REJECTING MILITARY RULE IN MYANMAR

P.56
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ON THE COVER: photo by Ye Aung Thu/AFP via Getty Images

Robin Wright stars as Edee in Land.
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CHEMICAL KILLER
ERIC NEWTON/WASHINGTON, N.J.
Oh, the irony of a beautiful pro-life magazine cover just a few months after the magazine’s founder wrote that he couldn’t bring himself to vote for what was arguably the most pro-life administration in U.S. history.

TONYA CONRAD/ROCK HILL, S.C.
I write the newsletter for our local pregnancy center, Palmetto Women’s Center, and I recently reported on a young woman who came to us desiring an abortion pill reversal. How exciting it was to report the reversal worked and she was blessed with a healthy baby boy.

BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT
JAN. 30, P. 32—BRUCE STEVENS/MILFORD, MAINE
Connie Marshner’s statement that Ronald Reagan was tepid in his interest and support of the pro-life cause surprised me because one of the best pro-life books I ever read was written by President Reagan.

CONTAINING ABORTION
JAN. 30, P. 72—JOHN ROBERTSON/LATHRUP VILLAGE, MICH.
Marvin Olasky wrote about how the pro-life movement will need creativity in responding to the evil of abortion, but the failure to support the best answer to this evil on Nov. 3 was both frustrating and sad. Elections have consequences. One wonders when the sins of Americans will warrant our destruction.

THE DAY MOBS OVERRAN THE CAPITOL
JAN. 30, P. 38—JOSHUA FIELDS/BREA, CALIF.
Harvest Prude did not address the countless reasons why Trump supporters were so upset. I do not condone the violence, and rushing the Capitol was a foolish thing to do, but conservatives have had enough of being silenced, ignored, insulted, and ostracized.

FIFTY YEARS ON
JAN. 30, P. 20—KAREN BADDORF/LYMAN, S.C.
In June 2020, I celebrated 50 years with my “one and only.” In August, he got COVID-19 and passed away three weeks later. Everything Jamie B. Cheaney said about the working of 50 years together was so very true of us as well.

LESLE RITCHIE/HASTINGS, MINN.
I gasped when I read “God graciously gave him Alzheimer’s disease.” Only God could put that kind of grace in someone’s heart.

“ELVIN’S DEATH”
JAN. 30, P. 36—NEAL CUMMINGS/REXFORD, N.Y.
How profoundly sad that this boy’s life was snuffed out after having come so far. Yet, there is hope, which Jamie Dean clearly pointed to as she brought the gospel into clear focus: Elvin’s life was redeemed by our Savior. Hallelujah!

FREEDOM CALLING
JAN. 30, P. 29—KELLI BEUTEN/BISMARCK, N.D.
I was disappointed that Susan Olasky would recommend Where the Crawdads Sing without any caveats. I’ve had this book on my radar for some time now, and I’ve learned it includes quite a bit of bad language and descriptive sexuality.

CORRECTIONS
Judie Brown became executive director of the National Right to Life Committee after being an internal auditor for Kmart’s western region (“Birth of a movement,” Jan. 30, p. 33).
Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963 (“Strength amid struggle,” Feb. 13, p. 28).
CONCERNS ABOUT TIMELY DELIVERY OF THE MAGAZINE HAVE BEEN NEAR THE TOP OF OUR “THINGS WE WORRY ABOUT” LIST.

Check your mail
Postal delivery still matters in an increasingly online world

In my email inbox was word from a WORLD member who’d received and enjoyed the first several magazine issues of 2021: “We thought we were up to date,” the member said, before adding, “What a surprise it was [yesterday] to see the December 26th issue in the mailbox!”

Surprise! But not a very happy one.

It was not a surprise to us here, though. We had heard complaints about that particular issue—our “News of the Year” issue—since the first week of January.

Throughout WORLD’s history, concerns about timely delivery of the magazine have been near the top of our “things we worry about” list. That was particularly true pre-internet, when weekly newsmagazines were an important way of delivering actual news. WORLD was weekly then, and a several-day delay would have been disastrous.

The huge weeklies back then—Time, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report—were simultaneously printed on dozens of presses all over the country in order to place copies into the mail stream as near as possible to their ultimate delivery addresses. That saved publishers a lot of postage and enabled them to deliver magazines faster and more reliably.

WORLD circulation has never been big enough to justify printing at multiple plants. Our sole printing location has moved at least half a dozen times over the years, from a nearby North Carolina location, now to its current location in Wisconsin.

As we have moved the printing locations, the concentrations of our delivery delays have moved also. We’ve almost always printed east of the Mississippi River, so the West Coast has always presented problems (don’t get me started). For years, we even flew our entire western-states distribution to a postal center in California to try to minimize delays.

Sometimes the delays made sense. Other times, they just didn’t. It’s convenient to blame the United States Postal Service, and I’ll admit sometimes the USPS has been a favorite target of ours. We’ve been admonished by our members who serve in the USPS to consider that there often is a nonpostal reason for delays. They’re right about that.

Which brings me back to that recent “News of the Year” issue, a problem that wasn’t obvious by distance from printer to mailbox and followed no particular pattern. It turns out the culprit was Amazon, of course, and all the other retailers that, during a Christmas shopping season impaired by COVID-19, did more package delivery than ever before. Apparently, various post offices set aside periodicals—which is their right to do—until things slowed down. For some, things didn’t slow down until February.

Delivery is a constant challenge, so please, if you experience slow delivery of any issue of WORLD Magazine, let our Member Services team know right away.

Kevin Martin
CEO

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From bad to worse

Decades-old business attitudes were canaries in the cultural coal mine

In the early days of WORLD Magazine we struggled to stay alive. We knew the lifeblood of most successful magazines was advertising revenue. We had learned that magazines like Time, People, and Better Homes & Gardens typically secured two-thirds of their revenue from ads, with loyal subscribers providing the rest.

But even after several years of publishing at WORLD, we’d attracted enough ad revenue to cover no more than 10 or 15 percent of our costs. The ratio was all wrong. A friend of mine, with years of expertise in our field, told us bluntly that we had an “impossible publishing formula.”

I decided to hit the road. I knew some top executives in half a dozen large companies—a key marketing man with Coca-Cola, an ad writer for Chrysler, a top man at a big brokerage, and a vice president at Maytag. Wasn’t it reasonable to think they’d see it as a good investment to get some valuable ad space for goods and services and at the same time be responsive to my appeal that they support a cause like WORLD’s distinctive Bible-shaped journalism?

Not so. One of the men summed things up when, as he leafed through our current issue, he shook his head and said: “I dunno. Looks pretty religious to me. I just don’t see it as a very good fit.” Indeed, it was just such an expression of secularism that tended to characterize every last one of these prospects. I doubt if even one of them thought of himself as a secularist—but in practical terms, such is the philosophy that shapes their business lives. For them, anything that sounds a little “religious” is probably something, sooner or later, that’s bound to cause trouble.

Keep in mind these men were not just professing Christians—but folks who had reputations as seriously committed believers. I am fairly certain that if I’d dropped by to see them a generation earlier, most or even all of them would have signed on with warm enthusiasm. But my corporate friends were expressing an abstract fear of something ominous on the horizon. I understood their caution but begged them to prepare early rather than late.

So why bring this up now, some 30 years afterward? Partly because so little has changed.

Advertising revenue has grown, but slowly. Instead, you readers, through your subscriptions and especially your charitable gifts, have helped balance our budget, year after year.

Corporate advertising, of the sort I hoped for and described above, has through the years continued to be almost invisible.

But some of the picture is also quite different. Three or four decades ago, I failed to “close the deal” with half a dozen business leaders—mostly because they didn’t want their landscape cluttered with embarrassing “religious” artifacts. “Just keep all that at a distance,” they said.

Now, though, just keeping a distance isn’t enough. In today’s climate, extinction is more and more the goal. Withholding their good names from our advertising pages isn’t punishment enough. Now corporations are joining forces with those who want to ensure we have no page from which to withhold their names. That’s why we see the biggest businesses and many corporate giants not so subtly dictating to our culture a radical leftist value system, often appearing to be bent on the weakening and destruction of those who dissent.

Think that “extinction” and “destruction” are a bit strong? Then keep your eyes focused, in the months ahead, on issues like tax exemption and hate speech. Go back and review the pledges offered by all the Democratic presidential candidates—many of which would explicitly widen the platforms of the LGBT alliance and tighten restrictions on any entity that might be seen as critical of it. One of those candidates is now president of the United States, and others are active in his administration.

I didn’t appreciate it 30 years ago when those businessmen turned down my sales pitch. But going from reluctant ad buyers to a threatening president is, in my experience, going from bad to worse.
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“Hope Medical Center has been a great blessing in Quinindé because it is a space where we can comprehensively look at the person. The vast majority of patients arrive seeking solutions for their physical health problems, but we take this opportunity to reflect on their spiritual state. We see how God opens doors to share His Word through medical care, knowing that only in Christ can we find abundant life.”

DR. YENY AGILA DE PINOS
QUININDÉ, ECUADOR

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During a Zoom Christmas party last year, no one at Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) talked about recent sexual abuse accusations from spa employees who had treated the organization’s founder, who died in May 2020. Among a list of things employees were thankful for, one named “Ravi’s vision and legacy” in a recording of the party WORLD obtained.

Zacharias’ widow, Margie, at that time a senior staffer at RZIM, told colleagues that higher-than-expected donations on Giving Tuesday showed donors were “letting us know loudly and clearly that they are standing with us.”

Fallout from Zacharias’ abuse begins
Apologetics ministry considers next steps while affiliates break away

by Emily Belz
Near Christmas, RZIM Canada speaker Daniel Gilman recalled the organization pushing staff to suggest ministries and churches across Canada to receive free copies of Zacharias’ most recent book. Gilman couldn’t bring himself to name one.

“I couldn’t understand for the life of me, if we’re taking the allegations so seriously that we have launched an investigation into whether Ravi might be a sexual predator, how we can give away his books?” he said.

In February, Atlanta law firm Miller & Martin released the shattering results from its independent investigation, commissioned by RZIM, into accusations of misconduct by Zacharias. Based on interviews with a dozen massage therapists and data from Zacharias’ phones and laptop, the report included evidence of sexting, sexual assault, and, according to one therapist, rape.

