and bright tropical-fruit aromas and flavors."

Standing Stone 'Teinturier' Brut Rosé (\$36).

A different Georgian grape, saperavi, "gives this bone-dry sparkler its tart red-fruit flavors and rosy hue."

2020 McGregor Saperavi Reserve (\$65). This dry "dinner party-worthy" red has a "textured palate with integrated tannins" and is "rich with red plum, strawberry, and tobacco flavors."



The 2025 Nissan Kicks: What the critics say

Edmunds

The new Nissan Kicks “resets expectations.” An affordable, fuel-efficient commuter car, Nissan’s smallest and least expensive SUV “failed to impress its first time around.” But six years after its debut, the subcompact crossover has been redesigned and is “hugely improved.” Its engine is still underwhelming, supplying “just enough zip to get you from point A to point B.” But the Kicks now has a bolder exterior look and its more spacious interior “feels contemporary and stylish.”

Car and Driver

The new power train, which pairs a larger four-cylinder engine to a new continuously variable

transmission, “feels much more responsive than its predecessor.” With a mere 141 hp on tap, “you’ll have to plan passes carefully,” but “the handling instills much more confidence than the engine,” and all-wheel drive is now available for the first time. That \$1,500 option trims just 1 mpg off the Kicks’ estimated 35 mpg highway fuel economy.

Motor Trend

The rear seats remain a tight fit for two grown adults despite the Kicks having grown 1.6 inches wider, nearly 3 inches longer, and almost an inch taller. Nissan’s front seats are so comfortable, though, that the shotgun-seat passenger might want to doze off. While other subcompacts still



A smart subcompact, from \$21,830

outrank this entry-level SUV in one comparison point or another, “far fewer match the total package the 2025 Kicks offers at its price point.”

The best of...statement socks for women



Comme Si The Agnelli Sock

Exposed socks used to be uncool; today, visible socks qualify as “a high-fashion statement.” To join the trend, pair leather loafers with these luxe Italian socks made of Egyptian cotton. “Bolder types might opt for a shot of scarlet.”

\$30, [commesi.com](https://www.commesi.com)
Source: Wall Street Journal



Bombas Vintage Stripes Half Calf Socks

For a sportier look, do what L.A. celebs have been doing and rock some retro crew socks with your workout leggings. Bombas’ have cushioned footbeds and the stripes come in seven colors.

\$14, [bombas.com](https://www.bombas.com)
Source: Who What Wear



Sock Candy Ditsy Floral Ankle Sock

These funky socks would bring “pizzazz” to a pair of mules, closed-toe sandals, or even strappy heels. The vibrant flowers are embroidered on sheer nylon, “creating the illusion that they’re floating against the skin.”

\$18, [sockcandy.com](https://www.sockcandy.com)
Source: Wirecutter



Wilfred Sugarplum Crew Sock

Ruffled trim and an airy pointelle stitch give these crew socks “a coquettish twist.” Sold in packs of three and pictured here in heather gray, they have a seamless toe and structured heels. Available in ankle and crew lengths.

\$25, [aritzia.com](https://www.aritzia.com)
Source: Elle



Brother Vellies Cloud Sock

“If you want to achieve the perfect ‘Princess Diana in biker shorts’ look, these chunky socks are for you.” They’re most eye-catching when bunched up, and the cotton weaves “cloudlike” feel makes them ready for sweater weather.

\$35, [brothervellies.com](https://www.brothervellies.com)
Source: NYMag.com

Tip of the week...

How to make a home smell great

■ **Use the stovetop.** To perfume your home with “the clean, fresh scent of citrus and florals,” place sliced lemons, oranges, and a mix of your favorite herbs in a pot of water and bring to a steady simmer. Mint, lavender, and rosemary are good additions. To create a cozy fall atmosphere, combine sliced apples with cinnamon, star anise, and cloves.

■ **Place bouquets.** While it’d be nice to have roses in every room, there are less expensive ways to introduce pleasant aromas. “Hang eucalyptus in your shower (or anywhere, really) for an instant mood booster, add a vase of lavender to your office, and make your own dried potpourri from foraged petals.”

■ **Make a spray.** You can mix up a pet-safe odor eliminator by stirring together 1 tbsp of baking soda and 30 drops of orange essential oil. Put this mixture in a spray bottle, add 2 cups water, and shake. Spray it into the air or onto any fabric that smells unpleasant.

Source: Martha Stewart

And for those who have everything...

“Look out, vinyl,” because “cassettes are making a comeback.” More than 430,000 cassettes were sold in the U.S. last year, and now that pop stars like Taylor Swift and Ariana Grande are releasing music on plastic cartridges, audio companies have begun to modernize the humble tape deck.

We Are Rewind’s Portable Cassette Player is the first with Bluetooth connectivity. “A large metal box with a decent amount of heft,” it was inspired by the original Sony Walkman. This device’s rechargeable battery will last longer than 1979’s double-A’s, though. It also comes with a pencil—perhaps to help Gen Zers learn “the time-honored pencil-winding fix.”

\$159, [wearerewind.com](https://www.wearerewind.com)
Source: CNET



Tech support...

How to provide remote tech help

■ **Share screens.** If a friend or family member needs tech aid, try a video call first, because visuals help you be helpful. You can also use screen sharing, a feature built-in on FaceTime, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. Once you can see the source of a problem, “it’ll be *much* easier to give directions.”

■ **Make a screen recording.** Alternatively, record your own device’s screen as you demonstrate what to do. Screen recording is one of the utilities that pop up when you swipe down on a smartphone screen. To capture a Mac’s display, try a free app called QuickRecorder. Running Windows? Pull up the Game Bar, either by searching for it or by pressing Windows + G.

■ **Gain remote access.** “Sometimes, the easiest fix is one you do yourself.” If your loved one installs a remote access app like TeamViewer, then shares with you a temporary passcode, “you’ll have access to their entire computer, from your own computer, smartphone, or tablet.”

Source: Lifehacker

Allison was bawling, she turned to me and said, 'Mom, I got a D.' It was the first time she called me 'Mom.'

