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Creating more, for life as always.

The origin of our Sompo Group can be traced back to a private fire company which belonged to the very first fire insurance company in Japan, "Tokyo Fire Insurance Company, Inc.", established in 1888.

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There has always been a strong sense of mission and commitment in the origin of the Sompo Group to "protect customers at all costs" as our service which was the sole purpose of the private fire company and not just as an insurance company.

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<https://www.sompo-hd.com/en/>



TIME

~~2020~~

**THE  
WORST  
YEAR EVER**

*by*  
STEPHANIE  
ZACHAREK



*I wish to train  
with astronauts*

**Addison, 8**  
Wilms tumor

WHERE THERE'S A **wish** THERE'S A WAY.

*For children battling a critical illness, a wish is more than a dream. It can be a turning point that can give them the emotional and physical strength to keep going.*

.....  
WISHES NEED YOU ★ [WORLDWISH.ORG/DONATE](http://WORLDWISH.ORG/DONATE)  
.....

**Make-A-Wish**  
INTERNATIONAL



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*The impact of climate change was felt around the world in 2020. Here, embers from the Bear Fire light up a hillside behind the Bidwell Bar Bridge in Oroville, Calif., on Sept. 9*

Photograph by *Noah Berger—AP*

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ON THE COVER:



TIME illustration

# Conversation

## THE RESULTS ARE IN

PRESIDENT-ELECT JOE Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have an enormous challenge ahead of them if they are, as Harris has committed, to “heal the soul of our nation” as half the nation still vehemently believes that your Nov. 23 cover should more appropriately read “A Time to Steal” rather than “A Time to Heal.”

*Neil Hawthorne,*  
GOLD COAST, AUSTRALIA

YOUR ELECTION-RESULTS issue appears to me full of make-believe and wishful thinking about the U.S. I miss reality, and even more, I miss real plans. Let’s stash the issue away and dust it off in four years’ time and we’ll find it was romantic lore.

*Gerold W. Schmidt,*  
BONN, GERMANY

I AM SURE THAT AN OVER-whelming majority of people here in Europe are happy with a new President in the U.S. But we find it very depressing, and completely incomprehensible, that nearly half the American population again supported a man like Donald Trump. We really wonder if they have lost their moral compass.

*Kjell Ivar Walberg,*  
ELVERUM, NORWAY

I WAS DELIGHTED TO RECEIVE your Nov. 23 issue,

at least until I opened it. Nearly the whole magazine was devoted to the election. You continue your Trump-bashing and praise Biden before he has done anything as President. May I remind you that not all your readership is American, and that there is a big, wide world out there, with plenty of news that I, for one, would love to read about.

*Sara Gutman,* JERUSALEM

IF HISTORY RUNS IN CYCLES, here’s a prediction: Obama resembles Kennedy, Trump resembles Nixon, Biden will resemble Carter. In 2024, the right will come back to power with a new leader who resembles Reagan. It won’t be Trump ever again. As Nixon stunned America with his illegal actions, Trump has spooked America with his anti-democracy gambit.

*Don Jackson,*  
QUIÉVRECHAIN, FRANCE

## HARRIS MAKES HISTORY

RE “WHEN POWER LOOKS Like Me” [Nov. 23]: It is so heartwarming to think that from now on, young girls and women, no matter their ethnicity, will look at the world’s first power and see themselves in the Vice President. Kamala Harris’ election is opening the field of possibilities for women, especially Black women, and has inspired and empowered



many of us. This world has been ruled by men for far too long, and it is time we start taking women more seriously.

*Inès Guillot,* PARIS

RE “MAKING HER ROLE Count” [Nov. 23]: With Donald Trump’s term in office, race and gender equality have been punched in the gut. What a relief that the Black community and its advocates have managed to make their voices heard. Biden and Harris speak of unifying and healing, and Harris will be the light in the dark tunnel we faced during Trump’s presidency.

*Marika Adam,* PARIS

A MESSAGE TO HARRIS: Make yourself visible as a Vice President. In Norway, we have a tradition of female leadership. A Black woman of your capacity

may bring the world a great step forward.

*Bengt Espen Knutsen,* OSLO

## BACK ON TRACK

RE “THE RETURN OF EMPATHY” [Nov. 23]: The U.S. does better (as does the world at large) when empathy is front and center. When the U.S. becomes protectionist, ignores its allies, dances with dictators or is led by someone clearly lacking in leadership skills, then the country does not live up to its potential, and in turn, the world suffers miserably. The America of the last four years was unrecognizable. It will be a nice and necessary change to get back to normal and welcome back a country that definitely went down the wrong road politically. Sometimes detours reveal what was valued in the first place, but took for granted.

*Douglas Cornish,* OTTAWA

## TALK TO US

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Letters should include the writer’s full name, address and home telephone and may be edited for purposes of clarity and space

TIME

# Person *of the* Year

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**DEBATES**

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Join the discussion **LIVE**  
December 7th at 12pm E.T.

Moderated by TIME Executive Editor  
**BEN GOLDBERGER**

[time.com/poydebates](https://time.com/poydebates)

**'Are we O.K.? We will be.'**

**MEGHAN MARKLE**, Duchess of Sussex, revealing in a Nov. 25 *New York Times* op-ed that she suffered a miscarriage in July

*'The more I hold myself close and fully embrace who I am ... the more my heart grows and the more I thrive.'*

**ELLIOT PAGE**, the *Juno* and *Umbrella* Academy actor, coming out as trans in a Dec. 1 statement

**'OTHERWISE, I'LL SEE YOU IN FOUR YEARS.'**

**PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP**, seemingly teasing a 2024 presidential run after his loss to President-elect Joe Biden in the 2020 election—which he continues to contest—at a White House Christmas party on Dec. 1

**'I have piles of cash at home. The government is paying me cash for my salary, because I don't have a bank account.'**

**CARRIE LAM**, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, explaining in a Nov. 27 interview how she circumvents U.S. sanctions

*'I say thank you from the bottom of my heart. For the first time in more than four years ... I breathe freedom and liberty today.'*

**GENERAL MICHAEL FLYNN**, who twice pled guilty to lying to the FBI, responding on Nov. 26 to a sweeping pardon from President Trump



**427,300**

Total number of employees hired by Amazon between January and October, growing its workforce by more than 50% from 2019

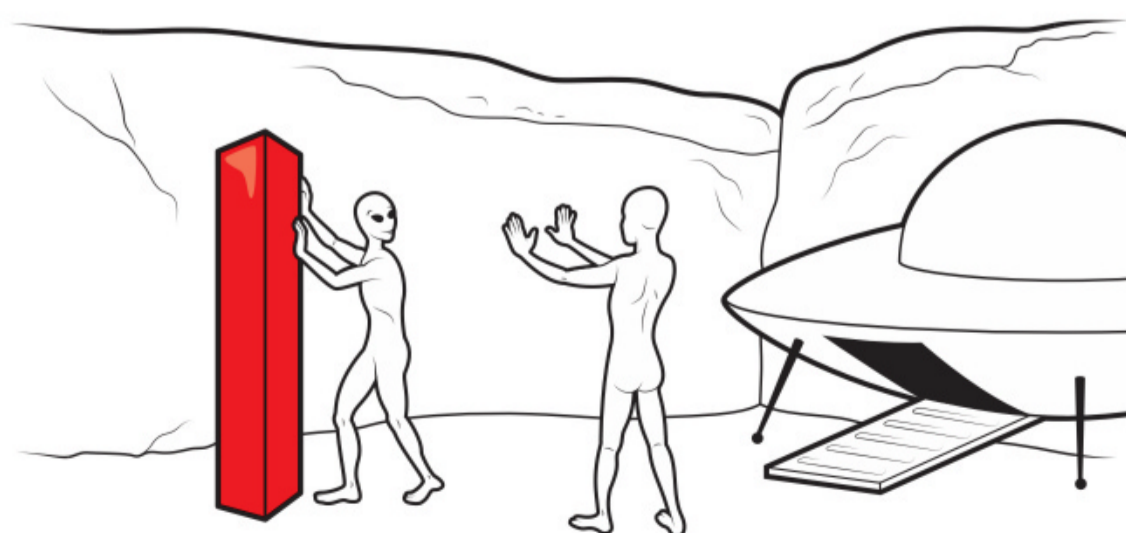


**GOOD NEWS** of the week

Kaavan, "the world's loneliest elephant," moved from Pakistan's Marghazar Zoo to a Cambodian wildlife sanctuary on Nov. 30, after a campaign led by Cher to free him from conditions many had labeled cruel and painful

**9**

Days between the discovery of a mysterious metallic monolith in the Utah desert and its equally mysterious disappearance on Nov. 27



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BROWN BIRD DESIGN FOR TIME

# The Brief

**CRITICAL CARE**  
A medical worker prepares treatment for a COVID-19 patient in the ICU at a Houston hospital on Nov. 14



**INSIDE**

EXPLORERS FIND PREHISTORIC  
ART IN COLOMBIAN AMAZON

BIDEN MULLS FORGIVING  
STUDENT LOANS

DISASTER IN ARECIBO AS SPACE  
TELESCOPE COLLAPSES

PHOTOGRAPH BY GO NAKAMURA

*The Brief is reported by Madeleine Carlisle, Suyin Haynes, Anna Purna Kambhampaty, Jeffrey Kluger, Ciara Nugent, Billy Perrigo, Madeline Roache, Olivia B. Waxman and Michael Zennie*



# The Brief Opener

## HEALTH

# What the COVID-19 vaccines actually do

By Alice Park

**I**T'S A RARE GLIMMER OF HOPE IN A BRUTAL AND battering pandemic year: in November, both Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech reported that their much anticipated COVID-19 vaccines are around 95% effective in protecting people against getting sick with the disease. Both companies have requested authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to start distributing their vaccines, and the agency is expected to review those requests in mid-December.

Scientists are encouraged, and even surprised, by the magnitude of the protection; public-health officials finally see what could be the beginning of the end of the pandemic; and families everywhere are fantasizing about a return to normality where gathering to celebrate holidays is not a matter of public-health concern. But those same public-health experts also warn that vaccines aren't the panacea that many desperately hope they will be. That's because, for now, the studies show that rather than preventing a person from getting infected, these shots appear to keep people from getting dangerously sick.

It's a distinction that's easily lost in the discussion of "efficacy." Yes, Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech reported that their shots are 94.1% and 95% effective, respectively. But at this point, efficacy does not refer to the vaccines' ability to prevent infection with the virus but rather to its ability to protect against the disease the virus causes: COVID-19. In both trials, volunteers were randomly given either the vaccine or a placebo, then asked to report any symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath or muscle aches. Only then were they tested for the presence of the virus. If people tested positive, they were logged as confirmed COVID-19 cases. Later, researchers compared how many in the positive group had been vaccinated vs. how many had gotten a placebo, and found that those who had been vaccinated were more likely to experience fewer symptoms and not get as sick as those on the placebo.

Because the study homed in on just those volunteers who had tested positive, there's no way to tell for sure whether the vaccinations confer total immunity for anyone else. What is clear is that the vaccine appears to protect you from getting sicker once you are infected—and that is still a huge advantage over the virus, as severe COVID-19 can send people to intensive care. The more infected people who experience milder

symptoms and recover at home, the less burden there is on the health care system and the less exposure that health care workers will have to the virus, all of which contributes to better control of the pandemic.

However, because the vaccines do not necessarily protect against infection, we won't be abandoning public-health measures—such as wearing masks, social distancing and avoiding indoor gatherings—anytime soon. Researchers are still studying whether people who are vaccinated and never experience symptoms can still spread the disease to others. In the meanwhile, experts say it's best to keep up the behaviors that have proven to stymie the spread of COVID-19.

**EVEN IF THE SHOTS** are authorized, initial supplies will be limited until manufacturing can match demand. An independent committee of advisers to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended on Dec. 1 that health care workers and older residents

in long-term care facilities, both of whom are at higher risk of getting COVID-19, should be vaccinated first. The CDC has also asked state health departments to submit proposals for how they will distribute doses in phases. Not all of these plans have been solidified, but most start with high-risk groups, and then move to more vulnerable populations, including people with chronic health conditions, and eventually everyone else as more doses become available over the next few months.

While both companies have begun producing doses, it's likely that the majority of Americans won't be vaccinated until next spring at the earliest, so the ultimate goal in controlling the pandemic—herd immunity—probably won't happen until well into next year. "Not until a substantial proportion of the population is vaccinated, and the caseload has dropped to very low levels, will we be able to breathe—without a mask—a sigh of relief," says Emanuel Goldman, professor of microbiology at Rutgers University. And even then, he points out, researchers will have to remain vigilant about tracking any changes in the virus. "[It] might have other ideas and try to change in a way that makes the vaccine less effective."

Only by vaccinating millions of people, and monitoring how their immune systems react, will experts get a better handle on what it takes to extinguish COVID-19, or at least make it much more difficult for it to spread. "The big message is that we have an additional tool [in the form of vaccines] for fighting COVID-19, but we don't have a tool to replace everything we do just yet," says Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. "Hopefully as the country and world gets massively vaccinated, this virus will be essentially backed in, with no place to go because everybody is protected." —With reporting by AMY GUNIA/HONG KONG □

**'The big message is that we have an additional tool.'**

**DR. ANTHONY FAUCI**, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases



## NEWS TICKER

### Pope installs first African-American Cardinal

Pope Francis appointed 13 new Cardinals in a Vatican City ceremony on Nov. 28, including the Archbishop of Washington, D.C., Wilton Gregory, 72, who became the **first African-American Cardinal** in the Catholic Church's history.

### Australia's army acts after report on abuses

Thirteen special-forces soldiers face dismissal after an independent commission's report on **unlawful killings in Afghanistan**, the Australian army's head said on Nov. 27. The *Brereton Report* alleges troops were involved in the murders of 39 Afghan civilians and prisoners from 2005 to 2013.

### Thai protesters face lèse majesté charges

On Nov. 30, five leaders of Thailand's pro-democracy protest movement reported to police to face charges under a law that ostensibly **protects the country's monarchy** from insult, but that has become a political weapon. Protesters carrying inflatable ducks, a symbol of the movement, continue marching in Bangkok to demand accountability.



**PREHISTORIC PAINTINGS** A vast collection of ancient rock art has been discovered on cliff faces deep in the Colombian Amazon, providing further evidence that the rain forest's earliest human inhabitants lived alongside now extinct Ice Age animals. Likely created up to 12,500 years ago, the drawings were first discovered by a team of British and Colombian archaeologists last year but had been kept secret until now, ahead of their debut in a documentary set to air in the United Kingdom.

## THE BULLETIN

### In France, a debate over filming police

**BY THE TIME THE CANISTER FLEW** through a window, filling the room with tear gas, a security camera had already captured footage that would convulse France. It showed three Paris police officers violently assaulting Michel Zecler, a Black musician. Zecler says the three officers, whom his colleagues pushed outside moments before a fourth fired the canister, used racial slurs. The Nov. 21 incident is the most recent example of police brutality against minorities in France, and an outcry has ensued just as the country's government is pushing for stricter law-enforcement powers.

**LAW AND ORDER** France has faced waves of sometimes violent protests in recent years, from 2018's Yellow Vest movement to racial injustice demonstrations this summer. In response, lawmakers on Nov. 24 gave early approval to a new bill, backed by President Emmanuel Macron, that would in some cases make it illegal to share videos or photos of police. The government said the law was vital to protect officers from extremists.

**LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ** But rights groups argue that the law would harm freedom of the press—and make videos like the one of Zecler's assault less likely to surface. On Nov. 28, tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Paris and other cities to protest the legislation and the larger issue of police brutality. Some protesters wore T-shirts demanding justice for Adama Traoré, a Black man who died in police custody in 2016.

**U-TURN** By Nov. 30, Macron had been forced to backtrack. His party announced that lawmakers would completely rewrite an article in the bill about filming police. Meanwhile, four officers have been charged with Zecler's assault, and fabrication of evidence. (They deny allegations they used racial slurs.) Watchdogs said the rewrite was welcome but not enough. "Fixing French policing means addressing systemic racism and ethnic profiling, not just tinkering around the edges of one article of one piece of legislation," said Kartik Raj, a researcher at Human Rights Watch. —BILLY PERRIGO

## NATION

### Is student-loan forgiveness unforgivable in Congress?

EVEN BEFORE TAKING OFFICE, PRESIDENT-elect Joe Biden is already facing a political storm among his ideologically diverse base of supporters over the volatile issue of student-debt forgiveness.

Roughly 45 million Americans currently hold \$1.6 trillion in student debt, with the average student-loan recipient owing between \$20,000 and \$25,000, according to the Federal Reserve. Among those actively making payments on their debt, the average monthly installment is between \$200 and \$300. And with 5.3 million more people unemployed than in February, right before the U.S. fell into a pandemic-induced recession, progressives say that student-debt forgiveness could be a boon for the economy.