Now it appears possible the global ministry’s headquarters in the United States will shut down, according to several employees. In late February, Vince Vitale, RZIM’s director of the Americas and the Zacharias Institute, released a statement with wife and RZIM apologist Jo Vitale confessing their personal culpability in how the organization handled the accusations, and the possibility of shutting RZIM down.

“We serve a God who is infinitely more concerned about the cries of victims than about our reputations, and far more interested in repentant hearts than rebranded ministries,” the Vitales said. “In light of the severity of what has occurred, it may be right for this organization, at least in its current form, to come to an end.”

The week after it released the Miller & Martin report, RZIM temporarily stopped accepting donations. RZIM United Kingdom split from the U.S. organization and will change its name. RZIM Africa shut down its website except for a statement saying it would consider how to continue its work in light of the abuse reports. RZIM Canada announced it will close its organization with no signs of further investigation into possible abuses in Canada. Lori Anne Thompson, who in 2017 was the first publicly to accuse Zacharias of sexting, lived in Canada at the time.

“If the Canadian board would have just picked up the phone and asked some tough questions ... it’s possible it would have been the best thing that happened to Ravi Zacharias, including the opportunity to come clean and seek help,” said Gilman, whom RZIM Canada laid off in January. “And to all the women around the world that would have been safeguarded, and instead of being safeguarded are survivors of abuse.”

The U.S. RZIM board and senior staff members are wrestling with the next steps, according to staffers: Some seek to continue the organization’s ministry as before. Others argue it has permanently lost credibility. Until Miller & Martin’s preliminary report in December, RZIM had denied the accusations against Zacharias. He sued Thompson in 2017.

Other staffers describe a culture protecting Zacharias to the point of impunity. The full Miller & Martin report said Zacharias ostracized staffers who questioned his travel arrangements. In Canada, Gilman said he recalled “beautiful” staff meetings encouraging RZIM speakers to talk about their struggles with their faith and doubting God.

“I believe at RZIM we were safe to doubt Jesus Christ, but unwelcome to question Ravi Zacharias,” he said.

In a letter to the RZIM board, RZIM spokesperson Ruth Malhotra said in seven years of working with Zacharias, she “never once witnessed him demonstrating a posture of repentance.”

Miller & Martin discovered financial misconduct as well: Zacharias put some of his abuse victims on RZIM’s payroll and financed their housing and schooling with ministry funds. The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability terminated RZIM’s membership in mid-February after the report became public.

Employment lawyer Ed Sullivan, who reviewed the documents surrounding the investigation, said RZIM still faces trouble: “If lawyers think they can collect, they will sue,” he said.

Miller & Martin did not investigate possible abuse overseas, so more victims may exist. Zacharias spent significant portions of his year in Mandarin Oriental hotels in Singapore and Jakarta, Indonesia, and in an apartment in Bangkok. Guidepost Solutions, a crisis management firm RZIM has hired, and victim advocate Rachael Denhollander will continue to gather information from other victims.
900,000
The number of Americans the minimum wage plan would elevate above the poverty line, according to the CBO.

$54B
The amount the wage plan would raise the federal budget deficit by 2031.

$31.4T
The CBO’s projected national debt by the end of 2030, not taking into account the plan to raise the minimum wage.

17M
The number of workers making less than $15 per hour whose pay the wage plan would increase by 2025.

33%
The number of small business owners who said in a CNBC poll a $15 minimum wage would force them to lay some workers off.

1.4 MILLION
THE NUMBER OF JOBS THE U.S. ECONOMY WOULD LOSE if the federal government implements a Biden administration plan to raise the minimum wage to $15 per hour by 2025, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). The plan calls for raising the minimum incrementally from the current rate of $7.25 per hour.
USH LIMBAUGH, THE CONSERVATIVE COMMENTATOR who transformed the media landscape, died Feb. 17 at age 70. His fans saw him as a conservative hero, deserving of the nation’s highest civilian honor. At the 2020 State of the Union address, President Donald Trump awarded Limbaugh the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Accusations of racism, sexism, and hypocrisy also followed him throughout his career, and at times he apologized for hurtful remarks. But even Limbaugh’s critics could not deny his lasting influence on how American media outlets talk about politics—and life. His success became a road map for how AM radio could survive as a talk show platform. Limbaugh encouraged listeners to give to various charities. In 2008, he ranked fourth on the Forbes list of most generous celebrities. Last year Limbaugh announced he had lung cancer but said he was relying on God.

ACQUITTED
Seven Senate Republicans joined every Senate Democrat to vote against former President Donald Trump at his impeachment trial on Feb. 13—not nearly enough to reach the two-thirds threshold of senators needed to convict Trump of inciting the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol. The vote was 57-43. Republican senators gave different reasons to acquit: Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., said Trump had called for a “peaceful” protest prior to the riot. Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., said rioters had long planned to storm the Capitol. Other Republicans believed the Senate lacked jurisdiction to convict a private citizen who was no longer president. (The House impeached Trump before he left office.)

JAILED
Canadian authorities jailed Pastor James Coates of Edmonton-area GraceLife Church for violating COVID-19 health restrictions. Coates says the Alberta Health Service’s rules—limiting in-person worship gatherings to 15 percent of a church’s capacity and requiring attendees to wear masks and social distance—violate his conscience and religious beliefs. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, GraceLife Church held livestream worship services and followed local health orders. Since the church resumed meeting in person, authorities have fined the pastor and warned the church to follow the ongoing health orders. Coates turned himself in to police on Feb. 16.

ABDUCTED
On Feb. 17, gunmen stormed the Government Science Secondary School in central Nigeria, fatally shot one student, then took 42 captives, including 27 students. No group immediately claimed responsibility. Insurgents have abducted students across central and northern Nigeria in recent years. Some 100 girls remain missing after Boko Haram extremists kidnapped more than 270 from a boarding school in 2014. In February 2018, insurgents from the Islamic State West Africa Province terror group abducted 110 schoolgirls in Dapchi, most of whom returned home. In December, some 344 schoolboys went free a few days after armed men took them from their school.
“It was so cold, blankets stopped working.”
Austin resident STEFANY RIVERA, 13, whose family lost power after a winter storm hit Texas in mid-February, according to The Wall Street Journal. Many Texas families went without electricity and heat for days amid subfreezing temperatures.

“My savings is gone. … There’s nothing I can do about it, but it’s broken me.”
SCOTT WILLOUGHBY, a 63-year-old resident of a Dallas suburb, telling The New York Times how his electric company charged him $16,752 after Texas’ winter storm. When cold weather upset the electric grid and drove up demand for power, some Texans faced astronomical wholesale prices under the state’s minimally regulated energy market.

“I would want to know how selling Mein Kampf doesn’t violate their religious beliefs, but selling my book does.”
Ethics & Public Policy Center President RYAN ANDERSON, after Amazon pulled his 2018 critique of transgenderism, When Harry Became Sally, from its online store on Feb. 21.

“Uh-oh.”
KIM BEEDE, a board member of Oakley Union Elementary School District in Oakley, Calif., after learning during an online board meeting that the meeting was being publicly livestreamed. Thinking they were speaking in private, board members had spent several minutes criticizing and joking about parents in their district. “They want to pick on us because they want their babysitters back,” one board member quipped.
The entire board resigned amid a public outcry two days later.

“Father, we pray that their families would be comforted knowing that You are fighting on their behalf.”
KYLE ABTS, executive director of International Committee on Nigeria, in a prayer posted online on Feb. 15 for teenager Leah Sharibu and other girls held captive by Islamic terrorists. ICN co-hosted a week of prayer leading up to the three-year anniversary of Sharibu’s 2018 kidnapping from her school in Dapchi. Islamist groups like Boko Haram have abducted hundreds of teenage Nigerians, often forcing them to become wives to militants.
CATS IN COMMITTEE

SURPRISE VISITS FROM PETS during legislative committee meetings in New Hampshire have sparked a conversation about etiquette for Zoom meetings. On Feb. 3, during a meeting of the New Hampshire House of Representatives Commerce and Consumer Affairs Committee, cats owned by Rep. Anita Burroughs began investigating her laptop and appeared on the Zoom conference call. According to Burroughs, a Democrat, the appearances of her cats Yoshi and Jack during the teleconference sparked a rebuke from Republican committee chairman Rep. John Hunt. Burroughs said Hunt told the ranking Democrat on the committee to tell her Democratic colleagues to keep pets from interfering in committee work. “The chair talked to [the ranking Democrat] and said no animals in the room,” Burroughs said. “I can try to keep the cats off the screen. Keeping them out of the room is going to be impossible.” Though the Feb. 3 meeting was also disturbed by a dog barking, Hunt denies issuing a pet ban, calling it merely a suggestion.

FIGHTING FOR LIFE Jeanne Pouchain knows she’s not dead. But she has to prove it in court. The 58-year-old French woman was declared dead by a court in 2017 during a decadelong legal case. An employee Pouchain fired years ago is suing her for lost wages and told a court that Pouchain was dead after she stopped responding to the employee’s letters. Without evidence, the French court accepted the allegation and levied a judgment against Pouchain’s estate. The court’s decision set off a chain reaction in France’s bureaucracy, which scrubbed her from official records and invalidated her identity cards and licenses. “I have no identity papers, no health insurance, I cannot prove to the banks that I am alive ... I’m nothing,” Pouchain recently told The Guardian. In January, Pouchain’s attorney presented an affidavit to the court from her doctor attesting to her continued existence. Her former employee says Pouchain had been pretending to be dead in order to avoid paying the court-mandated damages.

BIRTHDAY RELEASE A Miami-area jail offered a tremendous birthday present to one of its inmates on Jan. 25. Jail officials accidentally released Eduardo Cabana, a 52-year-old inmate in Miami-Dade County, after they apparently confused his release date with his birth date. Cabana was being held without bond on multiple charges. His previous rap sheet included arrests on gun and drug charges. Authorities found Cabana and re-jailed him by Jan. 29, and the Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation Department said it had launched an internal investigation into the early release.

SAVE A CHIHUAHUA Authorities in Lompoc, Calif., have decided not to file charges against a woman who housed 104 Chihuahua dogs in her house. Last October, a concerned neighbor called animal control to report that the unidentified woman was hoarding small dogs in her Santa Barbara County home. “The resident cooperated fully with our staff and surrendered the dogs,” Animal Services director Angela Walters Yates told the Santa Barbara Independent in February. “All of the dogs were in good physical condition, and there were no signs
of neglect or abuse.” Despite that, the woman can’t keep the animals because she exceeded the number of dogs she was allowed to have without a kennel permit. A team of nearly 20 veterinarians and other staffers inspected the animals and arranged for their transport to shelters around the region.