Lisa, adopted 16-year-old Allison



LEARN ABOUT ADOPTING A TEEN
YOU CAN'T IMAGINE THE REWARD

ADOPTUSKIDS.ORG

This week: Homes in the Colonial style



1 ◀ Brookline, Mass. Part of the historic Longwood Mall neighborhood, this Federal-style Colonial dates to 1896. The three-story, six-bedroom redbrick house features wood floors, high ceilings, dentil crown molding, floor-to-ceiling windows, four

fireplaces, a skylit grand staircase, a marble-clad galley kitchen, a sunroom, and balconies with tree-top views. Outside are decks and a courtyard patio, the train and a park are walking distance, and Fenway Park is a five-minute drive. \$4,180,000. Deborah Gordon, Coldwell Banker Realty-Brookline, (617) 974-0404

2 ▶ New Orleans This 1857 Southern Colonial Revival stands on a residential street near iconic St. Charles Ave. The three-story, six-bedroom house has a center hall with Venetian plaster walls; formal rooms with original ceiling medallions, crown molding, built-ins, and fireplaces; a chef's kitchen; a library; and a sunroom. The 0.41-acre landscaped lot includes a covered patio, lawns, garden beds, mature trees, pool, cabana, and garage; Danneel Park is across the street. \$3,950,000. Mat Berenson, Latter & Blum/Compass, (504) 232-1352



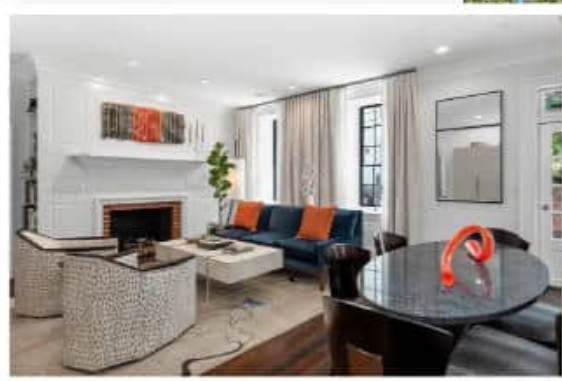
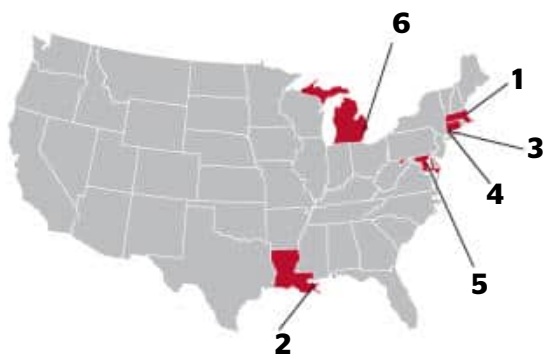
3 ◀ Ridgefield, Conn. Spring View Farm is a restored, renovated 1820 Colonial farmhouse. The four-bedroom home features simple historic rooms with wide-plank wood floors, arched and paned windows,

and exposed beams; the cleverly updated eat-in kitchen has beadboard walls, a fireplace, and butcher-block counters. The 3.09-acre rural property includes lawns, trees, a pond, and a three-story, four-stall horse barn with office and entertainment spaces; bridle trails are nearby and shopping is 10 minutes' drive. \$1,999,999. Libby Mattson, Houlihan Lawrence/Luxury Portfolio International, (203) 820-5524



4 **New Canaan, Conn.** This 1790 Colonial Classical Revival estate has been completely renovated. The five-bedroom main house has four fireplaces and oversized sunny windows;

an eat-in modern kitchen; and formal rooms with ebony floors, wainscoting, and coffered ceilings, including a living room with a deep bay window seat. The 3.68-acre landscaped property has lawns, gardens, bluestone terraces, heated in-ground pool and spa, pool house, one-bedroom guest cottage, barn, firepit, and maple and sycamore trees that are hundreds of years old. \$6,495,000. John Dunn, Compass New Canaan, (203) 388-5353



5 **Annapolis, Md.** Two connected 1776 Georgian buildings form this preserved, updated home near the City Dock. The five-bedroom house features a muraled entry; a three-floor elevator; a gourmet kitchen with island, fireplace, and atrium banquette bump-out; a primary suite with fireplace; a deck with city views; and a downstairs gym with hickory floors and a full bathroom. A brick patio and Savannah-style garden wrap the home's back and side, and the waterfront is strolling distance. \$3,250,000. Alex Tower Sears, TTR Sotheby's International Realty, (443) 254-5661

Steal of the week



6 **Royal Oak, Mich.** This asymmetrical Colonial in a leafy Detroit suburb was built in 1917. The four-bedroom house has hardwood floors; a living room with brick-surround fireplace; a windowed study with bookshelves; a dining room with corner china cabinet; a kitchen with granite counters, walk-in pantry, and breakfast nook; a sunroom; and a finished basement. The property, a short drive from downtown and the Detroit Zoo, has a fenced backyard, mature trees, and a detached garage. \$539,000. Dan Gutfreund, Signature Sotheby's International Realty, (248) 978-5774

The news at a glance

The bottom line

■ The Federal Reserve's two-and-a-half-year era of high interest rates gave U.S. banks an extra \$1.1 trillion in revenue. While charging borrowers 5.5 percent, the average U.S. bank was paying its depositors interest at the annual rate of just 2.2 percent at the end of the second quarter.

Financial Times

■ The Department of Justice sued Visa, alleging the payments company abused its power in the debit card market, controlling 60 percent of \$4 trillion in transactions and collecting \$7 billion in fees each year.

Bloomberg



■ Supercharged by Lionel Messi's roughly 625 million followers, Inter Miami is

now the most popular American sports team on social media, according to Blinkfire Analytics. Its revenue has surged fourfold to \$200 million since Messi arrived in 2023. Major League Soccer says its teams have added \$3.2 billion in value since Messi's transfer from Europe.

Bloomberg

■ The Conference Board, a business research group, said that its consumer confidence index fell to 98.7 in September, from 105.6 in August. It was the biggest month-to-month decline since August 2021.

Associated Press

■ The chief equity strategist for Goldman Sachs expects the S&P 500 to cross 6,000 a year from now. The forecast implies a roughly 5 percent gain from the record close reached earlier this week of about 5,719 for the index, which is up around 20 percent this year.

Fortune

■ Mark Zuckerberg was spotted wearing a \$95,000 De Bethune DB25 Starry Varius wristwatch while speaking at a live taping of the *Acquired* podcast in San Francisco. A model that includes a dial made from a meteorite can cost about \$260,000.