“Student-debt cancellation feels like one of the most accessible Executive actions to stimulate the economy at the moment,” says Suzanne Kahn, director of the Education, Jobs and Worker Power program and the Great Democracy Initiative at the liberal Roosevelt Institute.

Kahn and others say the move would also help close the wealth gap between white Americans and people of color. Some 90% of Black students and 72% of Latino students take out loans for college vs. just 66% of white students, according to a 2016 analysis from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

But the more moderate faction of Biden’s base argues that sweeping student-loan forgiveness doesn’t help the people who need aid most. Americans with college degrees, as a whole, have been less devastated by the economic effects of COVID-19 than their non-college-educated counterparts. A September report from Pew Research Center found that only 12% of people with college degrees were having trouble paying bills as a result of the pandemic, compared with 34% of Americans with a high school diploma or less.

Others raise concerns about precedent: if the government wipes out current student loans, future college students may have an incentive to take on debts, they argue, hoping they will also be forgiven. Colleges may in turn be inclined to raise their prices further.

In recent weeks, Biden has walked a fine line on the issue, offering support for a bill from House Democrats calling for \$10,000 worth of student-loan forgiveness but stopping short of endorsing anything close to a plan championed by Senators Elizabeth Warren and Chuck Schumer to issue \$50,000 per borrower through Executive action.

What’s clear, according to experts on both sides of the aisle, is that economic crises exacerbate the problem of student debt. The last time the U.S. dipped into a recession, state governments cut their investments in colleges and universities—which, in turn, raised their tuition prices and forced students to take on ever larger loans.

That’s not sustainable in the long run. It remains to be seen if Biden can arrive at a political solution that is. —ABBY VESOULIS

## NEWS TICKER

### Ethiopian troops gain control of Tigray capital

Federal forces took control of Mekelle, the Tigray region’s capital, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed tweeted Nov. 28, after a period of fierce fighting in and around the city. Ethiopia’s military for weeks has been locked in conflict with the Tigray People’s Liberation Front.

### Biden, Harris approved for presidential daily briefings

President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris began receiving the President’s daily intelligence briefings on Nov. 30, a key step in the transition of power that typically starts shortly after an election but was delayed by the Trump Administration as the President disputed states’ results.

### India’s farmers bring protests to Delhi

Demonstrations against new agriculture laws in Delhi swelled on Nov. 30, as tens of thousands of farmers blocked roads with tractors and trailers. Protesters say the pro-market reforms, passed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, leave them vulnerable to exploitation.

## CRIME

### Return service

An anonymous woman mailed a piece of marble back to Rome’s **National Roman Museum** in November, apologizing for being “an American a--hole” by taking it from an ancient site in the city. Here, more regretful thieves.

—Madeleine Carlisle

#### HIEROGLYPH HEX

An unnamed man delivered a carving back to the Egyptian embassy in Berlin in 2007, claiming his stepfather had stolen the item while in Egypt three years earlier and had suffered the “curse of the pharaohs.”

#### STOLEN STONE

In March, a man returned to the Israel Antiquities Authority a 2,000-year-old ballista taken from a display in Jerusalem 15 years earlier, saying he wanted to clear his conscience before “the end of the world.”

#### ROMAN RUINS

A Canadian tourist returned five artifacts to the Archaeological Park of Pompeii in October, saying she’d stolen them in 2005. She added that she’d also had bad luck ever since and didn’t want to pass the “curse” to her family.



# The Brief Milestones

## DIED

**David Dinkins**, New York City's first and only Black mayor, from 1990 to 1993, on Nov. 23 at 93.

> **Bruce Boynton**, a civil rights icon who inspired 1961's Freedom Rides and plaintiff in the landmark Supreme Court case *Boynton v. Virginia*, on Nov. 23 at 83.

> **Pat Patterson**, WWE wrestler, executive and "Royal Rumble" creator, on Dec. 2 at 79.

## RESIGNED

Controversial presidential adviser **Dr. Scott Atlas**, on Nov. 30, having joined President Trump's coronavirus task force in August.

## DEFECTED

A North Korean man—reportedly a former gymnast—who **escaped to South Korea by scaling a 10-ft. fence** in the DMZ, a Nov. 24 report said.

## SENTENCED

Hong Kong **pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong**, to 13½ months in prison, on Dec. 2, after he pleaded guilty to a charge of inciting a 2019 protest at police headquarters.

## CHARGED

Jerry Boylan, the California captain of a **dive boat that caught fire** in 2019, killing 34, with 34 counts of seaman's manslaughter, on Dec. 1.

## WON

Claire, a Scottish deerhound, who was named **Best in Show** at 2020's National Dog Show on Nov. 26, over some 600 other dogs.



*Maradona clutches the World Cup trophy after Argentina's 3-2 victory over West Germany in the 1986 final in Mexico City*

## DIED

### Diego Maradona

*Touched by the "hand of God"*

DIEGO MARADONA IS ABOUT TO DRIBBLE THROUGH TWO ENGLISH defenders in the quarterfinals of the 1986 World Cup. He spins, however, somehow keeping the ball attached to his left foot—as if it were a toy and he the child who won't let it go. And then he's off, to finish arguably the greatest 70-yd. charge in soccer history.

England's goalkeeper, Peter Shilton, is the last line of defense: Maradona, who died at 60 of a heart attack on Nov. 25, shimmies to his right, and Shilton slides right past him, giving Maradona the goal and Argentina the 2-0 lead it would hold on to en route to the country's second World Cup title.

"His greatest achievement, that goal will forever live in my memory," says Telemundo broadcaster Andrés Cantor, who has called every World Cup since 1990.

Maradona netted that most jaw-dropping goal in World Cup history minutes after scoring the most controversial one; Argentina first took the lead after his illegal handball. "A little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God," he said later.

He had demons: Maradona struggled with addiction. But he'll be remembered for his magic. On the day he died, a sad silence enveloped Buenos Aires. "He's the greatest player of all time," Cantor says. "An artist. Poetry in motion." —SEAN GREGORY

## DIED

### Tony Hsieh

*Visionary CEO who delivered happiness*

By Alfred Lin

TONY HSIEH AND I FIRST met at a Harvard party in 1992. We bonded over outlandish business ideas like his plan to run our dorm's food joint. Except then Tony did just that—he transformed the Quincy House Grille by adding a pizza oven, arcade games and a foosball table.

He would move on to make many profound contributions to the world as an entrepreneur, from web advertising with LinkExchange to e-commerce with Zappos. Through all this serious work, Tony never took himself too seriously. After one meeting, he asked board members to join employees for a Macarena dance-off.

Tony died on Nov. 27, over Thanksgiving weekend. His tradition for the holiday was always to invite lots of people over, especially those without a place to go. He often referred to himself as the caboose—everyone else came first.

The world will laud Tony for his professional achievements, but those of us who were blessed to know him will remember him for connecting people

from all walks of life and bringing joy to others.



*Lin is a partner at Sequoia Capital; he and Hsieh worked together at LinkExchange, Venture Frogs and Zappos*

## Even the pandemic hasn't made public-health icon **Paul Farmer** lose hope

By **Jamie Ducharme**

"AM I ALLOWED TO BE A NORMAL HUMAN AND say, 'How are you?'" asks Dr. Paul Farmer as soon as our Zoom call connects.

It's an apt introduction for a man who became a living legend in the global health world mostly by being a normal human who does extraordinary things—starting with co-founding the Boston-based nonprofit organization Partners in Health (PIH) in 1987, before graduating from Harvard Medical School. Since then, PIH and its global staff of 18,000 have helped strengthen health systems in the "clinical deserts" of Haiti, Rwanda, Peru, Russia and numerous other countries. PIH's work in these places is guided by a simple, albeit difficult to implement, principle: namely, that all humans are equal and worthy of effective medical care. Thinking like this—more radical than it should be in an often self-centered world obsessed with cost-effectiveness—has made the 61-year-old Farmer one of the world's most influential voices on health equity and global health delivery.

You wouldn't necessarily know this simply by talking to Farmer. He often interrupts his own thoughts to make a joke. He brags about his students at Harvard like a proud father—which he is, to three kids. In many of the communities where PIH works, he is known simply as Dr. Paul. And though he is beloved in these areas, it is not because of his résumé—he cheerfully tells the story of a Haitian woman who, upon learning he'd written a book, exclaimed, "Dr. Paul, you never told us you could read and write!"

**DR. PAUL'S LATEST BOOK**, *Fevers, Feuds, and Diamonds: Ebola and the Ravages of History* reads in part like a memoir, in part like a scholarly text. It's a sweeping history of West Africa, Ebola and the precipitating factors that made the former a too hospitable host for the latter during the 2014–2016 outbreak that killed more than 11,000 people in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. The book details PIH's work during the crisis, but Farmer insists it was mainly intended as a "reparative exercise"—one inspired by patients who survived Ebola, and meant to elevate West African voices, experiences and histories.

Less intentionally, it reads like an eerily prescient road map for understanding the COVID-19 pandemic. Farmer finished his book on

April 10, at the height of U.S. lockdowns. By the time he finished writing, he says with a wry smile, his editors were less concerned than they once had been about the public understanding phrases like *PPE* (personal protective equipment) and *social distancing*.

The general public is also, it is safe to say, more interested in public health now than a year ago, and there is plenty to satisfy that interest in Farmer's book. He writes extensively about another deceptively simple concept that guides PIH's work: securing the "staff, space, stuff and systems" necessary to deliver reliable clinical care.

All of these things were lacking in West Africa when Farmer traveled there to fight Ebola, which made it near impossible to actually treat Ebola patients—as opposed to simply trying to isolate them before they spread the virus—and to keep hospitals functioning well enough to take care of patients who needed any other type of medical treatment. COVID-19 has shown that the U.S. is not immune to these problems either.

The U.S. currently needs staff (for contact tracing), space (for COVID-19 patients to recover without infecting others), stuff (a vaccine) and systems (for testing and reopening). "We have so many resources, and we're sinking so much of it into health, but we're putting very little into public health," Farmer says. "It's been a tension between medicine and public health for a long time. You see that by the patchwork of our care-delivery system and our political system."

PIH was well positioned to help when COVID-19 arrived in the U.S., given its experience in places similarly lacking staff, space, stuff and systems. This spring, Farmer worked with Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker on building out the state's contact-tracing workforce, using lessons learned in Rwanda and Haiti to put together a community-health corps of more than 1,000 people in two weeks. The program, which at its height employed 1,900, hasn't been flawless; some local officials complained it was unreliable and inefficient, and it was downsized to 700 staffers in July.

The U.S. is not known for its stellar contact-tracing abilities, in part because Americans' "go-it-your-own, libertarian approach" makes them wary of sharing personal information, Farmer says. Many of the populations disproportionately affected by COVID-19, like communities of color, also have a deep-seated distrust of the U.S. medical system, stemming from centuries of medical experimentation and inadequate access to and quality of care. "We need to recover from COVID, and that's not going to happen without confronting these cultural problems," Farmer says. "But ... there's a lot we can do without saying, 'O.K., now we have

### FARMER QUICK FACTS

**Guilty pleasures**  
"There has to be zombies or dragons or something," Farmer says of his Netflix preferences.

**Green thumb**  
An avid gardener, he has taken things up a notch during the pandemic, by planting trees that he hopes will outlast him.

**Famous friends**  
Dr. Anthony Fauci—the nation's top COVID-19 expert—has worked with Farmer for years. "He's a machine," Farmer says.



to address the entire cultural makeup of a very heterogeneous nation’”—things like hiring enough contact tracers.

Farmer says PIH approaches contact tracing the way it approaches most tasks: by trying to convince people they are interested only in keeping them and their loved ones healthy. “I’m going to sound very touchy-feely-ish, but it’s [about] compassion and empathy and fellow feeling,” Farmer says. “You can’t do anything in public health without fellow feeling.”

**EVEN WITH A TEACHING LOAD** at Harvard, a job as the chief of global health equity at Boston’s Brigham and Women’s Hospital and the Massachusetts contact-tracing gig, this year has been a slow one for Farmer, a man who typically spends a good chunk of his time on different continents. Being mostly sequestered at home means his garden has never looked better, he says. Still, a slow year for Farmer would be an exceptionally busy year for most people. He spent a month in Rwanda and visited Haiti once over the

**‘You can’t do anything in public health without fellow feeling.’**

PAUL FARMER, on how he runs his health nonprofit

summer, and he’s still directing PIH’s strategy in other countries from afar.

Farmer is an unflappable optimist, to the point that it’s hard to imagine him getting stressed by much of anything. Though he says he’s deeply saddened by the failures to contain COVID-19, particularly in the U.S., he also says he’s encouraged by much of what’s happened this year, like the promise of a pro-science Biden Administration and, most of all, the long overdue racial-justice movement following the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

Perhaps most striking, though, is Farmer’s insistence that his optimism is, in fact, logical. “When you settle on a problem, devote the resources to it and have at least some ability to incorporate new information, every time, it gets better,” he says. “I don’t have any experience, anywhere, where you just apply yourself, along with others, and then do not see progress. My optimism has pretty honest roots.

“Although,” Farmer adds after a brief pause, “I would probably be an optimist even if not.” □

## Small retailers look for ways to survive the holidays

By Cady Lang

FOR MITCHELL AND SKYE COHEN, THE THIRD-generation owners of Economy Candy in New York City, the short period between Halloween and New Year's is usually the busiest season. The store would serve upwards of a thousand customers in a weekend, when shoppers flocked to the small Lower East Side store to buy candy in bulk for holiday gifts and parties.

But this year, the aisles of Economy Candy are uncharacteristically quiet, devoid of their typical crowds of loyal locals and curious tourists. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York City in March, the Cohens halted in-person shopping for the first time in the store's 83 years. For a business that has always relied on foot traffic for the majority of its revenue, the decision was tough but necessary: the shop wasn't big enough to keep people a safe distance from one another, and the costs of stocking, staffing and sanitizing far outweighed the profit they'd see if they stayed open. So, for the past nine months, the Cohens have sold their sweets primarily via their website, shipping orders or arranging curbside pickup.

More than 30 million small businesses in the U.S. are struggling for footing in what should be their busiest quarter. A Visa survey taken in September found that 69% of small businesses still viewed the 2020 holiday season as a top sales opportunity—but retail looks vastly different when a health crisis is both upending the economy and changing the way we shop.

For one thing, spending this year will be lower overall, so while small businesses can expect to see a boost in sales over the winter holidays compared with recent months' sales, it will likely be a smaller uptick than in past years. A September survey by Deloitte found that average retail sales for the year will increase by 1% to 1.5% over the holidays; by comparison, in 2019, that growth was 4.1%.

"We found this year that the overall spending per household was going to be down about 7%," said Rodney Sides, Deloitte's vice chairman of U.S. retail and distribution. "People are still spending money, but they're changing how they're spending it and what types of things they're buying. Travel is down, but home decor is up."

And in the age of social distancing, online shopping will see a boost. A November McKinsey



▲  
*A shoe- and hat-repair shop became Economy Candy in 1937 after a sweets cart outside began outselling shoes during the Great Depression*

report found that 37% of consumers will shop more online this holiday season. As a result, many small businesses that may have had little to no digital presence are upping their online offerings.

**FOR MAGGY MORAN**, the manager of Revival, a clothing boutique in Iowa City, the pandemic has completely shifted how she operates. Since the shop is in a college town, the months leading up to the holidays have traditionally been big for sales; before the pandemic, students and parents would come to the store to buy clothing and gifts ahead of the school break. This year, however, the University of Iowa will be going all-virtual after Thanksgiving. And with their county's status as a hot spot for COVID-19 cases, Moran and shop owner Sheila Davisson decided to close the store for in-person shopping and move sales completely online.

"Before the pandemic, online sales were probably less than 10%," Moran said. "Now our entire inventory is online, and we've been trying to make our in-person shopping experience translate to the website." To aid in this, Revival is offering customers the chance to curate their own holiday gift boxes, which shoppers can build over an email, phone or even video call.

Some businesses are adjusting not only their



way of reaching customers but also what they're selling. For Su Beyazit, the founder of Su'juk, a vintage store and hair salon in Brooklyn, navigating a pandemic holiday season has meant switching up her inventory to meet the change in what people are looking for. In past years, party dresses, holiday sweaters and anything with sequins would fly off the racks, but this year she's stocking more comfortable clothes and tried-and-true home goods.

After closing her store for three months at the start of the New York outbreak, Beyazit has increased her online retail activity since reopening in the summer and also hosts sidewalk sales. Beyazit displays racks of floral dresses and colorful coats on the street, and keeps masks and sanitizer on deck for anyone who stops by. Ahead of the holidays, she's teamed up with a local florist for a pop-up outside the store to sell seasonal wreaths and bouquets in a bid to make the most of their limited time outside before winter—and before a spike in cases could force them to close shop again. "We're preparing for another shutdown creatively, but at least this time, we know what we need to do," Beyazit said, adding that for now, "we're still trying to make shopping fun."