5 MASCULINE MESSAGING Chinese boys are too feminine, according to a directive issued by China’s education ministry. The December missive titled “The Proposal To Prevent the Feminization of Male Adolescents” directed schools to take steps to promote the masculinity of male students. The government edict suggested schools in China begin focusing more on soccer and instructed the institutions to aim at student mastery of at least one or two sports skills. Earlier in 2020, high-ranking apparatchik Si Zefu complained that Chinese boys were becoming “weak, timid, and self-abasing,” according to the BBC.

6 MONEY FOR THE TAKING Fake jobless claims cost California $11 billion in 2020, according to California Labor Secretary Julie Su. Announcing the news in January, Su said state investigations revealed some 10 percent of the $114 billion paid in unemployment claims was fraudulent. “There is no sugarcoating the reality,” Su said. “California did not have sufficient security measures in place to prevent this level of fraud, and criminals took advantage of the situation.” How easy has California’s unemployment system been to game? Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer said he uncovered an unemployment claim from a 99-year-old former housekeeper who hasn’t worked in decades.

7 WITCH HUNT REGRET A Scottish lawyer has asked the country’s Parliament to pardon nearly 4,000 people accused of witchcraft from 1563 to 1736 under Scotland’s Witchcraft Act. Claire Mitchell, who began her campaign last year to clear the names of people accused of witchcraft, lodged a formal petition with the Scottish Parliament to grant posthumous pardon and an apology to the 3,837 people—mostly women—accused of witchcraft during the 173-year period. Mitchell noted that scholars believe authorities executed around 2,500 supposed witches in Scotland during that time frame, often after eliciting confessions by torture. The Scottish legislative body has agreed to host the petition on its website and collect signatures until March 17.

8 VIVE LA LUNCH French workers can now legally commit the ultimate taboo: eating lunch at their desks. In order to help accomplish pandemic-related social distancing, the French government has suspended a prohibition on workers eating lunch in the office. Prior to the Feb. 14 announcement, French employees weren’t permitted to have their meals in the workplace, a rule meant to preserve the nation’s traditional la pause déjeuner, or lunch break. French workers often splurged on two- and three-course meals at local bistros before the coronavirus pandemic hit.

9 ROW YOUR BOAT A tough grandfather from Oldham, England, has earned new bragging rights. At 70 years old, Frank Rothwell on Feb. 6 became the oldest person to complete the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, an annual charity race in which participants row across the Atlantic Ocean. An experienced sailor, Rothwell rowed solo and unassisted 3,000 miles from the Canary Islands to Antigua in 56 days, raising $1.4 million for dementia research. While he isn’t the oldest person to row solo across the Atlantic—72-year-old Graham Walters set that record last year—Rothwell said he plans to make the trip again in 2023.
Perpetual victimhood

Suffering is real, but it shouldn’t change our identities

ACK IN THE EARLY 1970S, my husband worked as assistant manager of the local drive-in in the west Texas town where we were attending college. Since he didn’t get home until after midnight, I had those long evening hours to myself. When the weather cooperated, I took long walks. Most of it was along streets and avenues, but one route took me the long way around campus, past the far-flung tracks and ballfields, where there were no houses, little traffic, and few street-lights.

One night, in the silence under the stars, I began hearing footsteps besides my own.

After a hundred yards or so, there was no doubt someone was following me. When I stepped up my pace a little, so did the phantom footfalls. When I slowed down, ditto. Some impulse told me not to run, to stand up straight, to show no fear. But I cut corners to get back to the campus quad, and from there briskly walked the four blocks home. At the gate of the fence that surrounded our little house, I finally turned around: “Why are you following me?”

Memory is faulty, but I recall someone short and thin and not very threatening. He asked an obscene question. “Why don’t you come in and ask my husband?” I cheekily replied, before opening the gate and striding to the front door of my empty house. He didn’t take me up on the invitation.

Solitary walks after dark in remote areas aren’t smart. I could have used the advice offered by the University of Nevada campus police in a January welcome-back email sent to students returning to UN–Las Vegas. “Avoid dark, unpopulated areas” was near the top of the list. Other tips, such as “Look confident, keep your head up” and “Be aware and alert to your surroundings,” sound like thoughtful advice from Dad.

Not all students saw it that way. After a weekend of strenuous objections from the CARE Center and Student Diversity and Social Justice office, the campus police department apologized. For what? Apparently, well-meant advice from those who know something about violence was in fact “violent.” Trying to prevent harm was itself “harm,” a form of victim-blaming that placed responsibility for an assault on the one assaulted. To the social justice crowd, the cops might as well be reminding young ladies to dress modestly and avoid getting blind drunk at frat parties. (Which is good counsel, but verboten to say out loud.)

“Blaming the victim” is a slogan dating back at least 30 years. “A woman should be able to walk down the street stark naked and be safe,” Oprah declared on one of her programs. Theoretically true, though meaningless in the real world.

But perhaps there’s more than simple outrage reflected in the students’ complaint. As they put it in a campuswide memo, tips that “place responsibility on the individual to avoid being attacked erase the lived experiences of so many of us.” In other words, advice offered to help them be safe made them feel unsafe. There’s a sort of logic here, but it defies rationality. It’s not “lived experience” getting erased in the students’ minds. It’s the obvious difference between assigning blame for an act already committed and forestalling an act that might be avoided. Could it be that some victims and their advocates are not merely camping out on victimhood, but identifying as victims? As if it’s not only a potential rapist who objectifies women, but the women themselves?

My experience with the nighttime stalker could have ended very badly. If so, it would have shaped me, yes, but not made me. In The Great Divorce, C.S. Lewis pictures a chronic complainer in life who is still complaining in the afterlife. “The question is whether she is [now] a grumbler, or only a grumble.” Being perpetually outraged runs the risk of becoming perpetual outrage. I hope these kids grow out of it. There is so much more to living.
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Netflix has broken a lot of ground in the entertainment business since it launched the streaming revolution back in 2013 with its first original series, *House of Cards*. That show was famously dark, subversive, and crammed with R-rated content.

Since then, pushing the envelope has seemed the go-to move for the platform. Educators, parents, and psychologists alike slammed its original teen drama *13 Reasons Why* for glorifying suicide. Kids animated series *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* regularly features transgender characters. The company even added lesbian aunts to its adaptation of the classic 19th-century novel *Anne of Green Gables*. Then, in
September, it went too far, angering American audiences and attracting the attention of lawmakers with Cuties, a film that featured 10-year-olds twerking. A January report said 1 in 10 Netflix cancellations last quarter was a result of that debacle.

Perhaps that’s why the streaming giant has now decided to go in the one direction it hasn’t really tried before—traditional.

The most shocking thing about Kevin James’ new workplace sitcom The Crew is how at home it would be on good, old-fashioned broadcast television. James, the onetime King of Queens, stars as a NASCAR crew chief with an eccentric team working under him. There’s the handsome but dopey driver. The neurotic, insecure marketing man. And the are-they-really-just-friends female office manager. The series even has a live studio audience.

Given the red-state setting, perhaps it’s no surprise that the show begins with a joke about the team’s Pavlovian response to the national anthem—as soon as that “Star-Spangled Banner” starts, hats come off and conversations halt midsentence till it’s over. It’s a cute moment, especially refreshing because it’s clearly laughing with the characters, not at them. Given that the anthem has become such a lightning rod in professional sports, there’s something a bit brave for the pilot to court underserved conservative audiences by faithfully depicting racing culture.

None of this is to suggest the show is political in any pointed sense. When the boss retires and his Ivy League–educated, millennial daughter takes over the team, Southern and Silicon Valley values clash plenty. But it rarely seems intended to target a whole class of people.

At times, The Crew even feels like a bit of a throwback for traditional TV. Though it has some mild profanity and off-color jokes here and there, there’s nothing like the rapid-fire double-entendres audiences have come to expect from some of the biggest sitcoms of recent years like Modern Family or The Big Bang Theory. As James told me during our recent interview, “It’s engaging for adults and it’s also fun. You can feel comfortable watching it with your whole family. And you don’t find too much of that now.”

The show’s conventional approach will likely feel a little stale for viewers used to the more modern style of shows like The Office, but the jokes get better and the cast chemistry stronger as the series goes on. By the fifth episode, James and crew have it running like, well, a well-oiled machine.

So far, Netflix’s surprising shift seems to be appealing to a lot of people. When I checked the platform’s daily popularity rankings, The Crew was sitting at No. 5 of all movies and series in the United States. Not bad for a new dog performing old tricks.
Sorrow on the Mountains

Land shows a grieving widow searching for purpose in the wilderness

by Sarah Schweinsberg

IN LAND, DIRECTOR ROBIN WRIGHT stars as Edee, a lawyer whose city life is upended when a gunman kills her young son and husband. To flee painful memories and people who can’t grasp the depth of her grief, Edee sells everything, loads up a trailer, and purchases a remote, ramshackle mountain cabin.

Rid of cell phone, car, electricity, and plumbing and alone with the rushing rivers and mountain vistas, Edee thinks her suffering might ease. But she has inadequately prepared for a harsh Rocky Mountains winter.

She reaches the brink of starvation and suicide before a passing hunter happens on her cabin. Miguel (Demián Bichir) becomes Edee’s Good Samaritan and nurses her back to health—body and soul. He teaches her to hunt for deer, protect her garden from hungry rabbits, and fish for river trout.

Rated PG-13, Land has a spattering of mild bad language and two instances of brief nudity when Edee bathes and changes a shirt. The quiet and slow-paced film explores the importance of finding purpose while dealing with grief.

Without her family or an understanding of her eternal purpose, Edee feels she has nothing to live for. But the care shown by Miguel and the challenges of life in her quiet corner of the world give her a new, if incomplete, mission.

The knowledge that her next meal depends on her own actions, at least, keeps her aiming one more rifle and casting one more line.