Business Insider

Chips: Qualcomm seeks to buy troubled Intel

Intel's faltering turnaround plan has made it a takeover target, said Liana Baker in *Bloomberg*. The U.S. chip-making giant was approached last week with a "friendly takeover" offer by chip rival Qualcomm, raising "the prospect of one of the biggest-ever M&A deals, as well as other bidders entering the fray." It's humbling for the 56-year-old company, once the crown jewel of Silicon Valley. In 2021, CEO Pat Gelsinger was brought in to right the ship, but he "is open to considering the merits of different transactions." Apollo Global Management, the asset manager, has also joined the fray, saying it would be willing to invest as much as \$5 billion



Intel's white knight?

in Intel "as an alternative" to a Qualcomm takeover.

Buying Intel on the cheap sounds good in theory, said Dan Gallagher in *The Wall Street Journal*. But "Intel is essentially two businesses now: a semiconductor design shop and a chip-manufacturing operation." Neither is doing well. The foundry operation "lost \$5.3 billion in the first six

months of this year." On the design side, Intel "is still the dominant vendor in CPU chips for PCs and servers, but it has lost valuable market share in both to AMD." Any potential buyer would need "to solve multiple existential threats while also getting a deal through regulators."

Environment: California sues Exxon over plastics claim

California accused ExxonMobil of lying to the public about the recyclability of plastic, said Shira Stein and Bob Egelko in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In a first-of-its-kind lawsuit filed this week, California's attorney general said that Exxon has been "falsely telling the public for decades that plastic waste is recycled before it's dumped into landfills." In reality, environmental groups say, "less than 5 percent of all plastic in the United States is actually recycled" and they accuse Exxon of producing "more than 6.6 million tons of plastic waste a year."

Trade war: U.S. seeks to ban Chinese car tech

The Biden administration wants Chinese technology off American roads, said David Shepardson in Reuters. The Commerce Department proposed a ban this week on Chinese auto electronics and software, casting "the threat of Chinese vehicles and technology" as a national security issue. The administration has already imposed 100 percent tariffs on Chinese EVs imported to the U.S., but the "prohibition would apply even to cars built by Chinese firms outside China." The proposal also bans Chinese self-driving software, "a trade barrier that could protect Tesla and other automakers seeking to develop robotaxis."

Litigation: J&J again seeks bankruptcy approval

A Johnson & Johnson subsidiary filed last week for bankruptcy for a third time to end litigation over its cancer-causing baby powder, said Nathan Bomey in *Axios*. J&J says it has overwhelming support from claimants on a settlement offer of \$8.9 billion over 25 years. But its complicated efforts to dump the liabilities onto a new subsidiary and "then ditch them in bankruptcy" has twice been rejected in court. The maneuver, nicknamed the "Texas two-step" because it relies on Texas' bankruptcy rules, has been criticized as a way for a large corporation to "use bankruptcy to its advantage."

Bad decisions: Caroline Ellison sentenced in FTX fraud

Caroline Ellison, Sam Bankman-Fried's onetime girlfriend, was sentenced to two years in prison this week for her role in the collapse of the FTX crypto exchange, said MacKenzie Sigalos in *CNBC.com*. Ellison ran Alameda Research, the hedge fund founded by Bankman-Fried that "received much of the \$8 billion in customer funds looted" from FTX. She later accepted a plea deal and became "the star witness in the prosecution." Ellison reportedly spent the time waiting for her sentencing writing a *Bridgerton*-style romance novel.

Last one out turns out the blue light

The last full-size Kmart in America is closing next month, said Chris Isidore in *CNN.com*. "Once one of the country's leading discount retailers," with more than 2,000 locations at its peak, Kmart's footprint has been whittled down to one remaining full-size location, in swanky Bridgehampton, N.Y. It also maintains "a small, convenience-store version of itself in Miami," as well as stores in Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands. But the big-box retailer with the iconic "blue-light special"—a 15-minute discount spree signaled by a flashing blue light atop a pole—is about to be gone for good in the continental United States. It's just about the last chapter in "the disastrous 2005 merger of Sears and Kmart" engineered by hedge-fund operator Eddie Lampert, who was most "focused on selling off real estate" held by the two companies. The merged chains came out of their 2018 bankruptcy with 231 Sears and 191 Kmart stores, but "today only a handful of Sears stores remain."

Boomers: ‘Generational gridlock’ in the office

“Paul McCartney and Al Pacino aren’t the only octogenarians with no intention of retiring,” said Aden Barton in *The Washington Post*. Today, nearly 2 million members of the Silent Generation—born 1928 through 1945—are still fully employed, in addition to 21 million Baby Boomers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. With older workers staying on longer, there are now five generations in the workforce, and the “career ladder has become crowded at the top.” Young workers say this has made it “harder to launch their careers and to get promoted.” The share of the labor force made up of workers older than 55



Memo to youth: Stop blaming older colleagues.

is now 23 percent, up from about 10 percent in 1990. Evidence of the harm in this “is the growing income gap between younger and older workers.” According to economists Nicola Bianchi and Matteo Paradisi, “neither income inequality nor changes in types of jobs is to blame.” The main culprit is “generational gridlock.”

It’s not surprising that young workers are fed up with some aging colleagues, said Peter Coy in *The New York Times*. But for those young workers to blame Boomers “for their own failure to advance” is misguided. The reasons young workers feel less engaged at work have much less to do with the presence of older colleagues than with the “work-from-home shift” and “the aftereffects of the pandemic.” On the other hand, the pay

gap “is real,” but mandatory retirement is a “draconian” solution. “Employers would be at a loss if older workers retired en masse, taking with them their accumulated knowledge.” Older workers aren’t sticking around just to annoy the young ones, said Rebecca Gordon in *The Nation*. Most of them “simply can’t afford to stop” working.

It’s amazing older workers can stay on at all given the casual ageism in our society, said Emma Beddington in *The Guardian*. I’m 49, and “I’ve just learned I’m in my ‘late career’ era,” according to the job site

Indeed.com. Just six years from now, I’ll be in the career bracket dubbed “Decline.” Oh, really? This is just further proof that “any ‘decline’ is more the product of prejudice than of some intrinsic enfeeblement.” Indeed’s graphic was swiftly deleted, but not before “raising the blood pressure of people who actually need to worry about our blood pressure.” I’m rooting for the octogenarians who “insist they have no plans to retire,” said Pilita Clark in the *Financial Times*. If you enjoy working, keep doing it. “Working keeps your brain active, allows you to stay in touch with interesting people, and stops you being dull.” And companies need you. “Any older worker who saw a chart describing a 55-year-old as being in decline would have stepped in and saved their bosses from the idiocy of publishing it.”