But for some store owners, particularly in hot-spot cities, creative in-person solutions are less

**30%–40%**

The percentage of U.S. retailers' total revenue that comes from holiday shopping, according to Rodney Sides, Deloitte's vice chairman of U.S. retail and distribution

**86%**

The percentage of Americans who will be shopping this holiday season, according to a September study by Visa

**3/5**

The fraction of U.S. consumers who plan to do half or more of their holiday shopping online this year, per the Visa study

**55%**

The percentage of Americans who planned to take part in Black Friday, the most popular sales day of the year, according to a November McKinsey report

feasible. In July, Onikah Asamoah-Caesar opened Fulton Street Books & Coffee, the only Black-owned bookstore in Tulsa, Okla. Since then, she has offered limited socially distanced shopping at her store. She's opting out of participating in holiday fairs and markets this year for safety reasons; after giving birth to her daughter in April, Asamoah-Caesar has felt the need to be especially careful.

"I've said no to so many things that I would love to do, but unfortunately for us, it's really not safe," Asamoah-Caesar said. "I don't want to add to our numbers in any way, I don't want to put myself in a situation that might not be safe, and I don't want to endanger my team members. We're really trying to drive people to our website to do their holiday shopping."

**JENNY DASILVA**, the founder and director of Start Small Think Big, a nonprofit that helps under-resourced small-business owners, believes that it's up to consumers to support small businesses during this time. "These are businesses that typically have less than one month's worth of cash cushion on hand, and they've been doing this for nine months," DaSilva said. "Every day that goes by puts them closer to the brink. I think it is the responsibility of the consumer to meet those businesses."

The Cohens of Economy Candy have found that kind of support from their community. On the weekends, in an attempt at some kind of normality, they take orders by hand from longtime local customers who line up 6 ft. apart outside the store. But the majority of their revenue now comes from online orders, which were once just 10% of their total sales. And those sales are a fraction of what the store would normally do this time of year. "We rely on the holiday time: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, the general holiday spirit, businesses having their holiday and year-end parties," Mitchell Cohen said. "We lost tourism, we lost parties, we lost events. We lost 75% of our business."

It's a challenge unlike anything else the store has experienced over the nine decades it's been in business, during which it has survived the Great Depression, 9/11 and Hurricane Sandy. But the Cohens remain hopeful that their pivot to online sales can save them this holiday season. They've begun making candy care packages in Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and nondenominational themes that encourage customers to celebrate the season with loved ones, even if they have to do so from afar.

"We got by the first 80 years by people telling their friends and people from out of town to go shop at Economy Candy; now, word of mouth is online and on social media," Mitchell Cohen said. "We need people to shop local and shop mom-and-pops so we can be here for another 80 years." □



## Death of dish

It was with no shortage of sorrow that the astronomical world learned on Dec. 1 that the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico had collapsed, its 900-ton receiver platform tumbling into its reflecting dish, demolishing both the observatory itself and any hopes that the venerable instrument could somehow be saved. Completed in 1963, Arecibo long served to study gravitational waves, pulsars and planets circling distant stars, and to scan the skies for rogue asteroids. (It was also featured in movies, including *GoldenEye* and *Contact*.) But hurricanes, earthquakes and a series of accidents in which support cables snapped pushed it over the edge. Said Ángel Vázquez, the telescope's director of operations, to the Associated Press: "It was too much for the old girl to take."

Photograph by Ricardo Arduengo—  
AFP/Getty Images

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# The View

NATION

## THE POWER OF “WE”

By Robert D. Putnam and  
Shaylyn Romney Garrett

Unprecedented political polarization; deep and accelerating inequality; vitriolic public discourse; a fraying social fabric; public and private self-centeredness—Americans today seem to agree on only one thing: this is the worst of times. But we’ve been here before. The Gilded Age of the late 1800s was much like today. ▶

INSIDE

IRAN'S HOPES TURN TO THE  
BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

GLOBAL HUNGER  
DOUBLED THIS YEAR

MOVING HOME DURING  
THE PANDEMIC

# The View Opener

America then was highly individualistic, starkly unequal, fiercely polarized and deeply fragmented—what we might call an “I” society. However, as the 20th century opened, ordinary Americans, joined by a few extraordinary leaders, bent the course of history, putting America on a “we” trajectory, which produced clear and measurable progress toward greater equality, bipartisanship, connection and altruism.

But sometime during the 1960s, we turned sharply back toward “I,” and the resulting downturn has landed us today right back where the 20th century started. Economic inequality in this country is worse than in more than a century, and politics is more polarized than in any other period since the Civil War. Americans are increasingly aware of their social isolation. The pandemic has also revealed how self-centered we have become, as many of us shun masks and social distancing, sacrificing shared benefits in favor of individual liberties. But our history shows us how we can rekindle a sense of togetherness.

**THE PROTAGONISTS WHO** drove the last upswing—when “I” gave way to “we”—came to be called Progressives. They were a diverse coalition whose factions often disagreed about ends and means but who shared a galvanizing belief in the power of ordinary citizens to change the course of history. Drawing lessons from that period could be a game changer for America in this time of transition.

The Progressive Era was characterized by a widespread moral awakening in which the social Darwinist culture of the Gilded Age was roundly rejected. Soul-searching effort on the part of reformers revealed their own complicity in the national crisis. Their moral critique was directed not just outward but also inward. Reformers today who worry about the long run would be wise to emulate that self-critical stance.

Moreover, voices preaching the evangelical Social Gospel and its equivalent in other religious denominations were crucial in triggering that Progressive Era moral awakening. Pope Francis, the Rev. William J. Barber II and religious leaders like them can again play an outsize role in moving us toward a “we” society. Secular small-*p* progressives today should not shun the power of religious narratives and moral messaging.

Change began at the grassroots. Ambitious new

federal programs were the caboose rather than the engine of change. The first truly public high schools in the world were invented around 1910 in small towns in the Midwest, and within two decades this innovation spread to virtually every community in America. Today’s reformers should begin at the state, local and even neighborhood levels. Young people like labor and feminist activist Frances Perkins, municipal reformer Tom Johnson and anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells were crucial to reform in the last upswing, and their youthful counterparts, like Greta Thunberg and Alicia Garza, will be today.

Political leaders such as Teddy Roosevelt ushered in national reforms like consumer protection, child-labor laws, anti-monopoly regulation and environmental conservation, but they built on sturdy foundations laid by bipartisan and nonpartisan civic activists at the state and local levels. We should not be looking to charismatic “I alone” politicians to lead us to salvation.

Association was both a goal and a tactic of Progressives, who actively fought the hyper-individualism of the age by inventing new ways to bring people together. Settlement houses, service clubs and civic organizations created vast new stores of social capital that fueled the upswing for decades. Public and private initiatives modeled after them that draw Americans

out of their echo chambers will be important now.

The final lesson from the Progressive Era is perhaps the most important: with few exceptions, the “we” the Progressives built was mostly white and delimited by racism. The needs of people of color were largely sacrificed on the altar of progress, a mistake we cannot make again today.

A “we” society is more focused on our responsibilities to one another and less focused on our narrower self-interest. Political differences are kept within reasonable bounds; economic inequalities are minimized; people are connected and willing to cooperate, and share a sense of common destiny.

The history of the 20th century shows that unlike a physical pendulum, pulled by gravity, the societal pendulum between individualism and community—between I and we—does not swing automatically. It is controlled by our choices.

*Putnam and Romney Garrett are the authors of The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*



*Trump supporters face off with counterprotesters near the Supreme Court, on Nov. 14 in Washington*

THE RISK REPORT

## A ray of hope for Iran after a brutal year

By Ian Bremmer



A TERRIBLE YEAR for Iran got worse when the country's top nuclear scientist was killed. As the architect of Iran's nuclear weapons program, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was a national hero, and his Nov. 27 assassination has ignited fury across the country. Iran's Foreign Ministry and state media were quick to pin blame on Israel.

2020 began with the U.S. assassination in Iraq of General Qasem Soleimani, one of Iran's most powerful men, which was soon followed by Iran's military accidentally shooting down a passenger plane, setting off a round of antigovernment protests.

Then came COVID-19. Iran became the first coronavirus hot spot outside East Asia as Iranian officials lied about the severity of the outbreak to protect voter turnout for parliamentary elections that boosted handpicked hard-line candidates. Bungling by the government set off more demonstrations, and many more Iranians died than the government acknowledged. The economic toll grew heavier when the pandemic forced down the global prices of oil and natural gas, vital Iranian exports. In July, a fire at Iran's most important nuclear-fuel-enrichment site, which officials blamed on a bomb planted by Israel, inflicted enough damage to delay Iran's nuclear program by months.

Nor can Iran be pleased to see its two main enemies—Israel and Saudi Arabia—taking steps toward better relations. According to Israeli officials, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in November—though the Saudis deny it happened. The meeting is historic, even if they have little in common beyond a mutual need for regional stability and a shared antipathy toward Iran.

But Iran also got some much needed good news when Joe Biden won the presidential election. Now there is reason for hope among those in Iran who desperately want the U.S. to return to the nuclear deal—and the economic relief it might bring if sanctions are eased. With a presidential election in Iran next year, and Iran's hard-liners working to undermine President Hassan Rouhani, Iran's negotiators won't want to look weak at the table. But Rouhani knows that Biden's top diplomat, Tony Blinken, and National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan, are veterans of the Obama Administration negotiations that made the original deal in 2015.

**Biden represents the one hope Iran has of getting its economy back on track anytime soon**

**THIS TIMING HELPS** explain why Israel might have moved to kill the nuclear scientist now. Donald Trump is still President. Any displeasure from the incoming Biden team can be managed, and at the very least, Iran's nuclear program has likely been set back once again. (Israel has been blamed for killing Iranian scientists in the past, though none of Fakhrizadeh's stature.) Perhaps Israel is hoping that Iran's hard-liners will persuade the Supreme Leader to try to launch a showy retaliatory attack that will make it much more difficult for the Biden Administration to re-enter the nuclear deal. But the timing also helps explain why Iran's retaliation will be measured carefully to avoid escalation. Biden represents the one hope Iran has of getting its economy back on track anytime soon.

Iran's accusations that Israel killed Fakhrizadeh are made plausible by the sophistication of the attack, and therein lies a worrisome sign of things to come. It appears the nuclear scientist and his security detail were attacked with a remote-controlled machine gun. It's the kind of "lethal autonomous weapon" we're used to seeing in movies. New technologies, particularly the increasing sophistication of drone aircraft, will make asymmetric warfare more common and more effective. □

QUICK TALK

### David Beasley, the U.N.'s global hunger chief

*Beasley is the executive director of the World Food Programme, the U.N. agency in charge of food assistance. On Dec. 10, he will accept the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize on its behalf.*

#### How has the pandemic influenced your mission?

The number of people we project to be on the brink of starvation has gone from around 135 million pre-COVID to 270 million, so 2021 has the potential to be catastrophic.

#### What kind of aid will you need to tackle it?

We need \$15 billion in 2021, almost double the \$8.4 billion raised this year. That includes \$5 billion just to avert famine for about 30 million people, mostly in conflict-affected areas.

#### How do you convince nations to increase aid at a time of global hardship?

It's about being strategic with the money they have. It's like the *Titanic*: you've got spilled wine on the carpet and an iceberg out front. Which do you focus on? You need to focus on famine, destabilization and mass migration.

—JOSEPH HINCKS



# TheView Essay



<  
*The writer with  
her parents in  
Woy Woy, Australia,  
in August*

## What I learned living with my elderly parents for two months of the pandemic

By **Belinda Luscombe**

I'M NOT SURE HOW MUCH GROWN ADULTS SHOULD AIM TO do for their parents as they get older, but I'm pretty confident that I have undershot. I'm their only daughter, and I've lived in the U.S. for about 28 years longer than I said I would. So, during the pandemic, with no office to report to, I moved back into my childhood home, in Australia. While in some ways this return was sparked by concerns for the health and safety of my begetters, in others it was a literal guilt trip.

One of the things that is shocking about seeing aging parents after a while is how much of their lives looks like it needs fixing. There are all the issues that were beginning to get sticky before the pandemic, plus all the new measures that need to be put in place to keep them safe, plus all the stuff—in some cases, piled-up boxes of stuff—that worried you for years but became mission critical after COVID-19 meant they had to stay home for months.

And even worse, they seem so oblivious to it all. My parents will allow that they move a little slower and don't hear as well as they used to, but they pride themselves on being independent, accomplished 80-somethings. For that which they can't manage, my brothers step up admirably. But I am like the frog who has jumped into the pot and noticed how murky the water is.

**TO CELEBRATE MY ARRIVAL**, my mother purchased a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle of New York City for us to do. "There's no way I'm getting sucked into that," I said to myself. "I've got too much to do." I planned to be there for six weeks, including two spent in Australia's strict hotel quarantine. Even after tacking a few weeks on the end, I could hear the clock ticking.

And so I bought my mom an updated iPad with more accommodations for her hearing. I got my dad a new phone in order to more effectively shout at him from 10,000 miles away that he's using it wrong. I helped persuade them to have

their skinny, cancer-ravaged dog put down. I cleaned furniture and ovens and countertops. I bought them clothes and installed a thingummy to extend the reach of their wi-fi. I went with them to medical appointments and discovered that my mother was not supposed to be eating sugar and my father was supposed to have a procedure. With a little nudge from me, Dad got a hearing aid—and stents put in his heart. For a few weeks, I was a whirlwind of fixing-ness.

My parents saw my exertions as unnecessary, perhaps even disruptive, but they humored my to-do list. After all, it meant I was around the house and I might pause while downloading Zoom for them so we could meet in real time. There were many midchore offers of a cup of tea. And then, an hour later, of gin and tonic. They wanted to talk to the human they raised, to hear what she really thought, to tell her some old stories: life report, not life repair.

The whole time I was there, I knew that eventually I would have to leave for my other family and that returning to my parents would be difficult. And that eventually they will leave the way all humans do, and returning to me will be impossible. The pandemic made the reality of these exits hard to ignore.

It was obvious that giving more time to talk and less to tasks made sense, but I still found it exasperatingly difficult. Talking is never done. It's hard to differentiate from loafing. And because my parents are a little deaf and forgetful, it often seems like you finish a conversation only to have it all over again. It feels like nothing has been achieved. I know you sometimes have to fix things more than once—floors are always getting dirty, and wi-fi goes down—but usually not within the space of 45 minutes.

Of course, I did help with the stupid jigsaw puzzle. It turned out to be the perfect excuse to just plonk down and chat. I thought it would be easy, since after almost 30 years of living there, I should know what parts of New York City go where. But it was perplexing, challenged my perceptions and took ages. Sometimes the only way to make sense of a picture, even one you think you know well, is to bring all the little bits near each other and sit with them for a while. □

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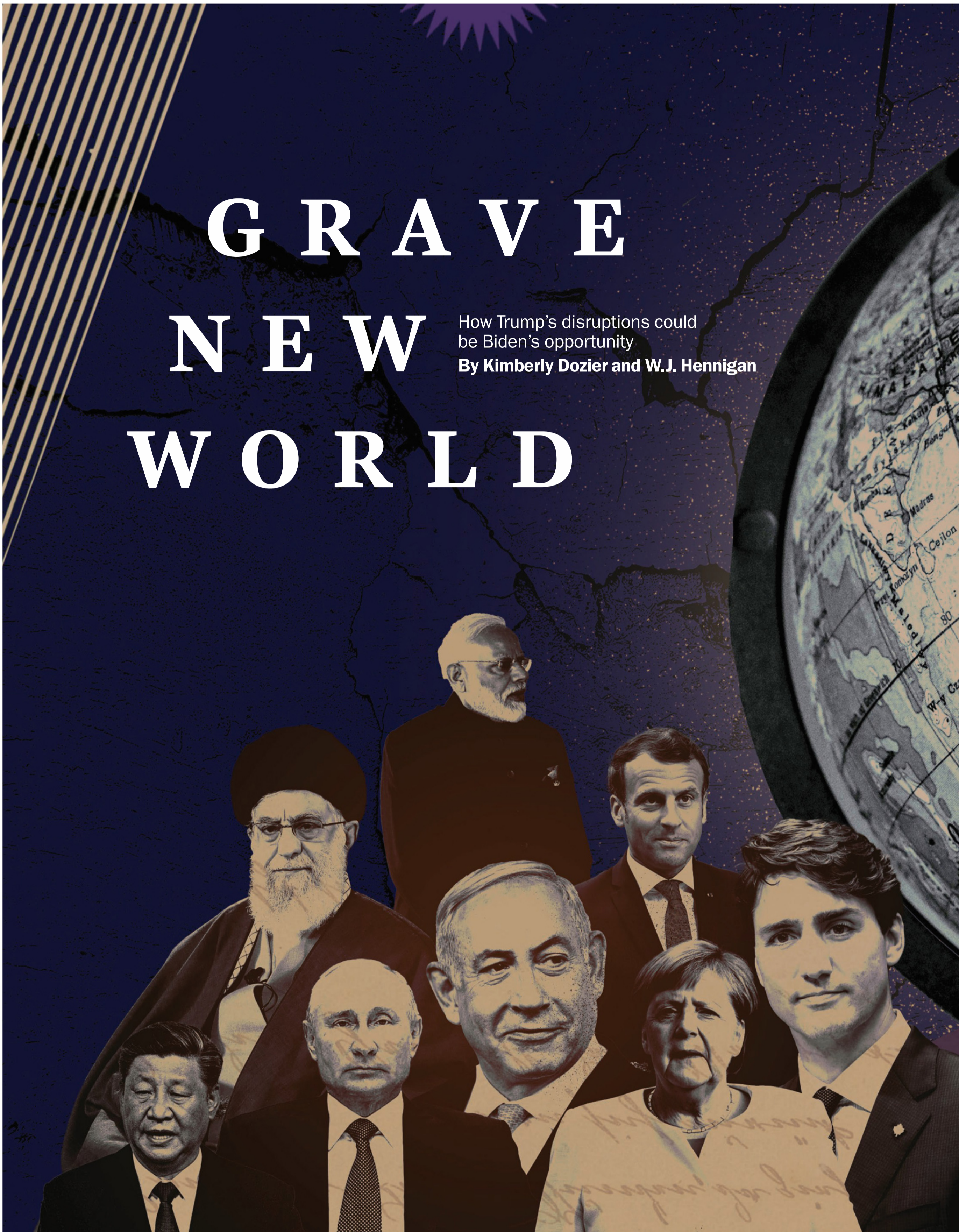


**SAVE  
THEM  
ALL**

# GRAVE NEW WORLD

How Trump's disruptions could be Biden's opportunity

By Kimberly Dozier and W.J. Hennigan





## E

EVEN BEFORE THE PRESIDENT-ELECT finally began getting the daily briefing from U.S. intelligence services on Nov. 30, Joe Biden would start his day at his home outside Wilmington, Del., with a two-page rundown on the world. The document was prepared by his own foreign policy and intelligence experts, who several times a week also provide a focused brief on one area of a globe already familiar to the former Vice President and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But an additional benefit of the sessions, with longtime advisers like incoming National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State-designee Antony Blinken, was that they felt almost ... normal.