FOUR FILMS ABOUT DEMENTIA*

Still Alice: 2014 drama (PG-13)
Glen Campbell: I’ll Be Me: 2014 documentary (PG)
Memories of Tomorrow: 2006 drama (not rated)

*RECOMMENDED BY THE ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE ASSOCIATION (SINGAPORE)
The goal of HISTORY’S *Alone* is simple: Ten trained survivalists live solo in the wilderness. The last person standing receives $500,000. Miles apart from one another, the survivalists really are on their own. Camera crews don’t even stick around—each contestant does his or her own filming. Season 1 contestant Alan Kay summed it up this way: “It’s just you, the Creator, and creation.” Nature reveals the glory of God. That’s good. But prolonged isolation highlights another truth God spoke eons ago: It is not good for man to be alone.

That’s the real challenge: learning to live without a companion.

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A CYNIC AND A SUPERHERO

Flora & Ulysses is a fun film for kids with true lessons about marriage

by Megan Basham

Perhaps the most common setup in children’s movies is for a young protagonist with true-blue belief in magical possibilities eventually to win over cynical adults. Flora (Matilda Lawler), one of the title characters in the latest Disney+ original movie Flora & Ulysses is different. She begins as a cynic.

True to life, Flora has absorbed the lessons her parents have modeled for her. Her father (Ben Schwartz) has allowed a series of professional setbacks to convince him to stop trying to publish his comic books. Instead he has settled for the bitter grind of stocking shelves at a big box retailer. Flora’s romance novelist mother (Alyson Hannigan) is a victim of success, so petrified by fear of her critics she can no longer bring herself to risk writing something bad. Focused on their individual failures, they’ve both given up on their marriage.

What has Flora taken away from all this? That life is a series of defeats, and it’s better to live without hope than to experience disappointment.

Clearly, Flora is in need of rescue. Or at least a profound attitude adjustment.

Enter Ulysses, a pint-sized superhero disguised by an alter-ego so unassuming, even Clark Kent would envy it: a red squirrel.

Whether it’s leaping treehouses in a single bound or writing odes to cheese-balls, little by little, Ulysses reveals his supernatural abilities, convincing Flora and next-door neighbor William to start seeing the wonder in the world again.

And hope, as always, is infectious. Once they see it, others do too.

At times, the movie takes a slapstick, Looney Tunes direction. Instead of Elmer Fudd hunting wabbits, we get an overly enthusiastic animal control officer (Danny Pudi) hunting for rabies-infested forest rodents. The maniacal CGI cat that attacks him at regular intervals may be a bit tiresome for adults, but it’s just the thing to keep kids engaged with the deeper themes of the movie.

And these are well worth their time. In the last several decades, movies from Mrs. Doubtfire to Night at the Museum have treated divorce more as an opportunity for kids to experience positive growth than the trauma it truly is. Based on Kate DiCamillo’s Newbery Medal–winning novel, Flora & Ulysses doesn’t pretend that divorce offers kids anything but heartbreak. The film refuses to impose the false, upbeat narrative that her parents’ individual, separate love for Flora is as good as their joined love for her as a married couple.

The story leaves a few minor plot threads as loose ends, and some parents will wish that a few PG jokes involving romance novel covers and comic book characters who don’t wear clothes had been left on the cutting room floor. But overall, for all its pratfalls and fantasy, Flora & Ulysses tells kids some important truths.
Springing the trap
The modern drift away from Darwinism
by Marvin Olasky

MICHAEL BEHE’S A Mousetrap for Dar-win (Discovery Institute, 2020) shows that science is a contact sport. Behe’s title refers to his metaphor for explaining why Darwinism is an inadequate explanation for complexity. A mouse-trap cannot improve its importance by adding on one piece, then another: It doesn’t work unless it has all its parts.

Behe became famous (or infamous) in 1996 with his Darwin’s Black Box, which showed how little Darwin knew about cells. Since then the Lehigh University professor has been under attack, and his new book shows his responses to abuse from Richard Dawkins and others. The state of the battle now? Behe writes, “It may surprise people who get their information about the state of science from gee-whiz puff pieces in the mainstream media, but, although strong partisans still hold out, the eclipse of Darwinism in the scientific community is well-advanced.”

As I’ve read more about God’s creativity in this, I’ve been more and more amazed. Behe writes, “Machines in cells act as taxis and trucks, shuttling passengers and supplies across vast distances (relative to the size of the molecules), along cellular highways marked by traffic signs, both also made of molecules. Cellular computer programs of bewildering sophistication control the assembly of the machinery. Elegant genetic regulatory networks express the information in DNA to produce the right molecules at the right times in the right places, building the intricate bodies of animals.”

Behe asks, “How could Darwin’s clunky mechanism—one tiny, random change at a time, each followed by a long, fitful, and uncertain period of natural selection, with no ability to anticipate future needs—account for the molecular marvels that modern biology had uncovered? Increasingly the answer became, it couldn’t. The more science advanced and the more elegance and complexity was uncovered, the more biologists drifted away from Darwinism.”

Two worldviews—Darwin’s and the Bible’s—now compete. Margaret MacMillan’s War: How Conflict Shaped Us (Random House, 2020) examines a key part of human history from a Darwinian perspective. She asks whether “humans are genetically programmed to fight each other. ... We cannot deny, I think, the inheritance evolution has left us.” But she holds out hope: Maybe we’re more like peaceful bonobos than their vicious chimpanzee cousins. Or maybe, “with new and terrifying weapons, the growing importance of artificial intelligence, automated killing machines and cyberwar, we face the prospect of the end of humanity itself.”

Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, in The True Story of the Whole World (Brazos Press, 2020), show how the Bible contradicts ancient religions: For example, the sun is not an object to be worshipped, but an “object placed in the heavens for the simple purpose of providing light and heat.” They portray sin as a quest for autonomy: All of history proclaims the consequences of that wrongful quest.

Alexandra Natapoff’s Punishment Without Crime (Basic, 2018) has a long but accurate subtitle: How Our Massive Misdemeanor System Traps the Innocent and Makes America More Unequal. Strong research and tight writing spotlight death by a thousand cuts.

Claire North’s The Gameshouse (Orbit, 2019) is a remarkable set of three novellas in which kinglike players compete in chess and other games that transcend boards: Their pawns and other pieces are real people who live or die based on decisions of the players. North’s writing is excellent, but F-bombs suddenly explode in the third novella. —M.O.
**Family dynamics**

Recent books about marriage and family issues

by Mary Jackson

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**With These Words** by Rob Flood: Flood provides married couples with practical tools to tame the tongue and become more effective communicators. With examples from his marriage and other married couples, he analyzes unhealthy communication patterns and interweaves Biblical wisdom that provides better alternatives. The book addresses the importance of first responses, prayer, physical touch, forgiveness, listening, and proper timing—with the goal of glorifying God and loving one’s spouse more fully. Communication is fundamental for married couples, yet for change to occur, believers must be willing to look honestly at their own weaknesses and embrace the power to change that comes only through Jesus Christ.

**Why Is My Teenager Feeling Like This?** by David Murray: This book draws from 18 real-life examples to illustrate various struggles teenagers have with depression and anxiety. Murray, a pastor and counselor, helps parents and other adults identify possible root causes and understand how to pray, apply Scripture, ask the right questions, and point teens to Christ. Each case study includes various “keys”—Scripture meditation, rest, exercise, digital detox, prayer, and in some cases, medication—to help address underlying issues. Though not exhaustive, the book provides a starting point for parents and children to address mental illness and emotional disorders “as common experiences in a fallen world.” A companion book for teens, *Why Am I Feeling Like This?*, is also available.

**Embodied** by Preston Sprinkle: Sprinkle seeks to address transgenderism with empathy and truth. He refers to his transgender friends throughout the book and relates their nuanced experiences. He looks plainly at what Scripture says—how our bodies are an essential part of our image-bearing status, how the distinction of male and female in Genesis 1 describes biological sex not gender identity, and how Jesus affirmed this while overturning social views on masculinity and femininity. The book examines the roles that gender stereotypes, intersex conditions, rapid-onset gender dysphoria, pronouns, and other factors play in this cultural moment. Sprinkle calls Christians to form “a radically biblical community … one that affirms bodies, rejects stereotypes, pursues truth with humility, and lavishes grace on everyone who fails.”

**Them Before Us** by Katy Faust and Stacy Manning: Faust and Manning believe children’s rights should supersede adult desires. They examine divorce, abandonment, donor conception, surrogacy, and same-sex parenthood through a child’s perspective. They argue that redefining marriage has led to redefining parenthood, and children face real setbacks, losses, risks, and wounds outside of a stable home with a married, biological mother and father. Children’s voices are often underrepresented or dismissed in cultural and policy discourse, and the book includes policy recommendations that factor children’s rights. Faust’s experiences as a child of divorce (her mother became a lesbian), a pastor’s wife, an adoptive mother, and a children’s rights activist add depth to the book’s robust research and compelling testimonials.
Resilient reads
Nonfiction books for middle graders and teens
by Kristin Chapman

**Torpedoed** by Deborah Heiligman: This riveting but tragic World War II story chronicles the 1940 sinking of the SS City of Benares as it sailed for Canada with evacuee children aboard, all fleeing the German air raids on England. The government evacuation program had successfully relocated hundreds of English children to safety before a German U-boat torpedoed the Benares in stormy, frigid waters. Only 13 of the 90 children would make it home alive. Heiligman’s meticulous research showcases survivors’ courage and determination while black-and-white photos and illustrations help illuminate the story. *(Ages 10-14)*

**The Radium Girls** by Kate Moore: During the early 1900s, hundreds of young women eagerly applied for factory jobs painting watch dials with glow-in-the-dark radium. The pay was good and the work easy. But after they started suffering from odd ailments that mystified doctors, they would eventually discover their jobs came at a terrible cost. Moore’s gripping account follows the women’s fight for justice amid overwhelming odds. Because this young readers’ edition discusses the tragic and sometimes graphic details of radium poisoning, it is best suited for more mature readers. *(Ages 13 and up)*

**Bee Fearless** by Mikaila Ulmer: Teenager Mikaila Ulmer’s path to entrepreneurship started with a bee sting and the discovery that bee populations were disappearing. Ulmer decided to raise money for bee research: Using her grandmother’s secret recipe, she launched a lemonade stand. Over the next several years her lemonade business grew, culminating with an appearance on *Shark Tank* where she landed a business deal. Ulmer’s memoir weaves in business tips and strategies for budding entrepreneurs, encouraging kids and teens to find ways to make a difference. Note: Includes a brief reference to evolution. *(Ages 10-14)*

**A Hopeful Heart** by Deborah Noyes: Before Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy, there were Louisa, Anna, Lizzie, and May. *A Hopeful Heart* charts the arc of Louisa May Alcott’s early life, with its many highs and lows, and her winding path to becoming a literary icon. It also profiles her parents and the family’s extremely hard life due largely to her father’s pursuit of visionary ideals rather than industrious works. Note: The book discusses Louisa’s earlier, financially lucrative writings, which many considered risqué for the time and she herself labeled “rubbishy.” *(Ages 13 and up)*

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**Afterword**


In *A Tale of Two Kings* (Harvest House, 2021) Gloria Furman contrasts the first and second Adam, explaining how Adam’s sin brought death but Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross reversed the curse to give life. Even though the world is still broken, Furman reminds children that they can have great hope in “the King who is making all things new.” Note: Natalia Moore’s colorful illustrations artfully veil Jesus’ face under a glowing orb of light. —K.C.
Union really has just shaped my life and wrecked my life in such a good way that I would want people to experience. I always tell people whenever I’m giving tours, ‘Make sure that wherever you end up going you have the conviction that that’s where the Lord wants you,’ because I know that this is where the Lord wants me. It has been nothing but the best, and it’s just flipped my world upside down.”