What the experts say

The puzzle of the missing men

The official unemployment numbers are missing a large chunk of nonworking men, said Juhohn Lee in *CNBC.com*. The unemployment rate for prime-age working men (ages 25 to 54) was 3.4 percent in August, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. “This number primarily includes those who are unemployed and looking for a job.” But it ignores about 10.5 percent of the men in that demographic who are “neither working nor looking for employment.” That number has crept up steadily over decades. In 1954, it was just 2.5 percent. Why “men have been steadily dropping out of the workforce” has been an economic mystery, but education appears to be “an important predictor.” Men who are not college educated “leave the workforce at higher rates than men who are,” and fewer men have been enrolling in college.

Ultra-high yields on pure baloney

Beware of investments promising “colossal yields,” said Jason Zweig in *The Wall Street Journal*. I found one recently called the Mega High-Yield Term Deposit, “which claimed to offer up to 15 percent guaranteed annual return for 10 years.” One salesman told me that the product buys “Obamacare policies” as a type of security and “acts a lot like a”

certificate of deposit and is “backed up by Lloyd’s of London.” But term deposits “aren’t even deposits.” They are “limited partnership units, which can’t be traded and are subject to early-withdrawal penalties of at least 10 percent.” I tried to trace these widely-advertised offerings, and finally got to Paul Regan, a Miami wealth adviser who was caught “stealing \$140,000 from an elderly customer with dementia” and was “barred from the securities industry for life in 2004.”

Estate plans for ‘solo agers’

“Solo agers” need different retirement solutions, said Diane Harris in *The New York Times*. About a third of people 50 and older “now live alone and don’t have children, are estranged from their children, or can’t depend on them or other family members for help.” At minimum, these solo agers “need a basic estate plan that includes advance directives laying out their wishes about medical treatment and end-of-life care,” as well as a “health care proxy and durable power of attorney” that can make medical and financial decisions on their behalf—especially in the event of a spouse dying. Solo agers often choose their siblings as decision-makers, “and that can be a mistake.” A better option is “a family member who is a generation younger than you.”

Charity of the week



Nearly 400,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, and as many as 50 to 70 percent of these cases could have been prevented. For breast cancer awareness month this October, the non-profit **National Breast Cancer Foundation (nationalbreastcancer.org)** is releasing free resources on its website to help prevent and detect the disease in its earliest stages. Founded in 1991, NBCF provides free services and guidance to women before, during, and after a breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. The organization has provided free mammograms and diagnostic services to more than 1 million women, and helps cover the costs of in-need patients’ groceries, transportation, child care, prescriptions, and more while they undergo treatment. NBCF engages donors and volunteers to pack and prepare HOPE Kits—packages of comfort items like fuzzy socks and tea that are delivered to patients.

Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from Charity Navigator, which rates not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their governance practices, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group’s highest rating.

The Fed: Will its rate cut boost Harris?

Democrats got what they'd hoped for with the Federal Reserve's "jumbo" rate cut last week, said **Alice Tecotzky** in *Business Insider*. By cutting the central bank's benchmark interest rate by a half percentage point, to between 4.75 and 5 percent, Fed chair Jerome Powell and his fellow policymakers signaled "the beginning of the end of the inflation fight." That removes a weight burdening Kamala Harris' campaign and lets her say that the administration's policies are addressing voters' top concern. And as lower interest rates diffuse through the economy, they will help businesses as well as consumers looking to buy homes, borrow money, or reduce credit-card debt. "People won't begin to feel the effects right away," however. The immediate impact will be felt in "the political environment" and "change the tone of the conversation" around the economy. Harris can use the rate cut "to tout her economic plan," though she will probably want to avoid the appearance that it was a partisan decision.

"Good luck with that," said **Amara Omeokwe** in *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Other than in 2008, amid the financial crisis, the Fed "hasn't pulled the trigger on rate cuts this close to a presidential election since 1960." The first rate cut in four years now comes at a time when the bank's autonomy "has become a live political issue," after Donald Trump said he wants a say in monetary policy decisions. Eleven of the 12 voting members of the Federal Open Market Committee approved the rate cut. The lone dissenter, Michelle Bowman, the Republican governor of the Kansas City Fed, was appointed by Trump and became the first Fed governor



Voters may give Harris credit for ebbing inflation.

"much higher than economic conditions called for." So far, layoffs have remained low, but there's evidence that "firms have applied the brakes to hiring." Look for the Fed to aim for a "neutral" rate of 3.25 percent to keep the economy at the right pace—but be warned that a return to near-zero rates "isn't in the cards."

Trump's advantage in surveys on the economy has already "dropped dramatically in recent weeks," said **Abha Bhattarai** in *The Washington Post*. Even a top GOP pollster says that "voters are beginning to give Harris the benefit of the doubt." To understand why, look to Wisconsin, said **Matthew A. Winkler** in *Bloomberg*. The post-pandemic recovery of Wisconsin's economy is "unprecedented in the 21st century." There is "record-low unemployment, a manufacturing rebound, and the transformation of the Badger State's No. 1 business, agriculture, into a juggernaut." There's no question that Wisconsinites are better off now than they were four years ago. We'll see whether more Americans start to feel that way, too.

to oppose a policy decision since 2005. She says the half percentage point cut could retrigger inflation.

Nonsense, said **Paul Krugman** in *The New York Times*. "The straight economic case for a rate cut was overwhelming." It would have been political if the Fed had decided *not* to cut rates. The bank is simply bringing things back to "normal," said **Greg Ip** in *The Wall Street Journal*. For the past two years, the rate target was 5.25 to 5.5 percent to combat inflation. That now looks

The Tariff Man's guide to taxes

Andrew Duehren
The New York Times

Donald Trump could fundamentally change the way Americans are taxed, said **Andrew Duehren**. The former president has publicly and privately floated a variety of tax ideas that, on their surface, seem like small gestures to working Americans. He has "called for ending taxes on Social Security benefits and fully restoring a costly deduction for state and local taxes," known as SALT, which Republicans pushed to cap in 2017. Two of his other proposals—no taxes on tips and no taxes on overtime—appear to be motivated by "the raw political appeal of promising tax cuts." And then there is Trump's pet vision of funding the government through tariffs. Taken together, all those

efforts align with a long-standing conservative dream: eliminating the income tax. That's not totally implausible. Other countries, like Canada, do rely heavily on so-called consumption taxes (essentially, national sales taxes on goods and services). Trump's "tariff on all imported goods" could act as a kind of consumption tax. But a tariff-led system would "explode the deficit, spur trade fights, and disproportionately burden lower-income Americans" with higher prices. "If you wanted to do a consumption tax," said one tax scholar, "you'd be hard pressed to find an economist who's not working for the Trump campaign who would say you should start with tariffs."