Which is what much of America and the world is craving. For many worn out by President Donald Trump's disruptions, Biden's taking the helm of U.S. foreign policy raises the reassuring prospect that the world might go back to the way it was. Even Republican graybeards who have worked with Biden—and Blinken and Sullivan—quietly say they hope for a return to good order on the foreign front. Among America's allies overseas, the response to Biden's election “was the collective breathing of a huge sigh of relief,” says former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. “You could sense the unknotting of shoulders all the way from Seoul to Sydney.” Biden himself sounded a reassuring note when he took the podium in Wilmington on Nov. 24 and declared, “America is back.”

But the truth is harder. Biden and his foreign counterparts know the world can't go back to the way it was. Relations with China are at a half-century low. The NATO alliance is weaker than it has ever been. North Korea, which Trump alternately threatened and wooed, is now the long-range-missile-wielding,

self-declared nuclear power that decades of American Presidents sought to prevent. On top of it all, Biden is taking the reins as the world struggles with a global pandemic, the economic, social and political fallout of which remains unclear.

If the world Trump leaves behind poses an enormous challenge for Biden, though, it also presents an opportunity. In fact, Biden inherits the greatest chance to remake American foreign policy since at least 9/11 and perhaps since the end of the Cold War. From the ashes of Trump's norm-torching “America first” presidency, multiple Biden aides say, there's a chance to reinvent America's approach to problems that have long vexed multiple Administrations. In conversations with TIME, the aides say they have a policy blueprint for Biden's first 100 days, the next 100 days and beyond, that fixes what they can and makes the most of what they can't.

The immediate strategy, Sullivan tells TIME, “starts with renewal at home and builds to reinvesting in alliances and rejoining institutions.” On the first day of Biden's presidency, Sullivan says, the U.S. will rejoin the Paris climate accord and the World Health Organization. Then the U.S. will focus on getting a handle on the pandemic at home, in hopes of showing that the once global superpower can get its own house in order. The core of the strategy thereafter, Sullivan says, is to rally allies that represent “half the world's economy” to address common challenges



like China, North Korea, Russia or Middle East instability.

How to do that is where the real challenge of remaking American foreign policy for the post-Trump era begins.

**BIDEN'S TEAM HAS HAD** a surreal start, denied transition briefings for two weeks because of the incumbent's refusal to acknowledge the election results and the need to convene remotely

## NATO, Russia and the New Europe

Rebuilding alliances may be central to Biden's global strategy, but in Europe, as elsewhere, the world has changed. German Chancellor Angela Merkel left her first meeting with Trump convinced that Europeans had to start taking care of themselves, recalls the State Department's former No. 3, Ambassador Thomas Shannon. Trump's assault on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and especially Article 5 of its charter, which pledges that an attack

on one nation is an attack on them all, undermined faith that Europe and the U.S. would stand together against common enemies.

Over the ensuing four years, European allies have upped their defense spending, and that's not a bad thing: U.S. complaints that Europe underfunds its own defense go back decades. France, moreover, has boosted its counterterrorism presence in Africa, to the relief of U.S. commanders there.

But European burden-sharing has



▲  
A woman passes a U.S. military vehicle in northeast Syria on Jan. 22

during the pandemic. “We’ve had to work together with people we’ve never met together in person,” says Julie Smith, Biden’s former Deputy National Security Adviser who’s now with the transition team. “I don’t know how tall anybody is. I don’t know

how short anybody is. All I’ve seen is their kitchen.”

In some ways that’s appropriate: America’s new start abroad must begin at home, Biden’s aides say. In his attempt to deal a death blow to what he termed the “deep state,” Trump axed or left unfilled hundreds of positions at the State Department, the Defense Department and other agencies and cut the National Security Council (NSC) staff in half. He

come at a cost. None was more pleased by Trump’s moves than Russian strongman Vladimir Putin, whose revanchist agenda in Ukraine and elsewhere in Eastern Europe has challenged the West. As NATO weakened, Putin insinuated Russia into European politics, supporting Moscow-friendly candidates with a mixture of money and disinformation.

Heavy U.S. sanctions and an opening on nuclear-weapons diplomacy give the Biden team a chance to reset relations with Moscow. The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or New START, expires

Feb. 5, 2021. If it sunsets, it will be the first time in the effort to limit the nuclear stockpiles in the U.S. and Russia since 1972. Moscow has hinted it may be ready to deal.

At the same time, Biden has moved to restore faith in NATO in calls with Merkel, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and French President Emmanuel Macron. “They know that he wants to revitalize alliances,” says Julie Smith, of Biden’s foreign policy team. “They’re counting on him to do that.” —*W.J. Hennigan and Kimberly Dozier*



## The price, and potential, of a separate peace

Trump fundamentally changed the game in the Middle East. He cut off aid to the Palestinians, embraced an Israeli plan to take control of most Palestinian territory and recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. At the same time, Trump wooed Gulf states by getting tough on Iran. The gambit yielded the Abraham Accords—the United Arab Emirates’ recognition of Israel in return for halting the threatened seizure of West Bank territory. Bahrain and Sudan followed by normalizing relations with the Jewish state.

Those moves came at a price, all but killing the long-sought “two state” solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The incoming Administration recognizes putting peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians back on track will be hard. Biden says he won’t reverse the Trump Administration’s moves on Jerusalem, but beyond that, his incoming team’s goals seem modest: reaching out to both sides to “just try to preserve the possibility of a two-state solution, [and] not allow for further erosion or deterioration,” Biden’s incoming National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan says.

Biden has plenty on his hands nearby, dealing with Iran, which already turned up the heat by again expanding its nuclear program and now threatening to bar inspectors if U.S. sanctions aren’t lifted by February. Nevertheless, Tehran indicated its willingness to talk to the Biden team. Sullivan signaled openness to lifting sanctions to salvage the 2015 agreement, adding, “We have proven to Iran over time that we can put sanctions back on after they have been relaxed in ways that create enormous economic pressure.” —*K.D. and W.J.H.*

# World

eliminated, shrank or downgraded entire offices, like the NSC's pandemic cell, which Sullivan intends to rebuild. Dozens of ambassador posts remain vacant.

Rebuilding offers Biden the chance to remake a famously calcified foreign policy bureaucracy. "We're going in with a bit of a clean slate in these institutions, because the damage is so severe," says Smith. "We obviously have to build back the workforce," she says, but they can also revamp structures that were designed "70-plus years ago."

Conversations with Biden's staffers summon the same sense of regret and opportunity abroad. In China, the Middle East and Europe, Trump upended foreign policy dilemmas that had hamstrung the U.S. and its allies for decades. For years American diplomats struggled to figure out how to stop China from cheating on international rules of commerce without starting a trade war, how to make peace between Arabs and Israelis without selling out the Palestinians, and how to get Europe to shoulder the costs of its own defense without weakening the nation's alliance with them.

In each case, Trump blew the problem up with no long-term solution and at real cost: America is in an expensive trade war with China, the two-state solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict is moribund, and NATO is struggling. But each case also now offers Biden a chance to reframe the problem, and perhaps approach it with a new, more effective strategy.

The knock on Biden, and his team, is that they won't seize the opportunity, but through a combination of reflex and inertia will seek to revert to past policies despite all the change in the world. "I know some of these folks. They took a very different view," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Nov. 24 on Fox News. "They led from behind; they appeased. I hope they will choose a different course."

And it's not clear what strategies, beyond alliance building, can work. Gérard Araud, a former French ambassador to the U.S., U.N. and Israel, has worked with many members of the incoming Biden team as far back as the Clinton Administration. He predicts they'll be challenged—and likely chastened—by "the new balance of power" set by China's rising economic and military strength and Russia's growing



## Remaking the rules for China

For years, Beijing rewarded attempts to welcome it into the global, rules-based order by building military bases in the South China Sea and, according to Washington, cyberstealing U.S. technology and U.S. government personnel records, and cyberattacking the Pentagon. The disappointments continued during Trump's term, with China effectively ending Hong Kong's

autonomy decades early and expanding its crackdown on minorities like the Uighurs.

Trump's team waged solo economic war, slapping on tariffs, sanctioning Chinese officials and labeling companies like Huawei and TikTok as national-security threats, all to limited effect. China is now one of the biggest traders, funders, infrastructure builders and preferred lenders in Africa, Latin America, and Central and Southeast

adventurism, which has handed Moscow the upper hand in places like Syria, Ukraine and Libya. America's rising isolationism after years of foreign entanglements will make building consensus at home hard too. Trump's withdrawal from the world builds on "the inheritance of Obama, who didn't go to Ukraine, who didn't go to Syria," Araud says, reflecting the wider "fatigue of the Americans towards intervention."

When it comes to rebuilding at home and abroad, however, Biden brings something many are desperate for: empathy. On a trip to Brazil back in 2013, then Vice President Biden noticed a blue star on the lapel of then Ambassador

Thomas Shannon Jr., who greeted him on the windy tarmac in Rio. That small symbol linked Biden and Shannon as parents of children serving in war zones, and Shannon explained that his son was serving in Afghanistan. Days later, as he boarded Air Force Two for home, Biden doubled back, dug into his pocket and handed Shannon, a practicing Catholic,

**Biden says the U.S. can't go back to old habits abroad**



<  
*Chinese President  
 Xi Jinping waited a week  
 to congratulate Biden*

Biden is looking for a new approach on China: after a 2011 visit he declared that “a rising China is a positive, positive development, not only for China but for America and the world writ large.” Now his team will spend its opening months rounding up a hands-across-the-water mix of democratically minded Pacific and European allies to check China’s expansionism. The size of their combined markets—more than half the world’s economy—will lay down “a marker that says, if you continue to abuse the system in the following ways, there will be consequences,” says Biden’s incoming National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan.

That will require undoing some of the damage of the past few years, to offset China’s growing regional influence without devolving into conflict. “If we invest in ourselves, invest in our relationships with our allies, and play this key role in international institutions,” Sullivan says, “there is no reason why we cannot effectively manage the China challenge in a way that avoids the downward spiral into confrontation.”  
 —K.D. and W.J.H./Washington and Charlie Campbell/Beijing

Asia. In November it minted a 15-country free-trade alliance, the world’s largest, that includes Australia and New Zealand.

Trump negotiated a bilateral trade deal that threatens more tariffs if China doesn’t buy \$200 billion in U.S. goods and services over the next two years, which hands Biden some leverage. But Trump’s attendant China-bashing has helped fuel historically high anti-China sentiment among Americans, making future compromise with Beijing harder politically.

a thumb-size silver rosary, saying, “This got Beau safely out of Iraq. I hope it gets your son out of Afghanistan.”

Such moments matter in diplomacy, especially now as America tries to rebuild its reputation as a global leader while withdrawing in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Just as important, though, is experience. Even some of Biden’s political opponents say that is his strongest suit. Ambassador James Jeffrey, Trump’s former Syria envoy who retired in November, calls the incoming team “highly capable, competent patriots” of the “Kissingerian school” who will act in the interest of keeping America safe rather than hewing to a particular

ideology. Biden, he says, is a “natural, if blunt, diplomat” who was unflappable under rocket fire that hit the U.S. embassy compound in Baghdad in 2010 during one of the then Vice President’s visits to the Iraqi capital. “I’ve never seen anybody as calm,” he recalls.

For his part, Biden seems to appreciate the opportunity he’s been handed. Introducing his foreign policy team on Nov. 24, the President-elect declared, “We cannot meet these challenges with old thinking and unchanged habits.” —*With reporting by CHARLIE CAMPBELL/BEIJING and LESLIE DICKSTEIN and SIMMONE SHAH/NEW YORK* □



## North Korea, going south

Not all of Trump’s broken foreign policy pottery can be mended. North Korea is more isolated, desperate and dangerous today than it has ever been. The U.S. estimates the North has enough nuclear material for two dozen or more weapons and long-range missiles that can reach the continental U.S. The pressures of international sanctions, natural disasters and the coronavirus pandemic have worsened living conditions for regular citizens and prodded the authoritarian government to engage diplomatically with outside nations. But Trump’s strategy of flattery and face-to-face summits led to no disarmament, and official U.S.–North Korea talks stalled last year.

Every U.S. President for 30 years has tried to avoid this destabilizing situation, but there is no going back now. Biden must try to improve Washington’s frayed relations with regional allies South Korea and Japan, and collectively apply pressure to get Pyongyang back to the negotiating table. Trump made that harder, depicting South Korea and Japan as free riders and demanding billions of dollars to pay for the 80,000 U.S. troops in the two countries.

The incoming Administration will start building a plan with Seoul and Tokyo before approaching Pyongyang, Biden’s aides say. “What you’ll see is much more of a united front,” says Colin Kahl, who served as Biden’s National Security Adviser from October 2014 to January 2017 and now works on his transition team. “Making real progress on these issues in the medium to long term is exponentially greater if we’re working alongside our allies, but also managing our allies’ relations with one another.”  
 —W.J.H. and K.D./Washington and Steven Borowiec/Seoul



Essay

# OUR AWFUL YEAR

2020 TESTED US  
BEYOND MEASURE.  
WHERE DO WE GO  
FROM HERE?

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATIONS BY NEIL JAMIESON FOR TIME

**STRESS >**

The pandemic enforced a kind of communal isolation, framing a cascade of public catastrophes and injustices with loneliness





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GEORGE FLOYD

# THIS IS THE STORY OF A YEAR YOU'LL NEVER WANT TO REVISIT.

There have been worse years in U.S. history, and certainly worse years in world history, but most of us alive today have seen nothing like this one. You would need to be over 100 to remember the devastation of World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic; roughly 90 to have a sense of the economic deprivation wrought by the Great Depression; and in your 80s to retain any memory of World War II and its horrors. The rest of us have had no training wheels for this—for the recurrence of natural disasters that confirm just how much we have betrayed nature; for an election contested on the basis of fantasy; for a virus that originated, possibly, with a bat only to upend the lives of virtually everyone on the planet and end the lives of roughly 1.5 million people around the world.

My job as a film critic is to look at movies and tease out their connections both to the greater world and to our lives. If 2020 were a dystopian movie, you'd probably turn it off after 20 minutes. This year wasn't doomily thrilling, like a fictional apocalypse. It was, in addition to being wrought with pain, maddeningly mundane, the routine of the everyday turned against us.

Our most debilitating threat this year was a sense of helplessness, and it ran unchecked. Although it's universal among humans to believe in their own fortitude, Americans, in particular, are conditioned to believe they can triumph over any crisis. But not since the spread of fascism in the 1930s—a threat America didn't actively recognize until the dawn of the 1940s—have we been faced with so many abnormal events that have been so egregiously distorted by aberrant leadership. We confronted the unspeakable, only to be deviously reassured that none of it was a big deal. A virus will magically “disappear.” Don't worry, every vote will be counted—maybe. America will be great again, if only everybody would just get back to work—and though a mask is optional, wearing one sure makes you look dumb.