RAYMOND CHAHYADI
Economics and political science double major
Bandung, Indonesia

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SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ, 51, is president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and an Assemblies of God pastor in Sacramento, Calif. Here are edited excerpts of our Dec. 18 conversation.

Wearing both hats—senior pastor of New Season Christian Worship Center and very much involved in politics—seems hard. How did that work out in 2020? Our church is about 40 percent white, 40 percent African American, 20 percent Latino and Asian. The protests after the George Floyd incident that morphed into riots placed me in a very precarious situation because we confronted an issue of injustice, but I refused to bow to a movement that was out of alignment with the Word of God.

You refer to Psalm 89, with its melding of righteousness, justice, love, and faithfulness. Every person is created in God’s image, so I repudiate all vestiges of bigotry and racism, but in American streets I saw the spirit of Malcolm X, not Micah. We saw burning, riots, vandalism, physical assaults on innocent individuals eating at restaurants or shops: Completely out of alignment with the Word of God.
When you’re so politically involved, how do you explain to your congregation that the gospel is primary and politics secondary? I explain to them that the gospel compels us to address issues that may have political implications, but we are not to be politically driven. I constantly tell my church we can’t be married to the agenda of the donkey or the elephant—we must exclusively be married to the agenda of the Lamb. I am 100 percent pro-life—I believe it’s one of the most critical issues of our lifetime. I am likewise committed to preserving religious liberty and supporting not social justice but Biblical justice, righteousness applied in our public sphere.

What percentage of your church members do you think voted Republican in the last election? We did not do a survey. My speculation would be 75-80 percent. A strong part of our African American leaders are staunch pro-lifers. They can’t vote for a party that advances the abortion narrative. They voted for life, religious liberty, and Biblical justice, not necessarily for the Trump personality. We say no to socialism, which is antithetical to a Biblical worldview.

Cuban Americans who saw socialism close-up tend to vote Republican. What about Venezuelans, as more have come to this country after experiencing Chávez and Maduro? Yes, and not only Venezuelans: Bolivians and Nicaraguans have seen the same thing.

What about immigrants from Mexico? Mexican values are not cartel values. Mexicans are some of the hardest-working individuals on the planet—12- to 14-hour workdays, strong faith, familia. That sounds like the values that made this nation exceptional—hard work, faith, and family. The idea that Mexican Americans or Hispanics generally would end up in perpetuity as a solid voting constituency for the Democratic Party is untrue. The Hispanic electorate will reinvigorate the conservative movement. The Latino community is the vaccine against socialism in America.

What do you recommend concerning the roughly 11 million people who are in the United States illegally? Let’s legalize with a green card those who have been here in this country for many years, who are hard-working, not criminals, not dependent on government subsidies or entitlements, not living off welfare. Let’s let their children who came here through no fault of their own become citizens.

Did most Hispanics in California vote against resuming affirmative action there? Yes. They don’t want to go back to discriminatory practices where we elevate one race over the other. That proposition came out at the same time the San Diego school district decided African American students did not have it within them, culturally speaking, to hand in their homework on time: Handing in work on time is supposedly a racist, Anglo-Saxon, Caucasian, Western world motif. That’s racism.

If you tell kids—whatever their color and ethnicity—that “it doesn’t matter when you hand in your homework,” many will hand it in late, and they’ll do worse in life. This idea that handing your work in on time, or that the language of Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare, is inherently racist—these notions are absurd. They’re part of a deconstructive modus operandi pushed by leftist extremists with a Marxist worldview. It’s antithetical to Scripture. The Latino community pushed back.

Hispanics are now 34 percent of all University of California admissions, up from 14 percent a quarter century ago, without affirmative action. Government tells me, “You are, in perpetuity, a victim. You’re second-class. You can’t make it on the God-given gifts and abilities that are in you. You can’t make it without government.” Uncle Sam is just an uncle. He will never be my Heavenly Father. I would like to see every Hispanic, every African American push back on the notion that without government we can’t thrive. Yes, we can.

What’s the potential within the Hispanic community to support school choice arguments? We do have “systemic racism”: It’s what the school district of Los Angeles and other school districts →
practice. We have a system in place where Latinos and African Americans and kids in the inner city are learning Dora the Explorer, when their counterparts in the suburbs are learning Chaucer and Milton. We socially promote people who are not academically advancing. We care more about political correctness than we do about STEM—science, technology, engineering, math. We’re harming beautiful African American and Latino young men and women with a public educational system that is completely morally reprehensible. We need school choice. Hispanics want more charter schools, more Christian schools, more private schools.

You write in your new book, From Survive to Thrive, “Our trials can become opportunities for God’s light to shine through the cracks of our brokenness.” In discussing Psalm 23, you write, “When I walk through the darkest valley,” not “if.” Is the gospel of suffering still strong in Hispanic churches, or is the prosperity gospel making inroads? The prosperity gospel message has had an impact in the Hispanic church, but I want to define the term. There is no gospel of prosperity. There is the gospel of Jesus Christ—the vicarious, atoning work of Jesus, the finished work on the cross, His resurrection, His ascension, and the birth of the Church. The notion that if you’re a Christian you should be rich and prospering is hard to swallow. If you say brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are not good Christians because they’re not rich, that’s heresy. But Psalm 1 does say, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked. ... In all that he does, he prospers.” So does God want you to prosper? Yes. Should making money and owning homes be the marker of a Christian walk? Absolutely not, and what we’re seeing in the Latino community is a middle ground.

Which is ... Latinos saying that suffering solidifies and validates Christianity—that in the midst of our suffering, we count our faith for joy. Our hope is in Christ who works all things for good. We like-wise see the Hispanic community saying “I’m not going to measure my Christianity by my Maserati or Mercedes-Benz”—that’s silly—“but God does want me to live a life where I can prosper spiritually, mentally, relationally, and become a blessing to people.”

I wonder about your redefining of the Greek word makarios from “blessed” to “happy”? I don’t believe in a theology of happiness where we are driven to be happy. But the joy of the Lord, if properly in place in your life, will prompt you to exhibit an emotional return on that investment of joy that was paid for on the cross, so even in the most difficult circumstances you will be happy. It’s not happiness independent of God-ordained joy, but joy as a byproduct of God’s indwelling through His Spirit.

Later in the book you talk about how your victories will exceed your defeats. How do you know that? The moment you receive Christ as your Lord and Savior, the victory of the cross literally trumps all of the defeats in your past. It’s equivalent to losing every other game you ever played in your past, and somehow you ended up in the Super Bowl by the grace of God, and you win. All your defeats cannot compare to a personal relationship with Christ where you have eternal life, as in John 3:16, John 10:10, and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

You write, “God is looking for thrivers, his champions who dare fight for justice.” Does that sound like God is looking for cool people and then signing them up? Is God looking for thrivers? Sure, He’s looking for the blind to give them sight. He’s looking for the lame to tell them to stand up, take up your mat, and start walking. He’s looking for the lost sheep. But He’s also looking for those willing to come out of perpetual survival mode. Thrivers are individuals who come out of the desert and step into the land of milk and honey knowing there are giants we have to bring down for the sake of our children and our children’s children.

Where do we see people doing that in America today? Many examples. Those who are fighting for life and ending this abortion obsession in America are what I call modern day Gideons, thrivers who said, “No, I’m not just going to survive. I’m going to thrive for the sake of my children and my children’s children.”

—For a previous Rodriguez interview, see “The Lamb’s agenda,” Dec. 1, 2012
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Music to make the world seem small

New collections chart folk music across the globe

by Arsenio Orteza

If you’re the kind of cineaste who watches Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Lady Vanishes* for the scene in which Michael Redgrave browbeats peasants into helping him document Bandrikan folk music, you’ll love Dust-to-Digital’s new digital anthology, *Excavated Shellac: An Alternate History of the World’s Music*.

Available via Bandcamp or dust-digital.com for an unusually reasonable $35, the collection presents 100 78-RPM-era songs from almost as many countries. Bandrika isn’t among them (it doesn’t really exist). But there’s music from actual countries Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, and Georgia. Some of it, especially Fr. Dukli Wieksa Banda’s waltzing instrumental “Na Wykretke” (1928) and Šule Radosavljevič-Šapčanin’s lustily sung “Jeleno, Momo Jeleno” (1927), is Bandrikan to the core.

Africa contributes highlights as well. One late-1950s recording captures the organ-accompanied Ugandan church choir Abaimbe Kenisa Lutiko eye Namirembe singing the hauntingly beautiful “Oje Omwoyo Omutukuvu” (“You Are the Holy Spirit”) in a cathedral with heavenly acoustics.

The buoyantly strummed guitars and mandolins of “O Ta Nikona” by the Mozambican Enosse Kuhanya Muni (1953), meanwhile, sound almost like a trial run at Peter Gabriel’s “Solsbury Hill.”

The project’s overseer, Jonathan Ward, has supplied a 185-page liner PDF and filled it with detailed information about each track and an introductory essay putting it all in context. With Grammy-winning engineer Michael Graves in charge of audio restoration, even the most “out there”-sounding tracks possess an ear-friendly vibrancy.