Tupperware's neatly packed lessons

Megan McArdle
The Washington Post

"Every time a former innovator becomes a bankrupt also-ran, people start asking where things went wrong," said **Megan McArdle**. But changing what you do when you're already an icon is no easy thing. Take Tupperware. Tupperware had a close-to-80-year run that started in 1946. In its early years, the brand represented progress, one of the many "big little inventions" that transformed the post-war years. "So neat! So sanitary! So cool!" Tupperware defined the American kitchen in an era of American prosperity. Until it didn't, because "time marches on." Once, it controlled the kitchen market so completely the name was used generically, like

Xerox. Eventually, however, the market changed. Tupperware parties no longer seemed cool. And so, "like many pioneering companies, Tupperware got trapped by the very model it pioneered." Sales crashed, and last week it finally went into bankruptcy. Tupperware's bankruptcy didn't make much of a stir, but it helps explain why great businesses of all kinds fail. Kodak "stayed frozen in film." Blockbuster stuck to its stores. It's easy to say that those companies should have transformed themselves before they went bust. But it's hard to adapt to life in the next century when it means changing the very strategies that made you successful in the last one.

The songwriter who penned hits for the Eagles

JD Souther
1945-2024

JD Souther helped shape the Southern California country-rock sound of the 1970s. Part of a group of singer-songwriters who lived, partied, and wrote together in the Hollywood Hills, the low-key Texan wrote or co-wrote songs recorded by his onetime girlfriend Linda Ronstadt (“Faithless Love”), Bonnie Raitt (“Run Like a Thief”), and James Taylor (“Her Town Too,” recorded as a duet with Souther). He was best known, though, for co-writing some of the biggest hits by the Eagles—to whom he was so closely tied he appeared on the back of their 1973 album *Desperado*—including “The Best of My Love,” “Victim of Love,” and “New Kid in Town.” Souther’s own recordings met with no such success, but he said he didn’t covet fame. “People would say to me, ‘Doesn’t it piss you off that the Eagles have these big hits off your songs?’” he said in 2019. “I would usually start saying, ‘Would you like to see the checks?’”



He briefly attended college, but left to perform with a band that relocated to Los Angeles. There he fell in with future Eagle Glenn Frey, said *The Telegraph* (U.K.). The pair haunted the Troubadour—a “dark and smoky” nightclub Souther called his “university”—and started the short-lived band Longbranch Pennywhistle. They “amassed a loyal following” and recorded a 1969 album before Frey moved on to form the Eagles.

Souther scored a No. 7 hit with “You’re Only Lonely” in 1979, said *Variety*. But after a 1984 album whiffed, he took a long hiatus, longing to “step off the hamster wheel.” In 1989, he launched an “unexpected career as an actor,” appearing in five episodes of the TV series *Thirtysomething*; small film roles and a recurring role as a veteran music producer on ABC’s *Nashville* followed. In 2008, he “finally returned to making records” with the jazzy *If the World Was You* and two more albums. He reflected with gratitude on his early career and the cauldron of creativity he’d found in Los Angeles. “The common denominator is that we were all hungry at the same time,” he said in 2011. “We tried to write songs that we felt would last a long time.”

John David Souther grew up “immersed in music,” in Amarillo, Texas, said *The Washington Post*. His father was a former big-band singer who ran a music store, and while working there Souther learned the violin, clarinet, piano, and drums.

The hard bop sax player who crafted jazz standards

Benny Golson’s elegant compositions and technical skill made him a hero of hard bop, the driving blues and gospel-influenced jazz genre that emerged in the

Benny Golson
1929-2024

1950s. The saxophonist and founder of the band Jazztet released eight

solo albums between 1957 and 1959, composing beloved standards like “Along Came Betty,” “Whisper Not,” and “I Remember Clifford.” He was also one of the 57 musicians featured in Art Kane’s famed *A Great Day in Harlem* photo, which played a key role in the 2004 Steven Spielberg film *The Terminal*. “I had a love affair with melodies,” he said in 2007. “As far as I’m concerned, my music should always have meaningful melodic content, something you come away humming.”

Born in Philadelphia, Golson fell in love with the tenor saxophone at 14 and soon befriended another local player, John Coltrane. He started writing and arranging music at Howard University, where he’d sneak off campus to jazz clubs. As a player, he was a “flowery conversationalist,” said *WRTI*, “cultivating bebop lines with a refined polish.” In 1958, he joined Jazz Messengers, learning the group’s blues-inspired style before launching Jazztet the next year. In 1962, Golson put down the sax to focus on composing, working on melodies that could “outline a defined character or tell a captivating story.” He wrote for *M*A*S*H* and other TV shows and arranged music for singers like Dusty Springfield.

When he returned to playing 12 years later, he had lost some fluency but developed “a muted, almost purring tone that was instantly recognizable,” said *The Washington Post*. He became a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master in 1996—the highest honor for jazz musicians—and played for two more decades. “I don’t know everything there is to know,” he said in 2019. “When I teach master classes, sometimes the teacher learns from the kids.”