Gaslighting has been a major feature of American civic life since 2016, but in 2020 it reached new heights of outlandishness, making many of us feel as if we'd been pushed to the other side of the looking glass. We spent countless hours stuck at home and connected to the often untrustworthy hive mind of social media, wringing our hands and pointing out injustices, only to end up feeling even more paralyzed





by the very people who are meant to protect us. The enemy sought to divide us, and succeeded.

And COVID-19, it turns out, was the greatest gift that the enemy could have hoped for. Helplessness met its evil twin, a partner in crime that would only magnify its mad power: isolation. In March, when major U.S. cities joined others worldwide in locking down as a defense against the virus, Americans who could work remotely figured out how to do their jobs at home. So many didn't have that privilege and lost their jobs, with no means to pay their rent or mortgage and no way to feed their families. Hunger became a major theme of 2020, presenting challenges even in countries with the means to assuage it. At the same time, parents across the world, no matter their means, hustled to take care of—and homeschool—their kids.

Meanwhile, essential workers, from grocery-store clerks to transportation professionals to hospital nurses and physicians, continued to show up for duty. We'd see clips of health care workers in the news, their faces marked by hours of wearing PPE, their eyes leaden with weariness. Sometimes unable to hold back tears, they'd describe a new addition to their daily routine: watching patients die when they

#### NEED

Those who could learned to work from home, though millions lost their jobs. Meanwhile, essential workers continued to show up, risking their lives

could no longer keep them alive. At a designated time each evening, many of us leaned out of our windows, armed with pots and wooden spoons or just our odd-ball cacophony of human voices, and raised a ruckus in support of those workers. It was the least we could do, at a time when we had no idea what to do.

**THAT BEGAN IN MARCH**, the onset of a period in which most of us felt encased in our own lonely snow globes, looking out at a world that seemed to be falling apart. Realistically, the world had started falling apart long before: horrific Australian bushfires had been raging for months and would not be quelled until midyear—just in time for wildfire season in the American West, with its own brazen cycle of devastation. Pictures from either of these scenes—unsettling orange skies in normally paradisiacal parts of California, aerial views of doomy plumes of smoke covering the Australian landscape—would feel apocalyptic in any year. But in 2020, with so many of us hunkered down inside, it was particularly alarming to reckon with the fragility of the natural world. To think of it burning away—not least because we humans have failed it with our poor stewardship—invites despair.

# Essay

Because face it: humans can often be terrible, making rash, selfish decisions at best and murdering one another at worst. Through most of 2020, to be locked inside and looking out was to feel peculiarly powerless. And even as we grew to feel more remote from the world as individuals, it also seemed that individual nations had begun to curl in on themselves, motivated by misguided notions of their own power and self-sufficiency. What does an “America first” agenda mean in a country that fails its own citizens when it comes to protecting them from a deadly virus? In the worst months of 2020, we were a nation that could barely take care of itself, let alone help anyone else through a crisis. Worse yet, we were on our way to becoming a nation that didn’t want to help anyone else, even when it was in our own interest to do so. And democracy—not a badge you can earn, Scout-style, but a practice and a discipline that needs careful tending—came to seem wobbly and fragile even in places that have long professed to believe in it. As if it were a previously fashionable fad we’d all become tired of.

The pages on this strange calendar just kept turning, with the menace of the pandemic bleeding through all of it. Public figures who meant a great deal to us—Ruth Bader Ginsburg, John Lewis, Kobe Bryant, Chadwick Boseman—were wrested away. And in May, the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis ignited righteous anger not just across the country but around the world. The ruthlessness of that act revived attention to similar outrages earlier in the year, particularly the killings of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. It also reminded us how often, throughout history, Black people had suffered similar injustices, with no recourse, no means of changing the status quo. And then in August, even with the whole world watching, police in Kenosha, Wis., shot and partially paralyzed another Black man, Jacob Blake, as three of his children watched from the backseat of his car.

The toxic traditions of injustice and inequality in America are no secret. A sequence of tragic events finally caused more white people to wake up. Whether this heightened awareness of the racism that has plagued our country since its founding translates into actual change remains to be seen. That’s just one of many question marks waiting

**OUR MOST  
DEBILITATING  
THREAT THIS  
YEAR WAS A  
SENSE OF  
HELPLESSNESS**

for us in 2021 and beyond. After a year of so many changes, will we change radically too?

We learned a lot in 2020—but what, exactly, did we learn? The bromides are already flowing freely: We slowed down. We learned what was important. We played board games and did jigsaw puzzles and really talked and listened to our children. All of those are undoubtedly good things, and we nod in solemn agreement when our neighbors enumerate those little blessings. But do any of them capture the microtexture of what our lives were like this year? In our cities, when we were told we shouldn’t go out at all except for occasional exercise, walks in the sunshine became the thing we hung onto. How lucky we were to be able to do that, at least! In the suburbs, our restricted routines opened new routes of creativity: we might drive out of our way to catch a spectacular sunset, or finally tackle a hiking trail we’d always meant to explore. Then came the time when it became possible to meet a friend for a take-out glass of wine—this became the summer of lukewarm and acidic rosé in a plastic cup, but it represented a privilege and a pleasure that, in earlier months, we weren’t sure we’d have.

When museums finally reopened, carefully limiting capacity, we were able to reacquaint ourselves with paintings we love, with golden objects that had been placed in the tombs of kings 3,000 years ago, with vessels that our ancestors used for simple but essential tasks like toting water from here to there. To step close and examine a 400-year-old brushstroke connects you with the human who put it there. It bears remembering that the Renaissance came into being even as the Black Death decimated much of Europe. Michelangelo and Rembrandt painted in its shadow; the plague took Titian’s life. Our lives may be hard—this week, this month, this year—but look at what others did during eras of hardship. The trail of vitality and beauty they left behind is enough to make us cry, and sometimes we do—we can give them that much, at least.

**FOR THAT REASON**, perhaps many of us have felt through 2020 that it’s easier to connect with old art than with new. All manner of amusements have been streamed right into our homes, some of them quite wonderful. Because nearly all of our movie blockbusters and big year-end spectacles were canceled, we spent more time watching stories about human beings talking to one another rather than chasing down a bunch of magic stones from a bejeweled glove.

But even so, very little of what we watched helped us make sense of this moment. We’re bored, we’re anxious, we’re overworked or, worse, unemployed: We’ve had lots of time to get to know ourselves better, which often leaves us more bewildered and less trusting of our judgment. We’re drained. We give up and watch *The Office* again, though there are worse



things. This isn't the time to be hard on ourselves for not knowing exactly what we want, except to continue to remain healthy and alive, and to do what we can to make sure the same goes for our neighbors and loved ones. Amid the pandemic's worst days of New York's first wave—those days in April when the number of cases and deaths continued to climb, when refrigerated trucks lined up to keep corpses from rotting, when we had no idea how, or if, this horror could be stemmed—one of my neighbors stepped out onto his fire escape during the evening cheer and recreated Jimi Hendrix's "The Star Spangled Banner" on his guitar. The notes wailed and withered, swelled and crested, a story we'd heard a million times yet somehow needed to hear right then. Those of us listening from our windows—perhaps, out of laziness or depression, still in our pj's at 7 p.m.—clung to its ragged majesty. Why didn't our forebears choose a more singable national anthem? Because they were waiting for the invention of the electric guitar.

We're tired with good reason, but our flag is still there. This virus attacks the weakest and most vulnerable and has thus disproportionately affected certain portions of the population. All the rules and restrictions have made us weary, yet it's more important than ever to be vigilant. When the U.S. COVID-19 death toll reached 200,000, the magnitude of

^  
**DEMOCRACY**

In what could have been the year of its death, we patched it up just in time. But the body politic remains divided

that number seemed unimaginable. Now it pushes toward 300,000, though the promise of several vaccines at least offers hope. For now, members of our families, friends whom we love dearly, people we've never met but whose work has touched us continue to die. The virus is a blanket problem that hits all of us in painfully personal, targeted ways.

Meanwhile, our President himself contracted the virus and, just days after being pumped through with steroids and experimental treatments, emerged in public—still, almost beyond doubt, contagious—to crow that if he could kick the disease, we could too. Shortly thereafter, he lost an election and insisted he hadn't—more gaslighting, but at least we're having some success stopping up the valve that's emitting the fumes. Democracy isn't dead yet. Somehow we patched it up with a scrap of duct tape, just in time.

Will it hold? Americans are inherently optimistic. It's why our allies like us, even if they secretly mock us behind our backs—but we don't care! We're a nation with our thumbs perpetually stuck in our suspenders. Our optimism is our most ridiculous trait, and our greatest. It can't always be morning in America. Sometimes we have to get through the darkest hour just before. The aurora bides its time. —With reporting by JULIA ZORTHIAN/NEW YORK



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2020

TIME  
**KID**  
*of the*  
**YEAR**

**THE WORLD BELONGS TO THOSE WHO SHAPE IT. AND HOWEVER UNCERTAIN THAT WORLD MAY FEEL AT A GIVEN MOMENT, THE REASSURING REALITY SEEMS TO BE THAT EACH NEW GENERATION PRODUCES MORE OF WHAT THESE KIDS—SELECTED FROM A FIELD OF MORE THAN 5,000 AMERICANS, AGES 8 TO 16—HAVE ALREADY ACHIEVED: POSITIVE IMPACT, IN ALL SIZES.**



# GITANJALI RAO

LONE TREE, COLO. / 15

*By Angelina Jolie*

“Observe, brainstorm, research, build and communicate.” That is what the brilliant young scientist and inventor Gitanjali Rao told me about her process, over Zoom, from her home in Colorado, during a break in her virtual schooling. Just 15 years old, Rao has been selected from a field of more than 5,000 nominees as TIME’s first ever Kid of the Year. She told me about her astonishing work using technology to tackle issues ranging from contaminated drinking water to opioid addiction and cyberbullying, and about her mission to create a global community of young innovators to solve problems the world over. Even over video chat, her brilliant mind and generous spirit shone through, along with her inspiring message to other young people: don’t try to fix every problem, just focus on one that excites you. “If I can do it,” she said, “anybody can do it.”

**ANGELINA JOLIE:** When did you know that science was a passion of yours?

**GITANJALI RAO:** I feel like there wasn’t really one specific aha moment. I was always someone who wanted to put a smile on someone’s face. That was my everyday goal, just to make someone happy. And it soon turned into, How can we bring positivity and community to the place we live? And then when I was in second or third grade, I started thinking about how can we use science and technology to create social change. I was, like, 10 when I told my parents that I wanted to research carbon nanotube sensor technology at the Denver Water quality research lab, and my mom was like, “A what?” *[Editor’s note: they are cylindrical molecules made of carbon atoms that are very sensitive to chemical changes, and thus are good for detecting chemicals in water, among other uses.]* It was just that changing factor of, you know this work is going to be in our generation’s hands pretty soon. So if no one else is gonna do it, I’m gonna do it.

**JOLIE:** I love that. So much of what my generation should be doing is just making sure we do as little damage as possible to ensure that the next generation can take the lead.

I know one of your latest innovations helps prevent cyberbullying. Could you tell me about that?

**RAO:** It’s a service called Kindly—there’s an app and a Chrome extension—which is able to detect cyberbullying at an early stage, based on artificial-intelligence technology. I started to hard-code in

some words that could be considered bullying, and then my engine took those words and identified words that are similar. You type in a word or phrase, and it’s able to pick it up if it’s bullying, and it gives you the option to edit it or send it the way it is. The goal is not to punish. As a teenager, I know teenagers tend to lash out sometimes. Instead, it gives you the chance to rethink what you’re saying so that you know what to do next time around.

**JOLIE:** So you just put it on your kids’ phones?

**RAO:** Yeah. I put out a survey to parents, teachers and students, and I honestly expected that students don’t want to be micromanaged.

**JOLIE:** Right. My kids would be like, “Don’t touch my phone, I’ll do it myself.”

**RAO:** No, exactly, that’s what I would be like. But a lot of the teenagers were telling me that, you know, it doesn’t seem like I’m being micromanaged; it seems like I’m being given an opportunity to learn from my mistakes. So that’s what I was superexcited about, that they understood what the goal of it was.

**JOLIE:** The way you’re talking about technology as a tool to remind people and help them to grow seems like a very new and different thing. It’s so exciting to have such a forward-thinking young, and female, inventor.

Does that affect you in any way? It’s surprising because I think of women as being brilliant, but there are so few women in the science and tech fields.

**RAO:** I don’t look like your typical scientist. Everything I see on TV is that it’s an older, usually white man as a scientist. It’s weird to me that it was almost like people had assigned roles, regarding like their gender, their age, the color of their skin. My goal has really shifted not only from creating my own devices to solve the world’s problems, but inspiring others to do the same as well. Because, from personal experience, it’s not easy when you don’t see anyone else like you. So I really want to put out that message: If I can do it, you can do it, and anyone can do it.

**JOLIE:** I know you have these “innovation sessions.” Tell me about those.

**RAO:** I just looked at what worked for me and decided to share it with everyone else. So I made this process that I use for everything now: it’s observe, brainstorm, research, build, communicate. It started with a simple presentation and lesson plans, and then I started adding labs and contests that students could do. Now I’ve partnered with rural schools, girls in STEM organizations, museums all across the world,

*Gitanjali Rao loves  
to problem-solve  
and experiment with  
everything from  
artificial-intelligence  
technology to baking*



and bigger organizations like Shanghai International Youth Science and Technology group and the Royal Academy of Engineering in London to run innovation workshops.

The students that I work with, they just don't know where to start. I think that if you give them that spark that they can then build off of, then that changes everything. That means one more person in this world wants to come up with ideas to solve problems.

At the end of every workshop, everyone has something that they can start working on. If you can do this in 45 minutes to an hour, imagine what you can do if you spend months and months working on it. I'm so excited when I get an email like, "Hey, I attended your workshop four months ago and here's my finished product, I really love it, it's a shoe that calls 911."

**JOLIE:** That is insanely impressive. For so many young people, it takes a lot to find the confidence to be able to put an idea forward. You have a brilliant mind, clearly, but you are very, very generous with that mind, and that's just really wonderful. What are you working on now?

**RAO:** I'm currently working on an easy way to help detect biocontaminants in water—things like parasites. I'm hoping for this to be something that's inexpensive and accurate so that people in third-world countries can identify what's in their water.

And I recently hit my goal of 30,000 students who I have mentored, which is superexciting. It's like creating a community of innovators. I really hope the work that all of these kids are doing identifies innovation as a necessity and not something that's a choice anymore. I hope I can be a small part of that.

**JOLIE:** I think you are. Your generation is unique. You don't just accept what's being put forward, but really question it, and that's so important. I know there are many, many issues we're facing today. With your work on water contamination, is the environment something that's very much on your radar?

**RAO:** Yeah. Our generation is facing so many problems that we've never seen before. But then at the same time we're facing old problems that still exist. Like, we're sitting here in the middle of a new global pandemic, and we're also like still facing human-rights issues. There are problems that we did not create but that we now have to solve, like climate change and cyberbullying with the introduction of technology.

I think more than anything right now, we just need to find that one thing we're passionate about and solve it. Even if it's something as small as: I want to find an easy way to pick up litter. Everything makes a difference. Don't feel pressured to come up with something big.

'FIND ONE  
THING AND  
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BIG.'

Most of my work with the biocontaminants is based on a gene-based therapy solution which I'm still trying to figure out. I'm also working on a product that helps to diagnose prescription-opioid addiction at an early stage based on protein production of the mu opioid receptor gene. I've been really, really interested in genetics. That's what I like, so that's what I'm deciding to work on.

**JOLIE:** You know, one of the things you pointed out which is so important is that there is so much, you can get overwhelmed. When I started working in refugee camps, there are so many different issues to deal with within a displaced situation. You get overwhelmed, and you don't really move. I love what you're saying: find what you're passionate about, and don't try to solve everything. Every solution is a part of the bigger picture of what we have to do. I really hear that and appreciate you saying that.

Where do you get your news or do your research?

**RAO:** My pop-culture news is actually *MIT Tech Review*. I read it constantly. I think that's really where inspiration strikes: hearing about all these amazing people at schools like MIT and Harvard who are doing such amazing work with technology. And I try to connect it back to what I see out there and put it together in a way that no one's seen before.

**JOLIE:** When you're not doing all of these amazing things—because I feel like I'm speaking to a 60-year-old scientist in Geneva—what do you do that's just a 15-year-old thing?

**RAO:** Actually I spend more time doing 15-year-old things during quarantine. I bake an ungodly amount. It's not good, but it's baking. And, like, it's science too.

**JOLIE:** So the science of the kitchen is not your specialty?

**RAO:** I guess not, no. To be fair, most of the time we don't have eggs at home, or, like, flour, so I have to, like, go online and search *eggless, flourless, sugarless cookies*, and then I try to make that. I made bread recently and it was good, so I'm proud of myself.