Speaking of “out there,” people who grew up associating the terms “Japanese” and “avant-garde” with the yowlings of Yoko Ono should know that nothing on the just-released *The Rough Guide to Avant-Garde Japan*—not the babies imitating Yoko Ono in the background of the saxophonist Masanori Oishi’s sublime “Syracuse Blues” or the rappers spitting Nipponese fire over the playfully jittery electro-weirdness of Cockroach Eater’s “Kyoqgen Qabbalah”—will have them holding their ears.

As with *Excavated Shellac*, listeners will marvel at the collection’s variety of sounds and how far a little experimenting can go toward rejuvenating moribund genres.

A more important awareness-raising awaits those who give the ninth volume of Naxos’ *Folk Music of China* series its due. Subtitled *Folk Songs of the Uzbeks & Tatars of China*, it gives voice to the Uyghur Muslims whose persecution is becoming the defining human-rights atrocity of the 21st century.

Actually, it gives voices (and mandolins and accordions), and in so doing it evokes a world of laughter, a world of tears, a world of hopes, and a world of fears.

It really is a small world after all.
A little old, a little new

New and notable releases
by Arsenio Orteza

If Loving You Is Wrong by Rev. Johnny L. “The Hurricane” Jones: “I learned a long time ago that everything that’s good to you isn’t good for you.” “If God has blessed you with a good wife, my friends, you ought to take care of that wife.” This document of an early-’70s service at Atlanta’s Mount Olive Baptist Church isn’t all that different from Jones’ other recent Jewel Records MP3 reissues. Amid spirited, primitively recorded singing, a deeply felt sermon punctuated throughout by shouts of “Yeah!” and “Amen!” emerges. What sets this sermon apart is that it doubles as an analysis of Luther Ingram’s greatest hit—“(If Loving You is Wrong) I Don’t Want To be Right”—more penetrating than anything dreamt of in the typical music critic’s philosophy.

Soul Jazz Records Presents Two Synths, a Guitar (and) a Drum Machine by various artists: The most purposefully noisy and weird of these 15 acts is New Fries, whose “Lily” sounds like sped-up Public Image Ltd. A close second is IXNA, whose “Somebody Said” sounds like sped-up Laurie Anderson. Coming in at a distant but cute third is Gramme, whose “Discolovers” might be an offshoot of the Tom Tom Club’s family tree. And if many of the remaining cuts, sped-up though they are, share too much DNA with high-end-hotel-lobby “trance” music to justify the collection’s “post punk dance” subtitle, the final three—by Black Deer, MADMADMAD, and Wino D respectively—combine for an off-kilter denouement worth sticking around for.
Crimes against the global Church proliferate under the cover of a pandemic

The bodies lay in the streets of Axum for days, pockmarked with gunshot wounds. At night the residents of Ethiopia’s holiest city listened, horrified, as hyenas fed on the corpses. For many, these were people they knew.

Rumors surfaced in early December of a massacre at Axum’s Church of St. Mary of Zion, but the government blocked reporters from the embattled Tigray region. Only after authorities lifted a blackout on phone and internet communication in February could they confirm the true horror: 800 people killed in and around the church in one weekend (Nov. 28).

In November fighting erupted between Ethiopia’s military and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Troops from neighboring Eritrea—who are mostly Muslim and have carried out some of the worst atrocities against Christians inside their own borders—have played a controversial role siding with national forces inside Tigray.

Axum and the surrounding area are the historical roots of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, one of the oldest in the world. The Church of St. Mary of Zion has been destroyed and rebuilt several times over the centuries, and according to tradition it houses the Ark of the Covenant. As Eritrean soldiers entered the city during the fighting, hundreds took refuge in the church.

“On every corner there was a body,” a deacon from the church told the Associated Press. “People were crying in every home.”

After Eritrean soldiers left the city, the deacon helped count the bodies, gathered identity cards, and assisted in digging a mass grave.

In pockets like Ethiopia’s Tigray region, crimes against the Church have proliferated in the shadows of a pandemic. While American and European leaders at home have been consumed with the health crisis—plus political, economic, and social upheaval—persecution is having more free rein abroad.

In Algeria, Protestant churches have remained closed due to COVID-19 measures, while authorities allowed over 180 mosques and some Catholic churches to reopen.

In India, 80 percent of Christians surveyed by Open Doors report government workers turned them away from food distributions, mostly run by members of the ruling Hindu nationalist party. Some said they walked miles from their homes and hid their Christian identity to receive rations that COVID-19 shutdowns made necessary.

Christians also face threats in areas where U.S. engagement, once strong, has lagged. In Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban and a looming U.S. pullout pose threats to a young and growing church that’s yet to secure a toehold among Pashtuns, who dominate the Taliban’s ranks.

In Turkey, officials are issuing deportation documents to asylum-seekers—including Christians already forced out of countries like Iran and Iraq—as forward processing of refugees has ground nearly to a halt during the pandemic.

One of the most serious conflicts to arise under cover of the pandemic also involves Turkey, which provided military support to Azerbaijani forces who attacked ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh late last year. A Russia-brokered peace agreement is untenable. Half of the 150,000 Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh have been forced from their homes, and many killed.

Reporters working with locals in December confirmed two beheadings of Armenian civilians by what appeared to be Azerbaijani forces. On Feb. 19, 100 members of Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, calling on the Biden administration to take “concrete steps” to protect Nagorno-Karabakh’s Armenian population. The displacement has spiked coronavirus cases across the region.

How to attend to such ills when illness and hardship visit our own doorsteps? Jesus’ disciples faced just that predicament as they regrouped following His death. Yet it was in that very moment the risen Lord gave a commission that they move out into “all the world.” It’s our orientation, too—even if not our physical calling to go—to advocate and pray and petition for the persecuted in this time of global distress.
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DONALD TRUMP MADE GAINS AMONG SOME HISPANIC VOTERS IN
DONALD TRUMP MADE GAINS AMONG SOME HISPANIC VOTERS IN 2020. WILL THE GOP CONTINUE THE TREND? BY HARVEST PRUDE

Trump supporters drive in a demonstration organized by Cuban exiles in Miami on Oct. 10.
GASTON DE CARDENAS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES
In July 2020, the Republican National Committee asked Paulsen to run the Latinos for Trump Coalition in Tampa. She called the request “one of the biggest honors of my life as a naturalized citizen.” She only had four months to ramp up outreach. COVID-19 caused the group to scrap phone-banking parties in which volunteers crammed together for hours. But she and 793 volunteers knocked on around 40,000 doors, individually made 40,000 phone calls in Spanish, and registered 172 people to vote.

Paulsen saw Trump’s increases among Hispanic voters in Florida coming, but it surprised others. Hispanic voters over-
whelmingly favored President Joe Biden, but Trump managed to chip away at some former Democratic strongholds, particularly in Florida and Texas. Trump’s backing among Hispanics grew from 28 percent in 2018 to 32 percent in 2020. That lopsided margin still favors Democrats. But some Republicans see a window of opportunity to regain levels of Hispanic support not seen since 2004.

In 2016, Trump won about 38 percent of Florida’s Hispanic vote. But 2020 exit polls showed that figure had jumped past 50 percent. Biden won liberal Miami-Dade County by only 7 percentage points—a county Hillary Clinton had won by 30 points in 2016.

Biden also bled support in south Texas, along the U.S.-Mexico border. Trump flipped Zapata County, near the Rio Grande Valley, from blue to red. The county is around 93 percent Hispanic.

Trump spent the months leading up to the election executing a focused, on-the-ground strategy in Florida. Can Republicans sustain those gains among Hispanic voters while cutting losses with them in other parts of the country? Some say yes, if the GOP focuses on key issues important to the growing voting bloc.

REACHING HISPANIC VOTERS will only grow in importance for both political parties. Ahead of the 2020 presidential election, Pew Research Center projected that Latinos—13 percent of all eligible voters—would be the largest ethnic or racial minority voting bloc, surpassing black voters for the first time: 32 million Latinos would be eligible to vote (compared with around 30 million black voters).

In key states like Arizona, Nevada, Florida, and Texas, Hispanics make up nearly 20 percent of the electorate.

A majority of Hispanic voters support Democratic candidates, but about one-third have voted for Republican presidential candidates since 1972. The GOP’s high point came in 2004, when George W. Bush won 40 percent of the Hispanic vote (up from 35 percent in 2000).

During his presidency, Bush’s messaging sought to appeal to Hispanics with socially conservative values of faith, family, and work. The former Texas governor also appointed Hispanics to key positions as governor and as president. He also exerted time and political capital to reform immigration laws. (Conservative Republicans in Congress ultimately stymied those efforts.)

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Conference, thinks Hispanics’ support of the GOP could surpass Bush’s numbers if Republicans are willing to address immigration reform.
“Republicans can compromise, can come together with Joe Biden,” Rodriguez said. “They can say, ‘We’re not going to give you amnesty but are going to give citizenship to dreamers.’” Dreamers are immigrants for whom the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program delayed deportation after their parents brought them to the country illegally. The Supreme Court blocked Trump’s efforts to end the program.

**WHEN PAULSEN CANVASED** the Tampa area in 2020, residents often opened the door when they saw she represented Trump but hesitated to discuss the election. “I’d ask them: ‘Are you better off than you were four years ago, economically-wise?'”

“They’d say, ‘Oh my [gosh], I’m making more money thanks to Trump.’”

She and others say the economy is key to capturing the Hispanic vote.

Drug cartel violence drove Cesar Grajalas and his father Javier to immigrate to the United States from Colombia 20 years ago. His parents ran a sewing business but had to sell their machines to pay debts. Javier bought one-way tickets to Miami for Cesar and himself, and they arrived with $80 in cash.

A family friend who managed a bakery allowed the two to stay at her home for a week. Grajalas helped the woman cook and clean. “She asked, ‘Can you bake cookies?’ I say yes, and I’d never baked cookies in my life.”

Members of the local Catholic parish helped them find work landscaping, cleaning and painting houses, and working construction. Three months later, they had enough to bring Cesar’s mother and sister to Miami.

After a year of saving, they bought two sewing machines. Then a few years later they opened a small luxury fashion studio in downtown Miami.

From his parents’ example, Grajalas learned that “our community will find a way to continue to be [entrepreneurs].”

Grajalas eventually connected entrepreneurial values to conservative politics and now works for the LIBRE Initiative, a sister organization to Americans for Prosperity that focuses on promoting conservative economic ideas among Hispanic communities.