The war orphan who became a star ballerina

Michaela DePrince
1995-2024

Born with vitiligo, a skin condition that causes depigmentation, Michaela



Mabinty DePrince was labeled a “devil child” at her Sierra Leone orphanage, the last to be fed and the first to be beaten. When an issue of *Dance Magazine* blew into the orphanage yard, with a woman smiling *en pointe* on the cover, she imagined a better life as a ballerina. And after she was adopted by an American family at age 4, she studied and practiced to make her dream a reality. When she was just 15, she was one of six promising dancers profiled in the documentary *First Position* (2012), and she went on to study with the prestigious American Ballet Theater and become the youngest dancer ever to perform principal roles for the Dance Theater of Harlem. At the height of her career, she was dancing lead roles with the Dutch National Ballet and appearing in the film version of Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* (2016). “There’s not a lot of us,” she said in 2021 of Black ballerinas. “But my passion is spreading more poppies in a field of daffodils, to have more Black and brown dancers.”

was 3, her miner father was killed by rebels and her mother died of malnutrition. At the orphanage “she took to twirling around and standing on the tips of her toes,” said *The New York Times*, and the DePrinces, the New Jersey couple who adopted her and her best friend, promised to take her to ballet lessons once she learned English. She

“was quickly discovered to be talented.” With her athleticism and what one reviewer called her “spitfire quickness,” DePrince became an international star in Amsterdam, said the *Los Angeles Times*. There she took the lead in such ballets as *Swan Lake* and *Coppélia*, dancing with “undeniable grace, strength, and precision.”

She had to take a break in 2017 after rupturing her Achilles’ tendon, said *The Washington Post*. That gave her time “to seek therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder after years of recurring nightmares” about her wartime childhood. She joined the Boston Ballet in 2021 but left this year for undisclosed reasons, and her cause of death at age 29 has not been revealed. “Dance with your heart,” she once told young ballerinas. “Don’t let the negative aspects of ballet cause you to lose what made you want to dance in the first place.”

She was born Mabinty Bangura in the war-torn West African country of Sierra Leone. When she

Getty, AP

The challenger

GOP activists in battleground states are trying to purge tens of thousands of people from voting rolls, said Eli Saslow in The New York Times. Overburdened election workers are dealing with the mess.

HELEN STRAHL STOOD at the front of a conference room in Savannah, Ga., last month and looked out at her audience, the evolving face of election denialism in 2024. There were no armed militia groups in attendance, no would-be revolutionaries dressed in capes and horns. The crowd was mostly made up of retirees and professional women, including some who wore glasses and T-shirts that read: “Got data?”

They called themselves the Georgia Nerds, and their volunteer group had spent the past several months challenging voter rolls and expressing skepticism about the upcoming presidential election before either candidate received a single vote.

“Can everybody hear me in the back?” asked Strahl, 65. A few people shook their heads, so she tried again. “I’ll speak up. Can you hear me now?”

A longtime compliance officer, Strahl had found her political voice during the past few years by taking advantage of a new Georgia law that allows private citizens to file mass challenges against other people’s eligibility to vote. She has legally challenged more than 1,000 voters in Chatham County during the past 18 months, quietly reshaping the electorate in a crucial stretch of coastal Georgia and amplifying conspiracy theories about widespread voter fraud. She wrote to elections officials to question the eligibility of seasonal workers who moved temporarily out of state, homeless residents who didn’t have a proper address, and almost 700 students or former students who were registered to vote at Savannah State University, one of the country’s oldest historically Black colleges.

“I live in this county,” she later explained. “I’d like to know my vote is going to count and not be diluted. It’s in my interest to help maintain a clean and accurate voting roll.”

It has become a popular tactic during a campaign season that has sometimes turned into a race between pro-democracy groups that try to register a historic number of voters and election deniers who try to inhibit registration drives and remove tens of thousands of people from the rolls. More than 40 states now allow for some type of voter challenges, and former President Donald



Paperwork linked to Strahl’s challenges in Chatham County

Trump’s campaign has encouraged activists to focus on the voter rolls in a relatively small number of liberal counties that could swing the election.

In Pittsburgh, a Trump supporter has challenged more than 25,000 people based mostly on change-of-address data, creating confusion among voters. In Detroit, teams of “election security” volunteers go door-to-door to verify people’s addresses and then file challenges based on what they find. An election-monitoring organization called True the Vote, which promoted conspiracy theories after the 2020 election, has armed its volunteers with a web-based app that allows them to “identify ineligible records and report findings.” The group says it has resulted in the filing of more than 640,000 challenges across 1,322 counties.

But few activists have been as prolific as Strahl, who has won hundreds of challenges and left a trail of chaos in her wake: overwhelmed election officials who ran out of envelopes to respond to her challenges; confused voters who aren’t sure if they are eligible; enraged voting rights activists who allege voter suppression and intimidation, even as Strahl signs each of her emails with “respectfully” and thanks election officials at county board meetings for their work.

Now she spoke alongside other members of the Georgia Nerds inside the conference room in Savannah as part of a presentation titled “How Georgia Elections Are Manipulated.” The group had filed a brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in May to support a lawsuit against the Georgia secretary

of state, alleging that state election officials had manipulated registration dates and created “phantom, fake” voters on the rolls. “Everything is in place for the Georgia 2024 general election to be stolen,” the group wrote.

Strahl finished her presentation and thanked the crowd, which included a few people who were beginning to file challenges of their own. There were versions of Helen Strahl in at least a dozen other metropolitan Georgia counties: Earl Ferguson in Fulton County, Gail Lee in DeKalb, Merry Belle Hodges in Gwinnett, and on it went. Together, a group of about a dozen activists had filed more than 100,000 individual chal-

lenges in Georgia in the past few years, successfully removing thousands of names from the voter rolls in a state where President Joe Biden won the last election by fewer than 12,000 votes.

STRAHL ALPHABETIZED AND stapled her challenges and then delivered them to the office of Sabrina German, director of the Chatham County Board of Registrars. “Good Lord, can we ever catch a break?” German wondered one afternoon, as she counted 11 cardboard boxes stacked in the corner of her office, each one labeled “Strahl.” She sifted through the files and ran the math in her head: It took one election clerk up to 40 hours to handle a box of Strahl’s challenges. German had eight people on her staff. That meant almost half of her team had been working essentially full-time on Strahl’s boxes for the past weeks instead of preparing for a presidential election that German already considered the most stressful of her career.

She had worked as a clerk for 25 years, and during the first two decades she remembered only a handful of voter challenges. Back then, Georgians were allowed to challenge up to 10 people each year, and occasionally someone would challenge a family member who had been arrested, lost their mental capacity, or moved out of state. Mostly, it was up to election officials and the secretary of state’s office to clean the voter rolls, and Georgia updated hundreds of thousands of records each year after voters moved, died, or changed their voting status. “People believed in the system and trusted us to do our jobs,” German said.

But in the aftermath of the 2020 election, Georgia’s Republican-led legislature passed an election integrity law that permitted any registered voter to file an unlimited number of challenges. The law required election clerks to schedule hearings and send up to four letters to each voter in question, which meant German’s office was mailing thousands of additional letters each month.