**JOLIE:** Well, I'm just so happy to get to know you a little bit. I'm sure I'll be using your inventions in years to come and just being in awe of you as I watch you do more and more in your life, and I can say, "I met her once."

*Jolie, a TIME contributing editor, is an Academy Award-winning actor and special envoy of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees*

SAN JOSE, CALIF. / 14

## TYLER GORDON

*Artistic phenom*

HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN TYLER GORDON HAS faced more challenges than some people experience in a lifetime. He used a wheelchair for nearly two years after breaking bones in his legs and hips because of a vitamin D deficiency. He was born deaf and underwent a surgery at age 5 that gave him some hearing, but he still speaks with a stutter. In elementary school, he got bullied so much that he barely spoke.

“His escape was to not speak at all; he’d nod his head or point, he was so afraid,” says Gordon’s mother Nicole Kindle.

But at 10, Gordon found his artistic voice. After watching his mom paint, he decided to try it himself and won first place in a school art contest with a portrait he’d made of the principal. In the four years since, he’s painted more than 500 portraits of Black icons who inspire him, most recently Vice President–elect Kamala Harris, who called him right before Thanksgiving to tell him he’s “amazing” and has a “gift.”

“Sometimes I can’t talk and get words out, so I speak through my art,” Gordon says. Painting helps him move past the bullying, which he still experiences; he lost a front tooth in one incident earlier this year. “It helps me take my mind somewhere else. I don’t want to keep thinking about that same moment for the rest of my life.”

His big break came in 2018, when his portrait of NBA star Kevin Durant went viral and caught the eye of the player’s mother, who bought it for \$300. Celebrities started calling for commissions. Among the stars he’s painted and met are Janet Jackson, Kevin Hart, Jennifer Lopez and Alex Rodriguez. In 2019, his portrait of the Central Park Five fetched more than \$100,000 at auction, and he won a 2020 Global Child Prodigy Award. This past summer, in the wake of George Floyd’s death, Gordon used his canvas to raise awareness about victims of police brutality, feeling a particular affinity to 23-year-old Elijah McClain, who also had special needs and an artistic side.

Media interviews and speaking engagements have helped Gordon combat his fear of public speaking, and he hosts virtual painting classes every Wednesday on Instagram, where he boasts nearly 50,000 followers.

“Since he started painting, I can’t get the kid to be quiet,” says Kindle. “He’s not afraid of the stutter anymore.” Now, by starting his own online platform for video tutorials called Tongue Tye’d, he hopes he can show other kids how to use art to overcome their challenges as well. —OLIVIA B. WAXMAN



*Tyler Gordon first made his mark with celebrity portraits*

**‘SOMETIMES  
I CAN’T TALK  
AND GET  
WORDS OUT,  
SO I SPEAK  
THROUGH  
MY ART.’**

COLUMBIA, MO. / 14

## JORDAN REEVES

*A fresh perspective*

FOR JORDAN REEVES, HAVING A LIMB DIFFERENCE has helped her envision a more accessible world. The 14-year-old designer and activist was born with a left arm that stopped growing beneath her elbow, a physical difference that helped ignite her passion for design. In the past four years, Reeves has created a 3-D-printable prosthesis for kids that shoots out biodegradable sparkles, consulted for companies like Mattel to create toys that affirm limb difference and even co-written a memoir about what she's learned from growing up with a disability.

Reeves sees good design as an avenue to empower those with disabilities, which is why she and her mother co-founded Born Just Right, a nonprofit that celebrates kids with physical differences and gives them design and STEM resources so they can come up with their own solutions.

"A lot of kids with disabilities have a different point of view on the world, because the world isn't made for us, really," she says. "We have this great design mindset because we grow up problem-solving. It's a pretty cool thing." But one of the biggest barriers she sees kids facing is finding the confidence to innovate. "It's so important to believe in yourself," she says. She found her confidence with the help of her mother, and by seeing the positive results of some of her early work. "[When I started,] I was just 10 and I was able to make an impact, which is so cool," she says. "Go for it, don't doubt yourself, don't think about what other people think—you can make change no matter how big or how small."

Although 2020 has brought new challenges, it hasn't slowed Reeves down. She's been hosting digital-design workshops for Born Just Right, appeared at the United State of Women conference to advocate for gender equity, and was the youngest of 30 global leaders recognized this summer at a 30th-anniversary commemoration of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. She also co-founded the Steam Squad, an online organization that gets kids involved in science, technology, engineering, math and the arts. Up next: working with Microsoft to design a guitar that anyone with mobility challenges can play.

She's inspired, she says, by the tenacity of her generation. "It's so sick knowing that I'm a part of a group of people who are working toward the future," Reeves says. "The world needs a lot of work at times, and it's important to be there to do as much as you can." —CADY LANG



*Jordan Reeves runs Make Just Right, a youth design consultancy, through her nonprofit*

**'A LOT OF KIDS WITH  
DISABILITIES ...  
HAVE THIS GREAT  
DESIGN MINDSET  
BECAUSE  
WE GROW UP  
PROBLEM-SOLVING.'**

LEESBURG, VA. / 10

## BELLEN WOODARD

### *Insisting on inclusion*

BELLEN WOODARD IS ONLY 10 YEARS OLD, BUT she's on a mission for inclusion. She has created her own line of crayons in tones that reflect the wide spectrum of skin colors she sees in the world, claiming the title of world's first crayon activist.

The idea came when one of Woodard's classmates asked her for a "skin color" crayon. Woodard, who was the only Black student in her grade, says she knew the classmate meant the peach-color crayon. When she told her mother Tosha Woodard about what had happened, Tosha suggested that next time she pass her classmate a brown crayon instead. "But I didn't want to do that," Woodard says. "I told her next time I was actually going to ask what color they want because it could be lots of different colors." Then she got to work making a set of 12 "skin color" crayons.

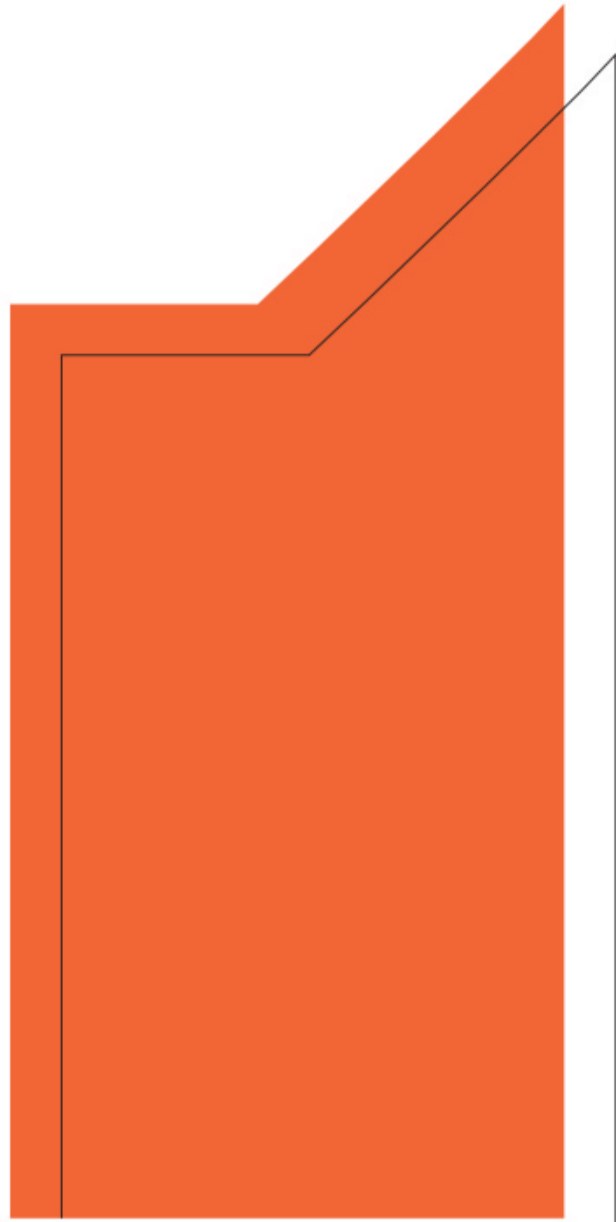
Although research shows that children can begin to understand and believe racial stereotypes by age 4, an August study by researchers at Skidmore College and Boston University found that parents often delay conversations about race with children because they underestimate children's ability to understand the concept. Tosha says her daughter's crayons have proved a great age-appropriate tool to spread a message of inclusion.

In spring 2019, Woodard launched More Than Peach, a nonprofit that has donated more than \$40,000 worth of multicultural crayons and sketchbooks to schoolchildren across the country. Her packet of crayons has been added to the permanent collection at the Virginia Museum of History & Culture.

Woodard says she was surprised by how quickly her message spread. She started by simply talking to her teacher about the crayons, then they were picked up by the rest of her school, and now she gets calls to speak—and distribute her crayons—at schools across the country. In March, she received a special recognition from the Virginia state legislature for her work.

Woodard's crayons are named for things found in nature—there's "Sahara" and "Reef," "Koko" and "Serengeti"—but each is also clearly labeled "skin color."

"I wanted to have crayons for a purpose," she says. "The peach crayon is a skin color ... but is it the only one? No, it isn't. My different shades of peaches and browns can hopefully match everyone including me and my friends and my classmates. Just everyone." —JASMINE AGUILERA



*'MY DIFFERENT  
SHADES OF PEACHES  
AND BROWNS CAN  
HOPEFULLY MATCH  
EVERYONE, INCLUDING  
ME AND MY FRIENDS  
AND MY CLASSMATES.'*

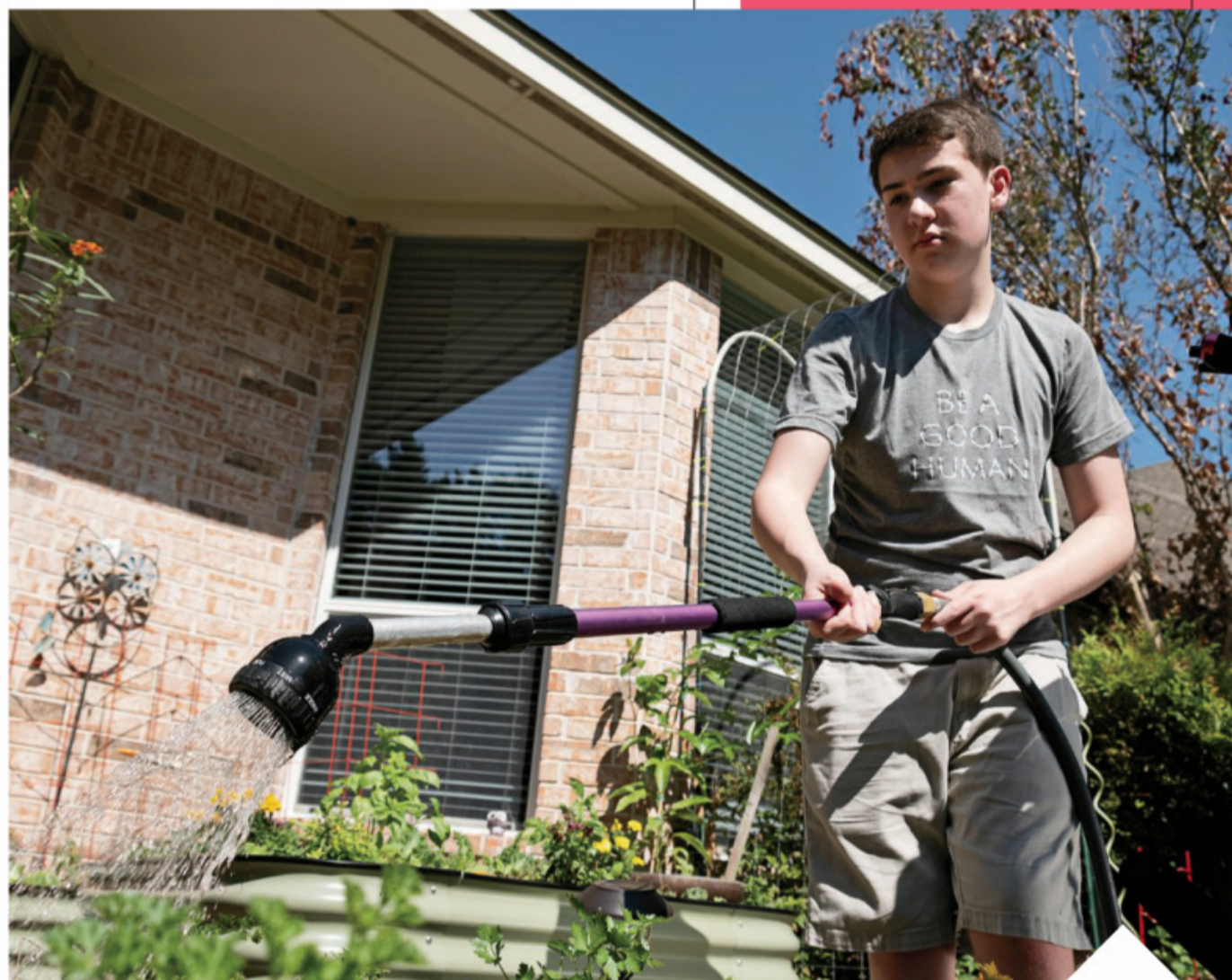
*In addition to her work in the art world, Bellen Woodard also aspires to be an astronaut and President of the U.S.*



AUSTIN, TEXAS / 16

## IAN MCKENNA

*Growing a food bank*



IAN MCKENNA WAS IN THIRD GRADE WHEN HE learned that nearly a quarter of the kids at his Austin school weren't getting enough to eat at home. He wanted to help, but local volunteer organizations turned him away, saying he was too young. So he decided to find his own solution. For years, he had been gardening with his mother, and they often distributed their extra vegetables to the neighbors. Why not give the produce to a soup kitchen? "Then I thought, I'm good at gardening," says McKenna, now 16. "Maybe I could try to start a garden that's meant solely to help feed these people who are in need." Better yet, he thought, why not plant a garden at school, so that kids in need could take food home?

McKenna persuaded his school to set aside space for a garden; then he asked the community for donations of seeds and equipment. Other students donated their time. Within months, McKenna's garden was producing lettuces, spinach, tomatoes, cucumbers and squash for students and their families. Now, seven years later, McKenna's Giving Garden project has expanded to five area schools in addition to his own backyard garden, and he has provided more than 20,000 lb. of organic produce (enough for 25,000 meals) to Austin families and food pantries.

For most of his gardening activities, McKenna wears the same T-shirt in different colors, emblazoned with what has become a personal motto: BE A GOOD HUMAN. To him, that means helping in any way you can, no matter your age. Even a smile can make a difference in someone's life, he says. "It lets them know that they are important. It can change their day."

When COVID-19 hit the U.S., McKenna redoubled his efforts, cooking up to 100 meals out of his home to distribute to the hungry on the weekends, so that he could give them one less thing to worry about. When social distancing meant that volunteers couldn't work on community garden plots, he started offering online tutorials and a gardening hotline so families could grow at home. Once he realized that some people didn't know how to prepare the more unusual vegetables in his gardens, like the 100-lb. bullet head wax melons he distributes by the slice, he started offering virtual cooking classes (the melons cook, and taste, like zucchini). While gardening is his core focus, McKenna says he is always looking for new ways to help the hungry. "Hunger doesn't stop," he says. "So I won't stop until it does." —ARYN BAKER

'I THOUGHT, MAYBE

I COULD START A

GARDEN THAT'S

MEANT SOLELY TO

HELP FEED THESE

PEOPLE WHO

ARE IN NEED.'

*Ian McKenna's favorite thing to grow is chilies, which he uses to make salsa*

anime off



**IN A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER, WITH SO MUCH OF THE WORLD CONFINED AT HOME, WE NEEDED CULTURE MORE THAN EVER—TO DISTRACT US, UPLIFT US AND REMIND US OF LIVES BEYOND OUR OWN. THESE ARE THE BEST OF THE MOVIES, TV SHOWS, ALBUMS, SONGS AND PODCASTS THAT KEPT US GOING IN 2020**

ILLUSTRATION BY JILLIAN ADEL FOR TIME

*Time Off* is reported by *Simmons Shah* and *Julia Zorthian*



# THE 10 BEST MOVIES

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

1

## FIRST COW

KELLY REICHARDT

In the verdant Pacific Northwest of the 1820s, two settlers—a baker and a Chinese immigrant with an entrepreneurial streak—start a business selling fried cakes made with the purloined milk of a local cow. The enterprise takes off, as their friendship deepens. Both tranquil and dazzling, *First Cow* is a song of this weird, rough-edged stretch of stolen land we call America, a place where tenderness is still the most precious commodity.