Economic opportunity is often the primary focus for many Latino immigrant communities Grajalas works with: “If you talk to the community and ask them, ‘Why did you move to the United States in the first place?’ the first answer is, ‘I want an opportunity for me and my family. I want a better economy for me and my family.’”

Grajalas believes Trump grew his support among Hispanics because of the perception that he could handle the economy better than Democrats. He’s not alone.

Ruy Teixeira, a left-leaning political scientist, said in a post-election analysis that Democrats bled support among Hispanics because of the misjudging issues they cared about. Instead of immigration and racial tensions, they should have focused on upward mobility and jobs.

Citing one panel survey by the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, Teixeira noted that over 70 percent of Hispanic voters cited jobs, the economy, and healthcare as “very important”...
issues. They considered immigration and racial equality far less important (47 percent of Hispanics viewed the Black Lives Matter movement unfavorably).

“This is a population that overwhelmingly wanted to hear what the Democrats had to offer on jobs, the economy and health care,” Teixiera wrote. “But the Democrats could not make the sale with an unusually large number of Latino voters in a year of economic meltdown and coronavirus crisis.”

Grajales thinks Hispanics associate a propped-up economy with socialism, a system many came to the United States to escape: “We don’t want that here.”

THE ECONOMY ISN’T the only appeal Republicans made to Hispanics in 2020. They also doubled down on cultural and religious conservatism.

Paulsen, whose husband is a pastor, said many Hispanic pastors she knows in Tampa preached sermons on how “the Bible says marriage is between a man and a woman, the Bible talks about the sanctity of life in the womb and until the end of life” and asked congregants how they could support the Democratic Party given its position on abortion. “Those two things right there are huge in the Christian conservative Hispanic community,” Paulsen said.

Ashley Verdugo works for the Christian Family Coalition (CFC) Florida, which highlights abortion, religious liberty, and marriage. Those issues resonate with many of the churchgoing Hispanics the group reaches.

The organization distributes English and Spanish voting guides on national elections, county commission races, and everything between. Verdugo’s father founded the organization 18 years ago, and they’re now involved in local races in six counties surrounding the Miami-Dade area. The group worked with Trump in 2016 and has continued to focus on increasing support for pro-life, pro-family, pro-religious-freedom candidates.

“For all his faults, Donald Trump was able to get Latino voters, and if Republicans want to move forward, they can’t just let that go to the wayside,” Verdugo said.

DON’T TAKE THE LATINO VOTE OR WHATEVER GAINS YOU’VE SEEN FOR GRANTED. ... THE R OR D NEXT TO YOUR NAME IS NOT GOING TO GUARANTEE A LATINO VOTE.

Some of those faults may be why Trump didn’t get more Hispanic votes. During and after his first campaign, Trump implied many immigrants, particularly from Mexico, were “killers and rapists.” He won election in 2016 as an immigration restrictionist, then allowed a federal government shutdown in an attempt to secure money to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. His administration faced mounds of criticism for its family separation policy at the border.

But by 2020, Trump had in some ways softened his focus on immigration and the border wall and shifted to the economy, “law and order,” and countering socialism. Some organizers said part of Trump’s appeal to some Hispanics was his brash approach.

“He’s not trying to sugarcoat, not trying to talk politically,” said David Casas, a former GOP member of the Georgia House of Representatives who now works with LIBRE.

Casas’ parents fled Cuba for Spain and eventually made it to the United States when Casas was 2 years old. His father, who had studied to be a doctor, worked as a waiter instead to provide for his family. Years later, Casas became the first Hispanic elected to the Georgia Statehouse as a Republican.

CASAS SAYS BOTH Republicans and Democrats will make a mistake if they ignore one key element: diversity among Hispanics.

“I think the biggest misconception is thinking that Latinos are monolithic ... a Cuban and his experiences and a Venezuelan and his experiences are going to be very different from someone from Mexico or El Salvador,” Casas said. “We saw it in this past election.”

Biden won more support in some states with large Hispanic populations: Arizona, California, Nevada, and New Mexico. Trump’s restrictionist immigration policies and rhetoric likely hurt him among higher concentrations of Mexican immigrants in places like Arizona, where he received 37 percent of the Hispanic vote there.

In Arizona, Trump was also likely hurt by his association with Joe Arpaio, who served as the sheriff for metro Phoenix for 24 years. Trump pardoned Arpaio in 2017 after the sheriff disregarded a judge’s order in a racial profiling case. Arpaio was a prominent supporter of a restrictive immigration law, S.B. 1070. The Supreme Court struck down the controversial “show me your papers” law in 2012. Local Hispanic organizers pointed to the outrage as a reason for growing turnout among Hispanics voting for Democrats.

For other Hispanic communities, like Florida’s heavy concentration of Cubans who came to the United States under different circumstances, the immigration policy issue may not matter as much, according to Mario Lopez, president of the Hispanic Leadership Fund.

The GOP will have to figure out whether it can build upon the support of Hispanic voters in future elections or if 2020 was a result of the Trump factor.

“From the conversations I’ve had, it is Donald Trump,” Casas said.

He offered a warning to lawmakers and organizers: “Don’t take the Latino vote or whatever gains you’ve seen for granted. ... The R or D next to your name is not going to guarantee a Latino vote.”
In Los Angeles, “defunding the police” led to disbanding a unit specially designed to help with homelessness

by SOPHIA LEE in Los Angeles

Los Angeles Sanitation Department workers ask homeless people to relocate as they clean streets in Hollywood.

VALERIE MACON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES
AREK ARZOUMANIAN WAS NERVOUS. As the Los Angeles Department of Sanitation environmental compliance inspector, he stood at a residential street corner in Van Nuys—the Los Angeles neighborhood with the densest population of homelessness in the San Fernando Valley—getting ready to clear out an illegal homeless encampment. Most of the individuals living there had already packed up after getting notice of the cleanup, but several tents remained.

Arzoumanian warily eyed those tents. Those who refuse to leave always make his job difficult. Arzoumanian meets homeless people all day in his job—and 1 out of 10 get belligerent when his crew attempts to clear the area. Most of the individuals living there had already packed up after getting notice of the cleanup, but several tents remained.

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Those were the times Arzoumanian was glad to have police officers nearby—and not just regular patrol officers, but Homeless Outreach Proactive Engagement (HOPE) unit officers, whose sole job was to engage with the homeless community. These officers took 40 hours of mental health intervention training and developed long-term relationships with homeless individuals. They knew their names and their stories. They knew who’s mentally ill, who’s drug-addicted, who’s violent, and who’s reaching a breaking point. They collaborated with other agencies to provide individuals with help rather than arrest or cite them. And on cleanup days, they protected sanitation workers like Arzoumanian.

But now the HOPE officers are gone. Responding to protesters’ calls to cut police programs in 2020, city leaders voted to cut $150 million from the Los Angeles Police Department’s budget. The department decided to disband at least half a dozen specialized details, including units focusing on sexual assault, burglary/cargo theft, and animal cruelty. The biggest of those units was the HOPE program, with 45 officers and four sergeants. Leaders originally set March 14 as the date to disband the unit, but attrition within the LAPD forced them to spike the unit earlier. By mid-February, it was gone.

When Mayor Eric Garcetti first introduced the HOPE team in 2016, he described the initiative as “a homelessness ‘super team.’” The LA City Council had declared a state of emergency because of the city’s homelessness, and HOPE was part of its comprehensive plan to tackle it.

By then homelessness and its socioeconomic complexities had become one of the most challenging issues for law enforcement. LAPD responds to more than 100,000 homelessness-related calls a year (out of about 975,000 calls). Police are usually the first to respond when someone sees a man passed out on a bus stop bench, or when a tent pops up in a public park.

Yet being homeless is not a crime. So with the disbandment of the HOPE team, LA will again wrestle with a big question: What role should law enforcement play in responding to issues in homelessness?

BEFORE THE BUDGET CUTS, the HOPE team was one answer. The team also consisted of sanitation workers and LA Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) outreach workers. The multidisciplinary program had two goals: connect homeless people with housing and services, and maintain the public health. HOPE was a long-due recognition that arresting or fining individuals for sleeping on the streets doesn’t work.

By 2016, Garcetti had called for an “all-hands-on-deck” and “innovative and powerful” approach to solving LA’s homeless crisis, saying a collaborative effort between police officers, outreach workers, and sanitation workers would lead to better community cleanups and access to help for the vulnerable. Standing by him was Councilwoman Nury Martinez, whose district in the San Fernando Valley housed the first HOPE team. Martinez described it as “a great start” and “a balanced approach to homeless encampments.”

Then public sentiment toward the police soured. After George Floyd’s death in May 2020, many anti-racism activists focused conversation about racial justice on policing: They claimed police officers enact too much violence with too little accountability. Some discussed specific policing reforms, but a loud group of activists insisted that police departments were broken beyond repair. Activists in LA demanded cutting 90 percent of the city’s police budget.
The “defund the police” group raised many of the same concerns that led to the creation of the HOPE team in the first place: Should dealing with homelessness be the responsibility of a police officer, who’s armed with deadly weapons and more than likely unequipped to handle complex psychological and social issues? Why invest so much money in policing instead of in agencies better suited to handle social issues? The group also pointed to troubling statistics: In the first six months of 2020, one-third of LAPD officers’ use of force involved a homeless person.

In many major progressive cities, the “defund the police” voices drowned out the “police reform” voices. Public pressure successfully pushed many mayors and city council members to slash police department budgets—some said a refusal to do so was synonymous with not caring about racial justice. Garcetti was one of the mayors who reluctantly caved: In June 2020, he proposed

“HONESTLY, AFTER THE POLICE LEAVE, I’M NOT SURE HOW MUCH WE CAN PERFORM OUR JOB.”

An LA city worker talks to a man living in a tent on a sidewalk along Cherokee Avenue.
to redirect $150 million from the LAPD budget to social programs in disadvantaged communities. Backing him once again was Martinez, who led the City Council in voting to slash $150 million from the LAPD budget. In a statement, she said the council will be “looking at public safety through a very different and more accurate lens.”

That same month, an LAHSA supervisor sent an impassioned email to all her co-workers, urging LAHSA to “immediately dissolve” its partnership with any law enforcement agencies, including HOPE, and expand its operation without the police. The supervisor, who’s white, argued she can’t make meaningful connections with black homeless individuals with police by her side. She then drafted a petition demanding LAHSA cut all ties with the police. More than 9,000 people signed.