Many of Strahl’s challenges were against voters who German said would eventually be taken off the rolls anyway as part of Georgia’s standard list maintenance—people who had died, committed felonies, or voted in other states. Strahl also filed hundreds of challenges against voters who were listed as inactive, which meant they were required to go through extra verification before they could vote on Election Day.

“I can think of a thousand better ways to use our time,” German said, as she handed one of Strahl’s boxes to her deputy, Roger Owens. “It’s busywork that muddies the waters.”

“I got another call this morning from a woman who was scared about whether or not she could still vote,” Owens said.

“It’s driving me crazy,” German said, because what bothered her more than the work itself was what she believed the boxes had come to represent: distrust, denialism, the eroding faith in democracy that she now felt hanging over so many parts of her job. It was the signs on the office wall about “suspicious packages,” and the new protocol that required all staff to wear gloves while opening the mail. It was the endless series of staff trainings about threats she’d never heard of before 2020—things like “spoofing” and “swatting”—and that made her feel, she said, as if someone expected her to “leave work in a body bag.”

“Expect conspiracies, anger, and vitriol,” read a briefing memo on how to manage voting locations in 2024. “Recognize the warning signs of someone on a path to violence,” read a pamphlet on de-escalation.

This was now German’s job on so many fronts—to stand before a wave of malevolence and respond with calm, with decency, with evenhandedness and bureaucratic protocols. There were more than 200,000 registered voters in Chatham County, and she prided herself on being fair to all of them. That meant responding to every open-records request and examining the evidence for each of Strahl’s challenges, researching address data, fixing clerical errors, studying

election statutes, and then providing each voter with an opportunity to respond.

“Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter,” she wrote, in a letter that her office mailed to each challenged voter, and then she moved to the next name on the list.

CARRY SMITH HAD spent the past two decades traveling around the coastal floodplains of Georgia with a card table and a clipboard, searching for unregistered voters. She had found them on peanut farms and late-night city buses, in rural churches and shelters for abused women. Smith had personally helped register more than 15,000 voters, lately as the regional director of a nonprofit called the Georgia Coalition for the People’s Agenda. She was one of the state’s most dedicated voting rights advocates, but this time the rights in question were her own.

“This letter is to inform you that your right to vote in Chatham County is being challenged by Helen Strahl,” read the first notice that Smith received in the mail from German’s office, in 2022.



Smith helps a resident register to vote; German in her office

Smith had been challenged along with dozens of others because she had potentially violated federal policy by listing her residential address at a business—a place called the Mailbox Cafe, which sold coffee and mail slots to people who were homeless or transient. Smith had rented a mailbox because she was staying with a different friend every few weeks while she commuted to Atlanta to finish her doctoral degree in political science. She called the registrar’s office, explained her situation and changed her address to the apartment where she was sleeping on a couch. Strahl’s challenge was denied, and Smith decided to start “challenging the challenger,” she said.

The dissertation that Smith was finishing was on the intricacies of voter suppression, and she began researching Strahl and eventually learned about the Georgia Nerds. There were videos online in which the group spoke about “bloated voter rolls” and “rigged elections,” and then participated in a news conference to declare a “citizens state of emergency,” on the steps of the

Georgia Capitol. But in Chatham County, Strahl’s challenges were unfolding mostly out of sight, at monthly Board of Registrars meetings in a nondescript office park. Smith started attending each month, listening to Strahl’s testimony and occasionally making her own statements to the board.

“There’s just weird things that shouldn’t be happening,” Strahl said this year, after she challenged hundreds of people whom she believed had moved out of state. “Mrs. Strahl is not an expert,” Smith told the board. “The state’s voter list maintenance is very sophisticated.”

“It’s a whole mess,” Strahl said a few months later, after challenging people who listed their residential address at post office boxes, a campground, and a Kroger grocery store where people sometimes slept outside. “This targets a vulnerable population,” Smith said. “It goes against their constitutional rights.”

Smith recruited more people to protest Strahl’s challenges, and each month a bigger crowd came to the board meetings as Strahl’s efforts seemed to intensify. Strahl submitted about 900 challenges in May. She emailed the board a list of more than 20,000 registrations in June that she thought were eligible for “list maintenance processing” before the election. A few weeks after that, she sent the board a letter about an “anomaly” of 689 students and former students registered at one street address at Savannah State University, which is 85 percent Black.

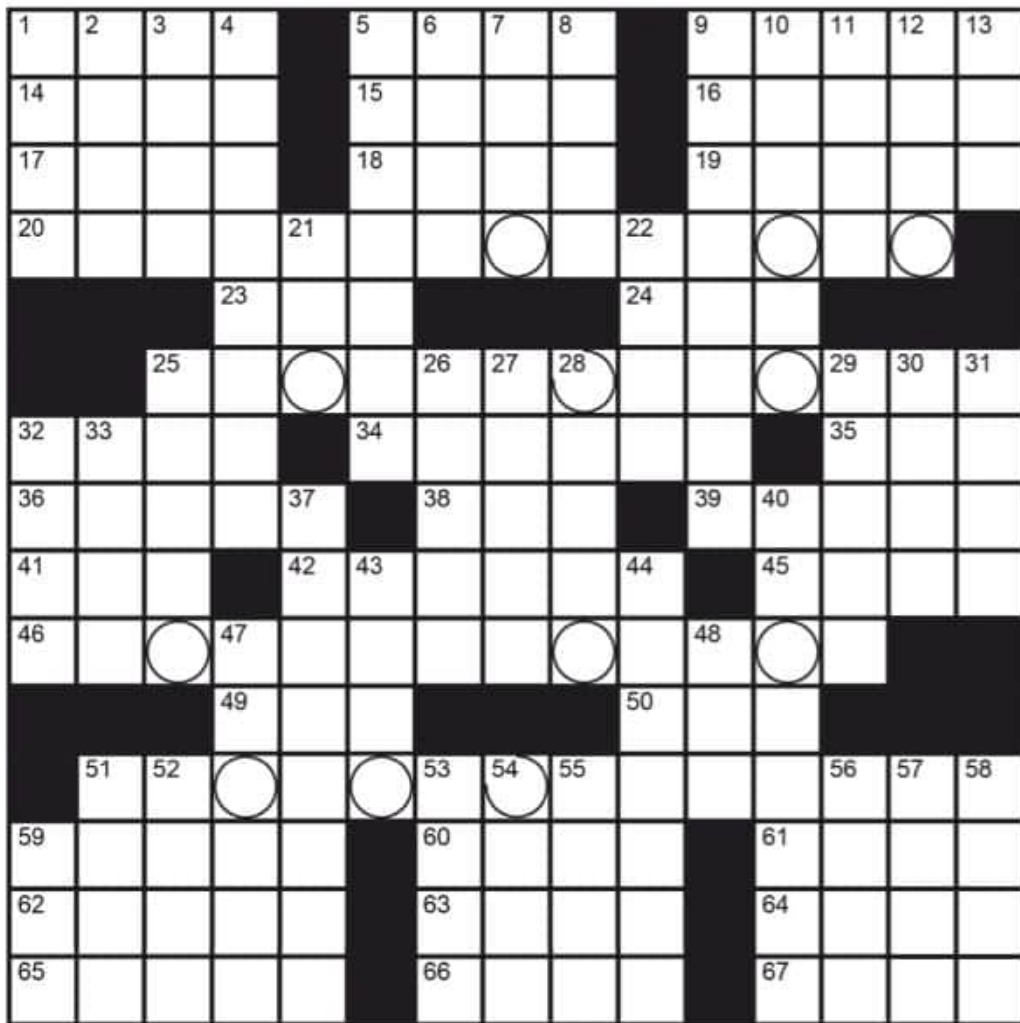
The board decided at a meeting in late July that Strahl hadn’t provided enough documentation in her latest batch of letters to force any more removals. Her challenges would be tabled until after November, because federal law prohibits systemic changes to the voter rolls within 90 days of an election. Several protesters from Savannah State still stood up to speak at the end of the meeting to express first relief and then indignation.