2

## COLLECTIVE

ALEXANDER NANAU

*Collective*, which follows a team of Romanian journalists as they uncover a health care scandal whose tentacles reach deep into a corrupt government, is that rare documentary that plays like a political thriller. But it's also a deeply moving testament to both the power and the necessity of investigative journalism—in any country run by a government that strives to distort the truth to serve its own goals.

3

## THE TRIAL OF THE CHICAGO 7

AARON SORKIN

Sorkin details the half-circuslike, half-somber drama of an intense pocket of American history, during which a group of antiwar activists

were tried for conspiring to incite violence at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The result is a lively work attuned to civic responsibility and small-d democratic ideals, a movie as simultaneously entertaining and galvanizing as anything you'll see this year.

4

## DAVID BYRNE'S AMERICAN UTOPIA

SPIKE LEE

This grand and glorious filmed record of Byrne's hit Broadway show is a work of great joy and expressiveness, a tower of song with room for everybody. As performed by Byrne and his troupe of 11 musicians and dancers, the numbers—some of them recent Byrne compositions, others drawn from his body of work with Talking Heads—feel at once fresh and familiar, inclusive but also mildly explosive. Lee captures perfectly the urgency of Byrne's intent: to live in any meaningful way, we must stay connected. It's a principle so glaringly simple that it's radical.

5

## LOVERS ROCK

STEVE MCQUEEN

This is the shortest of the films in McQueen's *Small Axe* anthology, but its hypnotic beauty is immeasurable. In London circa 1980, West Indians—often denied entrance to clubs—would host their own house parties, swaying on the dance floor as all manner of amorous possibilities played out, or failed to. *Lovers Rock* captures the energy and promise of just one of those nights, as well as what it means to find solace and solidarity within the larger, colder world. Somehow it holds a universe of time in just 68 poetic minutes.

6

## EMMA.

AUTUMN DE WILDE

Though Jane Austen has never been exactly obscure, her career as a superstar of mugs and cloth tote bags is a fairly recent development. This bright and lively adaptation of Austen's 1815 novel gets back to basics, reminding us why her work has endured. Anya Taylor-Joy plays the eponymous meddlesome heroine; Johnny Flynn is the family friend who watches in horror as she makes one misstep after another. These two are wonderful, together and separately, in a work that feels both modern and authentic in the best way. It invites everyone, diehard Austenites and newbies alike, into its embrace.

7

## WOLFWALKERS

TOMM MOORE AND ROSS STEWART

This beguiling animated delight tells the story of an English girl in 17th century Ireland who longs to become a wolf hunter like her father—only to befriend a mysterious forest-dwelling punkette who carries the secret of the wolves within her very being. *Wolfwalkers* is brushed with the mystical spirit of a Kate Bush song, rendered in a dazzling midcentury-modern design scheme. Its spell is irresistible.

8

## NOMADLAND

CHLOÉ ZHAO

What's the meaning of home? Is it the dwelling we live in, or a spirit that dwells within us? That's the question Zhao explores in the radiant and perceptive *Nomadland*. Frances McDormand gives a sterling performance as a widow who sells off her house and takes to the road in a van kitted out with the essentials for living, picking up seasonal work where she can. Though she's on her own, she's never fully alone. The people she meets along her travels have their quirks, but it's compassion and generosity that guide and unite them.





< *Yahya Abdul-Mateen II stars as Black Panther Party co-founder Bobby Seale in The Trial of the Chicago 7*

**9**  
**MISS JUNETEENTH**  
 CHANNING GODFREY  
 PEOPLES

In an America so divided that it sometimes seems each inhabitant is the sole citizen of his or her own stubborn country, writer-director Peoples' debut feature is a balm. Nicole Beharie gives a marvelous performance as a former pageant winner who tries to project her own dreams onto her teenage daughter, though this story is universal as well as personal. Set in Fort Worth, a city with a long tradition of celebrating the day in 1865 when enslaved people in Texas finally learned they'd been freed, *Miss Juneteenth* is a tapestry of a whole community, a reminder that this country is much bigger—and richer, and more diverse—than many of us tend to think.

**10**  
**BILL & TED FACE THE MUSIC**  
 DEAN PARISOT

In an unequivocally terrible year, who didn't need a crazy, ebullient, deeply gratifying burst of optimism? Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves reappear in the roles they originated some three decades ago: Then, they were goofy but openhearted teenage guitar obsessives from San Dimas, Calif., who changed the world via a time-travel phone booth. Today, they're husbands and dads facing all the insecurities that come with middle age—and yet in some ways their story is just beginning. Through their daughters, they've laid the groundwork for another act of world-saving derring-do, a reaffirmation that our collective dreams are our true strength. This work of ramshackle earnestness and generosity lit a path through a very dark summer. You can't ask for more from a comedy.

CPI SYNDICATION

# THE 10 BEST TELEVISION SHOWS

BY JUDY BERMAN

1

## I MAY DESTROY YOU

HBO

A young woman goes out drinking, wakes up with a brutal hangover and, some time later, realizes she was raped. Three years after the #MeToo revolution, you may think you've heard this one before,

but you haven't. For Michaela Coel—the 33-year-old British writer, director and actor who created and starred in this semiautobiographical masterpiece—the assault opens up a path to the core of her character's psyche, forcing her to address decades of formative trauma. Consent gets a complete deconstruction. Coel gives fresh consideration to race, gender, sexuality, family, social media and—on a meta level—the difficulty of making art that feels true. That the show ultimately comes down on the side of compassion, for ourselves most of all, made it a beacon in dark times. Equal parts physical and cerebral, Coel's humor made painful themes digestible for an audience exhausted by everyday life in a pandemic. You could say that in 2020, we all confronted annihilation. "I may destroy you," the year taunted us. If you're reading this, it failed.

2

## BETTER CALL SAUL

AMC

At the end of its third season, *Better Call Saul* stood at a crossroads. With the demise of a central character, the writers stumbled a bit at first—but by the time Season 4 wrapped up, they'd created a crushing indictment of a justice system that, from antihero Jimmy McGill's perspective, only pretends to believe in rehabilitation. Jimmy emerged in this year's fifth and best season liberated from his quest to court the approval of that system—a transformation solidified by his adoption of the pseudonym Saul Goodman. He took the new persona out for a spin in a harrowing, allegorical trudge through the desert, the culmination of an arc that brought him closer to future partner in crime Mike Ehrmantraut even as it tested his seemingly doomed relationship with the love of his life, Kim Wexler.

<

*Michaela Coel has said that she experiences the writing process as a kind of "psychological death"*



**3**  
**IMMIGRATION NATION**  
**NETFLIX**

How did we get from “Give me your tired, your poor” to kids in cages? Immigration is a huge, complicated yet urgent issue in America, and this docuseries comes closer to providing a comprehensive look at it than any other work in recent memory. Granted astonishing access to the ICE apparatus, directors Christina Clusiau and Shaul Schwarz found prejudice, confusion and cruelty. But the series is most powerful when it gives policy debates a human face: a toddler torn from his father’s arms, migrant workers organizing to demand pay from a politician’s shady construction company, a woman detained after bringing her granddaughter to the U.S. to save her from a forced marriage. As the turmoil at our borders persists, and a President-elect known for his empathy weighs his priorities, this is essential viewing.

**4**  
**MRS. AMERICA**  
**FX ON HULU**

In the early '70s, feminists seemed poised to make gender equity the law of the land with the Equal Rights Amendment. By 1980, however, the ERA had stalled out, Ronald Reagan had been elected President, and the movement was fraying. What happened? Creator Dahvi Waller offered one compelling explanation in a miniseries that followed conservative *bête noire* Phyllis Schlafly (Cate Blanchett) as she waged war on the amendment. Along with assembling a remarkable cast to play second-wave heroes—Rose Byrne as Gloria

Steinem! Uzo Aduba as Shirley Chisholm! Margo Martindale as Bella Abzug! Tracey Ullman as Betty Friedan!—this sharp, thoughtful show interrogated why the tide often turns against righteous movements.

**5**  
**THE QUEEN’S GAMBIT**  
**NETFLIX**

This glossy miniseries about an orphan chess prodigy gave a nation of homebound viewers the chance to live vicariously through Beth Harmon, a teenage force of nature (played by an incandescent Anya Taylor-Joy) who upends the sport’s midcentury establishment. Many fans even purchased chess sets of their own. Not since the heyday of another '60s-set drama, *Mad Men*, has a TV show been so effectively translated into a lifestyle. And like that predecessor, *The Queen’s Gambit* is more than pretty surfaces. Adapted from Walter Tevis’ novel, it weighs the price of genius, the psychology of addiction and the long-term effects of a lonely childhood—and evolves into a vindication of community.

**6**  
**CITY SO REAL**  
**NAT GEO**

Chicago politics is notoriously nasty, so maybe a docuseries on a local mayoral race was a no-brainer. But Steve James (*Hoop Dreams*, *America to Me*) isn’t just any director, and his take on the city’s 2019 election packs in plenty of insight along with the intrigue. Candidates embody different aspects of Chicago: political insiders and outsiders, moguls and public servants, a white law-enforcement veteran and Black activists. The most memorable wisdom, however, comes from regular Chicagoans. Their experiences flesh out a city—and, in many cases, a country—coming apart at the seams. A final episode set during COVID lockdown sums up what might be this year’s most salient lesson: a society

immersed in crises of its own making will be at a perilous disadvantage when unforeseen tragedy strikes.

**7**  
**BETTY**  
**HBO**

The world of Crystal Moselle’s *Skate Kitchen*, a fiction film starring young women from the real, eponymous New York skateboard crew, was too rich and fluid to be confined to a feature. So the director became a TV creator, casting many of the same skaters in vignettes that made plot subordinate to portraiture. These characters are the show’s masterpiece. And the very structure of *Betty*—which HBO has renewed for a second season—evokes a skate park, crowded with young people in motion, littered with obstacles, punctuated by emotional peaks and valleys. In a year defined by confinement, each poetic episode was a taste of freedom.

**8**  
**P-VALLEY**  
**STARZ**

Along with *Hustlers* and the rise of dancer turned rapper Cardi B, *P-Valley*—a noir drama set at a Black-owned strip club in the Mississippi Delta—represents an evolution in the way pop culture sees sex workers. Adapted from a play by creator Katori Hall, the show inhabits the struggling Pynk, where stripping is a sport, an art and a means of survival for characters marginalized by whiteness and patriarchy. In an approach that subverts the male gaze without sacrificing immersive sequins-and-trap-beats sex appeal, Hall zooms in on tensed quad muscles and frustrated ambitions more than on bare breasts. The result is a finely wrought foray into a misunderstood subculture that’s a pure pleasure to watch.

**9**  
**BOJACK HORSEMAN**  
**NETFLIX**

*BoJack Horseman* emerged from Netflix’s early original programming efforts as a long shot—an animated dramedy about a horse

who’d starred in a saccharine '90s sitcom, then spent decades drifting idly from one substance-fueled crisis to the next. Creator Raphael Bob-Waksberg used *BoJack*’s “Hollywood” setting to dissect male antiheroes, pop culture’s thirst for redemption narratives and the entertainment industry in general. And in its sixth and final season, he tackled the daunting task of ending a story about one (horse)man’s eternal cycle of relapse and recovery with humor, authenticity and grace. The last two episodes were masterpieces unto themselves, balancing hope for the future with the awareness that *BoJack* had inflicted indelible pain on the people who loved him most.

**City So Real sums up the salient lesson of 2020: a society immersed in crises of its own making will be at a perilous disadvantage when unforeseen tragedy strikes**

**10**  
**DESUS & MERO**  
**SHOWTIME**

In a year of endless challenges, *Desus & Mero* thrived. Pushed out of the studio by COVID, Daniel “Desus Nice” Baker and Joel “The Kid Mero” Martinez convened from their respective homes for what amounted to the funniest Zoom meeting on earth. While they’ve always been hilarious, all the bad news brought out another side of the Bronx-native duo. They drew attention to structural injustice and talked openly about mental health; their mere presence brought comfort amid isolation. In 2020, they’ve seen their show renewed for a third season, catalyzed the rise of *Desus & Mero* writer Ziwe Fumudoh and published a best-selling book. The world is their chopped-cheese sandwich.

# THE 10 BEST ALBUMS

BY RAISA BRUNER AND ANDREW R. CHOW

## 1 FOLKLORE TAYLOR SWIFT

After exploring the upper reaches of pop maximalism on her past projects, Swift makes a powerful about-face on *Folklore*, an album that's as much an experiment with emotional delicacy as it is a lush take on the intersection of folksy storytelling and contemporary pop. Swift has been a public figure for well over a decade, but never before has she sounded so consistently vulnerable, so at home in her voice and so willing to play with sounds: hypnotic string plucks, angelic chorus hums, the unexpected gruffness of Bon Iver's vocals on "Exile." Her lyrics, meanwhile, are sharp and tinged with layered bittersweetness. Some trade on the nostalgia of adolescence, others on an imagined American mythology, but the best offer hazy, intimate glimpses into the messiness of relationships and their frayed endings: *Folklore* is Swift finding the beauty—and power—in stillness and reflection, perhaps the most we could hope from quarantine.

## 2 UNGODLY HOUR CHLOE X HALLE

Sometimes they would don thigh-high metallic boots and dance through strobing orbs of light; sometimes they'd perform brisk routines on tennis courts; sometimes they'd strum acoustic guitars. Every live performance that the sister act Chloe x Halle delivered this summer was unique, but the source material—songs from this album—was uniformly strong. While many stars release increasingly baggy albums to maximize streaming numbers, the Bailey sisters took the opposite route, crafting 13 unimpeachable songs, each with inventive production flourishes and endless replay value, to craft a wholly modern and cohesive brand of R&B that borrows from the best aspects of several eras of the genre.

## 3 FETCH THE BOLT CUTTERS FIONA APPLE

The first track on *Fetch the Bolt Cutters* is titled "I Want You to Love Me." But Apple, it turns out, has ditched any desire for public approval. Rightly so: decades into a career during which she's been both hailed as a critical darling and regarded with confusion, this album is the art of a woman shedding preconceptions, baring her teeth—and her insecurities—and finding catharsis in the process of creation. Recorded entirely in her Venice Beach home with a small circle of trusted collaborators, it has a homegrown intimacy and a sense of discovery in each track—whether it's the bark of a dog or a cleansing shriek. The freedom she unlocks is potent.

## 4 GASLIGHTER THE CHICKS

It had been 14 years since the former Dixie Chicks released an album. On *Gaslighter*, the beloved trio of musicians came back with a vengeance. Quite literally: *Gaslighter* seethes with righteous rage ("Sleep at Night"), conveys a desire for comeuppance and change ("March March"), and—in its most wrenching moments—celebrates the glory of female solidarity ("Julianna Calm Down"). That the Chicks have been classified for years as a "country" act has never sat right with them, and *Gaslighter* shows why. While it has twangs of bluegrass, sweet vocal harmonies and the signature sound of Martie Maguire's fiddle, it's a project that's more about storytelling than form.

## Fetch the Bolt Cutters is the art of a woman shedding preconceptions, baring her teeth—and her insecurities—and finding catharsis in the process of creation

## 5 ETERNAL ATAKE LIL UZI VERT

The Philadelphia rapper teased the release of *Eternal Atake* for years, and the final result didn't disappoint: his album is colorful, ambitious, silly and extraterrestrial. Lil Uzi Vert is a more technically adept rapper than he perhaps gets credit for—he proves his chops on the rapid-fire "Homecoming"—but his foremost strengths are his incandescent melodicism, elastic sonic palette and giddy sense of absurdism. You can practically see his childlike smile through your headphones.

## 6 SET MY HEART ON FIRE IMMEDIATELY PERFUME GENIUS

*Set My Heart on Fire Immediately* begins with a gasp and then, across its 13-track run, feels like one long, ragged exhale of relief. Musician and performer Mike Hadreas has spent his career taking glittering shards of sound and turning them into surprising compositions, songs where you can almost see the cracks gilded by his rich, ornate orchestrations. They're all the more beautiful for it. His take on pop is ethereal but grounded, whether in the gritty pseudo-punk of "Describe" or haunting synth twangs of "Jason." He even veers into glam rock, as on the operatic "Nothing at All," burnishing it with whisper-light vocals. Here, he's at his most joyful and also his most opaque, letting the listener decide whether that first breath is one of pain or release. It might be both.

## 7 AGÜITA GABRIEL GARZÓN-MONTANO

The sonic trademarks that have long defined Garzón-Montano are all present on the bilingual Casanova's latest offering, *Agüita*: there are brooding funk jams, Fender Rhodes swells, psychedelic orchestral vignettes and an exquisite use of blank space. But Garzón-Montano also leaps toward the center of the pop world by trying his hand at reggaeton and Latin trap on songs like "Muñeca," "Mira My Look" and "Agüita." He genuinely revels in the genre's bombast, injecting his usually serious or sensuous lyrics with doses of humor. Taken as a whole, this album shows an artist who understands his expertise while also pushing his bounds.

## 8 WE'RE NEW AGAIN— A REIMAGINING MAKAYA MCCRAVEN

After a few spins of McCraven's reconceptualization of Gil



Scott-Heron's final album, it's easy to forget that he wasn't the towering poet's original co-conspirator in the first place. McCraven, a jazz drummer, is the third artist to attempt the daunting task of laying sonic architecture around Scott-Heron's gravelly musings: Richard Russell and Jamie xx preceded him on the acclaimed albums *I'm New Here* and *We're New Here*, respectively. But

^  
*Taylor Swift's Folklore, recorded during the pandemic and released in July, was influenced by indie rock and folk music*

McCraven creates something that sounds both wholly invigorating and like Scott-Heron's aesthetic home. And while McCraven's all-star band creates a diasporic collage of experimental Black music—J Dilla breakbeats, free-jazz brambles, Afro-Latin grooves—the spotlight remains squarely on Scott-Heron and his breathtaking narratives of insomnia, alienation and family.

9

## MISS ANTHROPOCENE GRIMES

While she's always been a cyberpunk innovator, on her album *Miss Anthropocene*, Grimes envisions a different universe entirely, one where she embodies a dystopian antigoddess of the climate crisis. (Yes, really.) But the music tells a slightly different story, in which her creative impulses—toward destruction, esoteric noise and unexpected collaboration—coalesce into a surprising, cohesive harmony. This is clearest on "Delete Forever," the closest she comes to a ballad, a sweet rock-'n'-roll lullaby to the allure of addiction. And it's most revelatory on "4ÆM," a rave opera with dramatically different acts that mixes the electronic with the exotic. *Miss Anthropocene* is also playful: Grimes has a light touch, delivering every nihilistic line with a wink. And while some tracks deliver screeching walls of sound, they resolve into catchy melodies—her best yet. Grimes may be a controversial figure in today's pop culture, but as her music pushes buttons, so too does it push the industry forward.

10

## CELIA TIWA SAVAGE

The latest album from Savage, a Nigerian singer-songwriter whom many call the Queen of Afrobeats, is characterized by an infectious buoyancy. A veteran of the American, British and Nigerian music industries, Savage has an innate understanding of how various strains of music from the Black diaspora fit together, so R&B, rap, Afrobeats and global pop coalesce seamlessly on the record. Savage's featherweight and precise voice flips fluidly between English and Yoruba, while bright horn sections drift in and out. She also shows off an alluring chemistry with an array of artists, from Sam Smith to Davido. All these inspired contributions make *Celia* a standout in a year of Nigerian creative excellence.

# THE 10 BEST SONGS

BY RAISA BRUNER AND ANDREW R. CHOW

1

## 'PEOPLE, I'VE BEEN SAD'

CHRISTINE AND THE QUEENS

Many artists wrote quarantine songs in 2020, but none conveyed loss and alienation like the agonizing, hypnotic "People, I've Been Sad," written by Héloïse Letissier last year as she grieved the death of her mother. It's a mantra for accepting communal suffering and making peace with tragedy—and her soaring voice makes it hard not to howl along.

2

## 'WAP'

CARDI B AND MEGAN THEE STALLION

Few rappers today have the cultural cachet of the firebrand Cardi B and the ebullient Megan Thee Stallion. With "WAP," they united for an infectious, juicy song that shook up the charts and—with its celebratory, explicit and uproarious lyrics—drummed up both controversy and conversation around sexuality.

3

## 'YO PERREO SOLA' (REMIX)

BAD BUNNY, IVY QUEEN AND NESI

This remix, which adds two generations of Puerto Rican hip-hop to Bad Bunny's husky voice, with Ivy Queen and Nesi, makes the original song only more exuberant. If packed clubs are in our future, "Yo Perreo Sola" should be a dance-floor staple for decades.

4

## 'LITTLE NOKIA'

BREE RUNWAY

A multihyphenate Brit who can rap like Missy, dance like Janet and snarl like Joan Jett, Bree Runway makes a mesmerizing turn from bratty to lofty as she moves from verse to chorus in this vicious rap-rock hybrid.

5

## 'GOOD NEWS'

MAC MILLER

"So tired of being so tired," Mac Miller sings. "Why I gotta build something beautiful just to go set it on fire?" Miller was known for wrestling his demons in song; "Good News," his first posthumous single following his 2018 death, is deceptively effortless but rejects easy listening.

6

## 'THINK ABOUT THINGS'

DAOI FREYR

The funky, futuristic "Think About Things" is the ultimate earworm: a warm, loving slice of electropop with a slinky synth line and catchy chorus. Initially destined for the kitschy Eurovision Song Contest, the song took on a life of its own after the annual competition was canceled for the first time in its 65-year history.

7

## '7 SUMMERS'

MORGAN WALLEN

As the pandemic erased many of the best aspects of summer—tailgates, block parties, family reunions, vacations and cookouts—Morgan Wallen released "7 Summers." It's a morose journal entry of a song that became one of the year's foremost anthems, his watercolor guitars serving as a portal to a more sun-kissed state of mind.



Puerto Rican singer and rapper Bad Bunny's "Yo Perreo Sola" is a transgressive anthem that should be a dance-floor staple for years

8

## 'BACK DOOR'

STRAY KIDS

Contemporary pop out of South Korea is tough to classify—like this song, which exuberantly co-opts nearly every musical style. An artful Frankenstein that's as catchy as it is complex, it features dramatic air horns, slinky R&B breaks, jazz interludes, a trap chorus and electronic beats that would rile up festival crowds.

9

## 'UWRONGO'

PRINCE KAYBEE, SHIMZA, BLACK MOTION AND AMI FAKU

A low-burning triumph of exquisitely picked guitars and

splasy cymbal work from some of the brightest stars of South Africa's flourishing house-music scene serves as a perfect backdrop for rising Afrosoul singer Ami Faku, who sings through an ethereal, undulating melody.

10

## 'LONG ROAD HOME'

ONEOHTRIX POINT NEVER

The strings that kick off "Long Road Home" are so urgent they transport listeners straight into the thrall of a concert hall—then settle into a sparkling song that surprises until its final note. Its composer, Daniel Lopatin, who was responsible for the soundtrack to the hit 2019 thriller *Uncut Gems*, has said this song is about learning to live in uncertainty. As he cuts, chops and shifts with manic energy, making use of vocals by Caroline Polachek, he maintains that sense of operatic confusion.

# THE 10 BEST PODCASTS

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

## 1 NICE WHITE PARENTS

Serial Productions takes a fascinating deep dive into New York City public schools, among the most segregated in the U.S. Host Chana Joffe-Walt presents a stunning portrait of white parents who often choose their children's future test scores over the diverse community they ostensibly desire. Once you've heard this show, it's difficult to stop thinking about it—or debating possible solutions with other listeners.

## 2 CODE SWITCH

Gene Demby and Shereen Marisol Meraji sit down with

*Immunocompromised writer Emily V. Gordon and husband Kumail Nanjiani are experts at being stuck inside*

guests for frank explorations of issues of race, like why Vice President-elect Kamala Harris' Indian heritage has gotten less attention than her Black identity, or the origins of the "Karen" meme. They draw from personal experience, grounding what could be an academic debate in a show that offers listeners an exceptionally clear understanding of the current state of politics and culture.

## 3 STAYING IN WITH EMILY AND KUMAIL

*The Big Sick* writers and couple Emily V. Gordon and Kumail Nanjiani are uniquely qualified to offer advice on how to survive the pandemic, since Gordon has a chronic illness that forced her to

occasionally quarantine pre-COVID; she also used to be a therapist. There's something soothing in their easy comic banter, like when they share the weird things that made them cry that week (say, a Charmin commercial) or coping mechanisms (befriending a squirrel).

## 4 YOU MUST REMEMBER THIS

Karina Longworth's podcast on Hollywood's history produced its strongest miniseries yet on Polly Platt. Platt is best known as the first wife of director Peter Bogdanovich, an unjust legacy considering that she did much of the work for films like *Terms of Endearment* and *Broadcast News*, but received little credit. Sourcing from Platt's unpublished memoir, Longworth gives the overshadowed artist her due and explores a larger story about sexism in cinema.

## 5 OUTSIDERS

It's rare to find reporting on the structural issues behind the surge in homelessness on the West Coast that also humanizes the unsheltered people at the center of the debate. This podcast's ability to do both is a narrative feat. Reporters at KNKX and the *Seattle Times* record compelling testimonies from homeless people in Olympia, Wash., that show how thin the line between sheltered and unsheltered can be.

## 6 THE DAILY

Host Michael Barbaro and his team at the *New York Times* have established themselves as the most trusted voices in podcasting. Health reporter Donald G. McNeil Jr. in particular has been a beacon for listeners, providing crucial information on how to move through the world as safely as possible and when we can expect a vaccine.

## 7 FLOODLINES

*Atlantic* writer Vann R. Newkirk II revisits Katrina through the voices of people stranded after the hurricane. The show builds to Newkirk's interview with former FEMA director Michael Brown, in which Newkirk presents evidence of malfeasance. It's hard not to draw comparisons between Katrina and COVID-19: in both cases, Black Americans bore the brunt of the government's failures, paying with their safety, their jobs and their lives.

## 8 DEAD EYES

*Dead Eyes* is a petty podcast, but a funny one. Years ago, actor Connor Ratliff was set to film the Tom Hanks-produced miniseries *Band of Brothers* when he lost the part, allegedly because Hanks thought Ratliff had "dead eyes." While poking fun at his own obsessiveness, Ratliff gets actors like Jon Hamm to talk about losing roles, providing rare insight into the brutal world of casting.

## 9 HOME COOKING

Podcasting vet Hrishikesh Hirway poses listeners' cooking questions to chef and co-host Samin Nosrat, like what to do with dozens of jalapeños in a CSA box. Nosrat's answers are ingenious, and—as anyone who has watched her on Netflix's *Salt Fat Acid Heat* knows—her laugh is infectious. If we're all stuck at home, we might as well strive to make our time in the kitchen as joyful as possible.

## 10 BACK ISSUE

Tracy Clayton and Josh Gwynn celebrate pop-culture phenomena that were either overlooked by the mainstream (white) media or deserve reconsideration—like Black '90s sitcoms or *America's Next Top Model*. In their conversations, they strike a balance between diverting fandom and criticism that can offer insight into how culture has evolved—and how far it has to go.





# 7 Questions

**Steve McQueen** The Oscar-winning director on his new collection of films, memories of 1980s London and the landscape for Black British artists

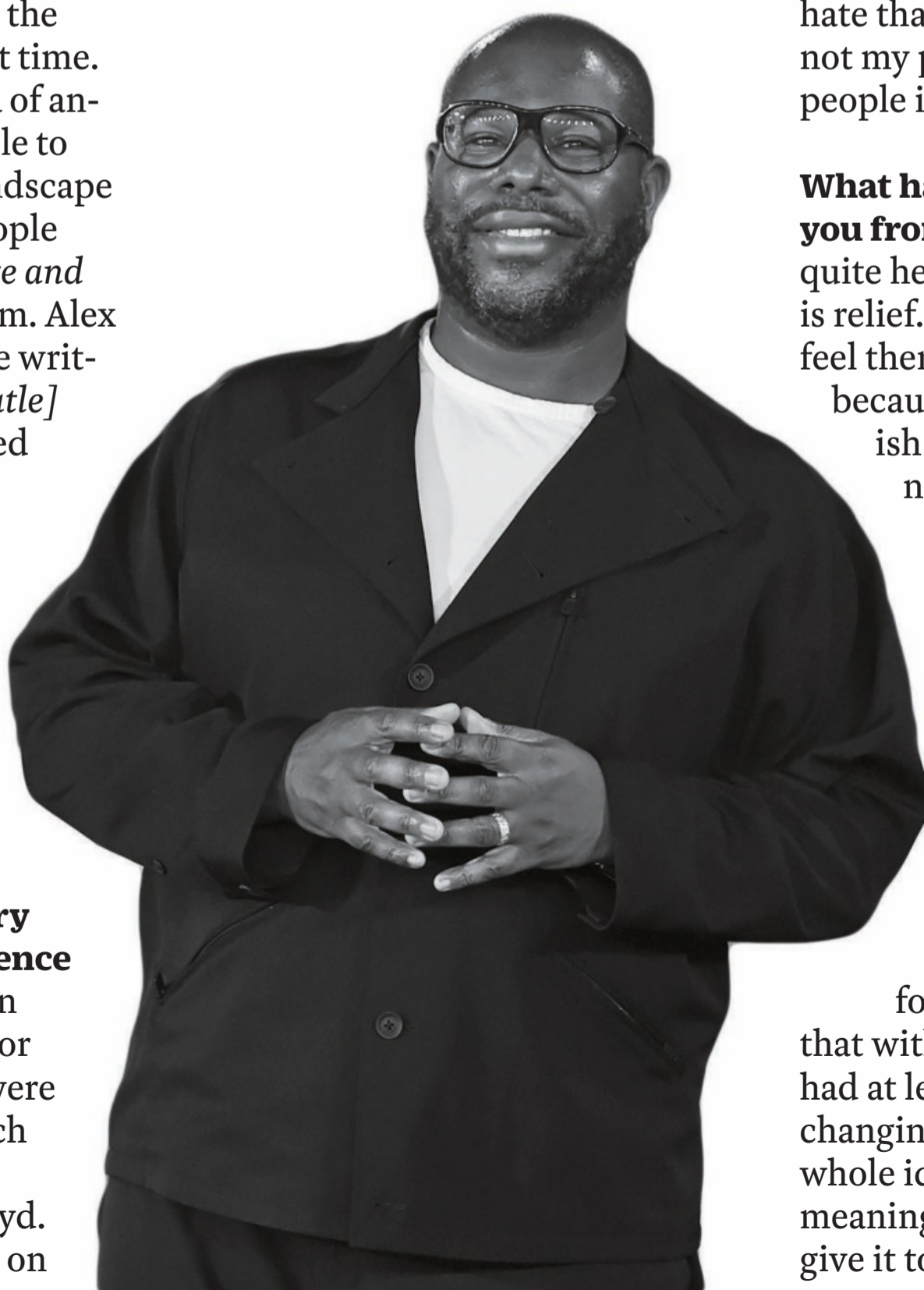
**S**mall Axe takes its name from a proverb: “If you are the big tree, we are the small axe.”

**It’s an anthology of five films about the experiences of the West Indian community in London, from the late 1960s to the 1980s. How did you first conceive the series?** This started about 11 years ago, and I needed the time and the maturity to get a grip on it. I needed that perspective. It was going to be one story with one family, but with my research, I was just finding all these amazing stories and thought that they should be stand-alone stories.

**These stories are not really taught in school or seen onscreen. What was it about these five moments that interested you?** Mangrove was the first story, and it’s a landmark case in British history. At the time, it was the longest-running court case at 55 days, and during it, the police were called racist for the first time. Lovers Rock is about the whole idea of another claim of defiance, of being able to express oneself with music, in a landscape which was not inviting to Black people in the clubs. The idea for Red, White and Blue emerged from the writers’ room. Alex Wheatle was actually a writer in the writers’ room, and his story [Alex Wheatle] was so amazing that I said, “We need your story.” With Education, I was combining the narrative of “educationally subnormal” schools, which emerged in the late ’60s and ’70s, with my own unfortunate situation, which happened in the ’80s.

**You had John Boyega in mind to play a senior police officer in Red, White and Blue from a very early stage. What was the experience of working with him like?** John can hold the camera. You either have it or you don’t, and he has it. When we were making [the film], he did that speech at Hyde Park involving Black Lives Matter and the death of George Floyd. I think the project had an influence on

“FOR ME, IT’S GREAT WHEN PEOPLE FEEL THEMSELVES LOOKING AT THEMSELVES”



him, and then after that speech, he had an influence on the project. There was a real kind of intertwining of real life and art.

**You grew up in the time period when the anthology takes place. How did your specific memories inform your storytelling?** Anything a Black person did was on the front or the back pages. It was a time where people were treated very badly. I remember the Brixton riots in ’81 and walking to school, and the narrative that was conjured up at school and the energy that was put upon you when you walked down the street as a Black person. There was a lot of uncertainty. But again, we power through. And I owe a great debt to those people who led the way.

**What do you hope people take away from watching the anthology?** I really hate that question. I don’t know; that’s not my problem. I never want to put people in a straitjacket.

**What has been the biggest impact on you from creating these films?** It’s been quite heavy. The first word I would say is relief. For me, it’s great when people feel themselves looking at themselves, because within the narrative of British films, a lot of these stories have never been told. My ambition was to fill the gap in that narrative.

**Do you feel like, as a Black British creator, the landscape is changing for you to make the art that you want to make?** I’m very hardheaded because of my mother. The landscape is changing because of individuals laying down a path for people to come into, and we did that with Small Axe. All our departments had at least one or two apprentices. It’s changing because we make a change. The whole idea of this series is “small axe,” meaning do it yourself. No one’s going to give it to you. —SUYIN HAYNES

# HELP SAVE THE FRIDGE

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