“These are young people who have the desire to vote, and you are trying to take that away?” one speaker said. “There’s an elephant in the room,” said another. “You went after Black people. If you want to be that vile, go after everybody.”

“Our voters should expect better,” Smith said.

A version of this story originally appeared in The New York Times. Used with permission.

Crossword No. 762: Born to Host This Show by Matt Gaffney



ACROSS

- 1 Come up short
- 5 1,440-minute stretches
- 9 ___ *Manner* (George Eliot novel)
- 14 Forearm bone
- 15 One of the seven deadly sins
- 16 Island near Curaçao
- 17 ___ out (fall right asleep)
- 18 Two fives for ___
- 19 Cast a ballot
- 20 The 50th season of *Saturday Night Live* begins on Sept. 28; this actress-singer hosted the show on Feb. 11, 2012, noted for its "Bein' Quirky" sketch
- 23 Paella piece
- 24 Sean Lennon's middle name
- 25 This comedian hosted in 1993 and 1996; she impersonated Liza Minnelli in one sketch
- 32 ___-Ball (arcade game)
- 34 Inn name
- 35 Language of southeast Asia
- 36 Best of the best
- 38 Author Amy
- 39 Commits a football infraction
- 41 Had more points than
- 42 Tennis racket brand
- 45 Suffix with care or cease
- 46 Comic actor who hosted the show in 1989, at the height of his *Naked Gun* fame

DOWN

- 14 "___ understand it..."
- 15 One of the Gershwins
- 16 *Seinfeld* had been on the air for four seasons when he hosted the show; in one sketch he complained to a gyro shop owner about his meal
- 17 ___ in comparison (wasn't as good)
- 18 Mischief-making god
- 19 Adele or Madonna, say
- 20 Returning Agassi
- 21 Driving service
- 22 Not odd
- 23 German for "white"
- 24 "Bless this ___"
- 25 Take a breather
- 26 Peach feature
- 27 Potatoes, in Indian cuisine
- 28 "I'm ___ hurry"
- 29 Coleridge or Wordsworth, e.g.
- 30 DJ's blunder
- 31 Chips for cards
- 32 Part of YSL
- 33 Get coordinated
- 34 *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* city
- 35 Patch type
- 36 Renaissance Faire instrument
- 37 Explorer Tasman
- 38 Down in the dumps
- 39 "Of course!"
- 40 Parka feature, usually
- 41 Tim and Harry, for two

- 26 Use DoorDash instead of OpenTable
- 27 Saudi's neighbor
- 28 Cut a rug
- 29 Ochoa or Barkin
- 30 Young fellows
- 31 Defeat
- 32 Try to turn a profit on
- 33 Swiss artist Paul
- 34 Season components
- 35 Lovely shrub
- 36 ___ in (get control over)
- 37 Wizard's concoctions
- 38 Beams used in surgery
- 39 Mrs., in Madrid
- 40 Powell or Pauley
- 41 Discount grocery chain
- 42 U. donor, usually
- 43 Ear part
- 44 ___ out a living
- 45 Shabby bar
- 46 Exciting nights
- 47 Spout off
- 48 Hound hand

The Week Contest

This week's question: A pair of British nudists—a man and a woman who are platonic friends—have just completed a six-day, 260-mile tandem bike ride across southwest England. If a TV network were to give these clothes-free cyclists their own travel series, what family-friendly title should it give the show?

Last week's contest: A worker on a corporate hiking retreat in the Colorado Rockies had to be rescued after his colleagues allegedly left him stranded on a mountain overnight. In seven or fewer words, write a subject line for an email the abandoned office worker might send to his colleagues on his first day back at work.

THE WINNER: To all unconcerned
Moe Cougher, Olathe, Kans.

SECOND PLACE: Re: Your recent divestiture effort
Mike Blauer, Burley, Idaho

THIRD PLACE: Circling back to why nobody circled back
Kenneth Burgan, Grass Valley, Calif.

For runners-up and complete contest rules, please go to theweek.com/contest.

How to enter: Submissions should be emailed to contest@theweek.com. Please include your name, address, and daytime

telephone number for verification; this week, type "Unclothed biking" in the subject line. Entries are due by noon, Eastern Time, Oct. 1. Winners will appear on the Puzzle Page next issue and at theweek.com/puzzles on Friday, Oct. 4. In the case of identical or similar entries, the first one received gets credit.



◀ **The winner gets a one-year subscription to *The Week*.**

Sudoku

Fill in all the boxes so that each row, column, and outlined square includes all the numbers from 1 through 9.

Difficulty: hard

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

Find the solutions to all *The Week's* puzzles online: www.theweek.com/puzzle.

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