A $150 million reduction from the LAPD’s gargantuan $1.8 billion operating budget was a symbolic gesture aimed at briefly satisfying public demands. But six months later, the council’s plan to direct about $88.8 million of those funds to projects such as street resurfacing, street sweeping, and exercise equipment for parks drew the ire of activists, who called it “glorified pork barrel spending.”

PEOPLE LIKE THE SUPERVISOR point out that many homeless individuals don’t trust the police because of previous trauma or negative experiences with law enforcement. But whether the police partner with LAHSA or not, inevitably, officers will at some point interact with the homeless.

Homeless individuals are the most vulnerable crime victims: In 2019, overall crime in LA decreased by 5 percent from 2018, but crimes against the homeless increased by 26 percent. Crimes with homeless victims have risen 17-fold within the last decade.

Sometimes it’s the homeless themselves who commit crimes. According to the most recent LAPD report, felony arrests of homeless individuals increased 19 percent from the past year. Other behaviors related to homelessness can also become a public safety issue: In one ride-along with the HOPE team at the LA River, I saw the sanitation crew confiscate nine large butane tanks from a homeless encampment underneath a bridge.

That’s why Arzoumanian, the environmental compliance inspector, dreaded the day the HOPE unit disappeared. “It’s horrible,” he told me, shaking his head. “The police had my back.”

I met him at 8 a.m. on a cold day in December, weeks before the HOPE unit disbanded. Normally, cleanup starts at 7 a.m., but per city law, the homeless can keep their tents up if temperatures fall below 50 degrees. The Valley HOPE team unit lead at the time, Sgt. Jerald Case, checked the weather on his iPhone: 48 degrees. So the sanitation crew members and LAHSA outreach workers waited in their vehicles while HOPE officers stood by the sidewalks with pink cheeks, stamping their feet and murmuring to each other.

At 8:41 a.m., Case checked his iPhone again: 52 degrees. Arzoumanian directed his crew to clean up an alley that was peppered with discarded clothing, plastic wrappers, and used needles. As his crew swept and
tossed shopping carts into a trash truck, Arzoumanian approached a woman refusing to take down her tent.

She looked to be in her early 30s, with a bean-sprout frame, pointy chin, and light brown hair cropped short. She sat in a urine puddle inside her tent, which took up the entire breadth of the sidewalk. Boxes, beer crates, and random pieces of furniture, including a black leather swivel chair, surrounded her tent like a protective moat. When Arzoumanian called to her, she popped her head out and glared at him.

Arzoumanian reminded her to pack her stuff into a 60-gallon container so the crew could clean the area. “Let me know how much time you need,” he cajoled her. “Later, later,” the woman mumbled. “OK, how much later?” Arzoumanian asked.

The woman became agitated. She rocked her head side to side: “You’re not going to touch my things. I’m a judge. I kill people!”

Arzoumanian pleaded with her, but by then she was hysterical and threatened him. “Don’t touch my [profanity]!” she hollered. “Every time I see you, you take my stuff! My only job is to kill, that’s all I know to do.”

As she began threatening to rape him, Arzoumanian turned to me with a pained, frustrated expression: “See what I’m talking about? This is too difficult.”

The HOPE officers stood watching several feet away, arms folded. Case walked up to Arzoumanian and asked him in a low voice, “How do you want us to proceed?” Arzoumanian decided against using force, and instead asked LAHSA outreach workers to call the Department of Mental Health and send a psychiatrist. “At this point, if we do anything, I think she’ll get violent,” he explained to me. I asked if someone would arrive in time. He shrugged: “They might take a week, who knows.”

Meanwhile, two young men filmed the entire encounter with their cell phones. They filmed the sanitation workers as they swept the trash-strewn asphalt streets and power-washed the urine-stained sidewalks. They swiveled their cell phones on the HOPE unit officers, who pointedly ignored them. “Paid protesters,” Case whispered to me. “How do you know?” I asked. Case said the first time the HOPE team arrived to clean the area last August, more than 70 protesters barricaded themselves between the homeless and the police. His officers heard a woman promise to pay them overtime if they stayed longer.

I walked up to the two protesters. One of them was a lanky 24-year-old man with dark matted hair and pierced ears. He declined to give his full name but identified himself as Chloe S. I asked what he does for a living. “Um … I do some art,” he replied. “So … an artist?” I clarified. He shrugged. “Um, sure. Yeah. I’m just a concerned neighbor who has compassion for people on the streets. We’re here because they’re here,” he said, indicating the HOPE officers.

Chloe said he shows up at the encampment cleanups every week to protest because police are abusing the homeless: “We come to advocate for the unhoused people here. We want to mitigate the damage the city does against them.” He said police officers “cause extreme mental distress” to the homeless by “lying” that they can keep their things, then throw them away.

I asked Case about Chloe’s claims, and he bristled: “We don’t take anybody’s stuff. We just do what the sanitation crew requests. Again, we’re just here for support.” He said in the almost four years he’d been HOPE unit lead, no officer had ever used a baton or a stun gun on a homeless individual. According to a recent LAPD report, out of the 5,107 times a HOPE officer interacted with someone experiencing homelessness between January and June of 2020, they used force four times, none resulting in serious injury.

The HOPE officers could have forcibly removed the woman in the tent, but they didn’t. Both HOPE officers and the outreach team offered her shelter, services, and opportunities to reconnect with family. They gave her a 72-hour notice about the cleanup, then a two-hour notice. They gave her a bag to store 60 gallons of property and offered free 90-day storage for any other non-hazardous items. They waited until the temperature was warm enough before clearing the encampment.

“It’s very sad,” Arzoumanian told me, his eyebrows turning downward. He knows the woman is suffering. But he also has a job. “The reality is, this is not going anywhere,” he said, pointing at the woman, the tents, the trash, and the encampment. Then he lowered his voice: “Honestly, after the police leave, I’m not sure how much we can perform our job.”
ROBERT JULIAN-BORCHAK WILLIAMS WAS AT HIS JOB AT AN automotive supply company on Jan. 9, 2020, when Detroit police called and told him to report to Detroit’s 3rd Precinct: The caller said police intended to arrest him—at work if necessary—but wouldn’t say why. Taking it as a prank call, Williams replied, “Well, I’m leaving work in 15 minutes, so unless you can get here in 15 minutes you can come to my home.” ¶ As Williams pulled into his driveway in Farmington Hills, Mich., an hour later, a police cruiser immediately parked behind him. Officers jumped out and handcuffed him as his wife and two children watched. Authorities charged him with grand larceny for a $3,800 theft committed six months prior at a high-end watch store.
ALGORITHMS
Police held Williams in jail overnight. The next day, during questioning, police showed him two grainy photos from the store’s surveillance cameras as evidence of his guilt. But the photos showed another man, not Williams. He held one of the photos next to his face and said, “No, that’s not me. I hope y’all don’t think all black people look alike.”

At that point, detectives revealed that a computer program had matched the store’s surveillance images with Williams’ 10-year-old driver’s license photo. It seemed the computer had made a mistake. Authorities held Williams for 30 hours and released him on $1,000 bond. At a court hearing two weeks later, the prosecutor dropped the case.

Police have long used a combination of witness testimony and shoe-leather detective work to track down criminals and solve crimes—scouting for fingerprints and DNA evidence, placing suspects in lineups, staking out homes and businesses, and reviewing hours of surveillance footage. In the 21st century, new technology has entered the mix: State and federal law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, have begun using facial recognition technology (FRT) to identify suspects and victims. Proponents say it is an essential and powerful crime-fighting tool. Most recently, police used facial recognition to identify individual participants at the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.

But privacy experts and defense attorneys cite problems with the technology. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) testing of FRT software revealed inaccuracies in identifying women and minorities. Police department policies governing its use are either nonexistent or ill-defined. And, as Williams’ case demonstrates, a false identity match can result in a wrongful arrest.

In a similar case in November, New Jersey resident Nijeer Parks sued officials and police in the city of Woodbridge, N.J., claiming police wrongly arrested and imprisoned him in January 2019 based on a mistaken facial recognition match.

Within the last two years, the state of Washington and the cities of Boston; San Francisco; Minneapolis; Madison, Wis.; Portland, Maine; and Portland, Ore., have banned governmental use of facial recognition technology or restricted its use to specific situations, such as identifying and locating “victims of human trafficking, child sexual exploitation or missing children.” In restricting the technology, officials cited concerns about accuracy and citizen privacy.
Still, government and commercial entities are implementing FRT at an increasing pace, and no national law or policy regulates its use. The technology’s growth raises an important question: Do its crime-fighting benefits outweigh concerns about privacy and accuracy?

To learn more, I spoke with Ryan Gable, a police constable in Montgomery County, Texas. We met in Gable’s Precinct 3 office, where dark wood shelves behind his desk hold personal mementos, including Texan football souvenirs, family photos, and a humorous quote: “I love you more than bacon.”

First elected to head Precinct 3 in 2012, Gable has served in law enforcement since 1993. He began his career investigating narcotics as an undercover officer in neighboring Harris County (home of Houston). With a staff of 80, including 69 officers, Precinct 3 serves a growing population of more than 250,000 residents.

In 2019, Gable’s precinct purchased a facial recognition software app from Clearview AI, a private tech startup that provides a facial recognition search system for police. He’d heard about the software while attending a meeting of private investors evaluating various technologies for use by law enforcement. After a free 2-3 month trial use of the app, the precinct purchased a discounted license.

Here’s how the software works: A police official uploads a person’s image into the app, which returns a series of possible identity matches. The software compares the image against other images in Clearview’s database—3 billion total, according to the company. Clearview assembled its massive database by scraping images posted online, including those in public social media accounts on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook. It claims 2,400 law enforcement agencies worldwide use its system.

According to Gable, the app has proven valuable in multiple cases. He describes one particular fraud investigation: Using counterfeited driver’s licenses, someone withdrew money from bank accounts throughout Texas, stealing the identities of 17 individuals. One bank’s surveillance video provided a particularly clear image, which the Precinct 3 criminal investigative division ran through the Clearview app. The software produced mugshots found via Google of a female who, after further police investigation, became the suspect in the case. Police haven’t yet found her, but an open warrant for her arrest is visible to any officer who might pull her over for a traffic violation.

Facial recognition doesn’t necessarily provide police with an automatic suspect. But Gable says the Clearview app has provided his investigators with leads in situations where none existed, including cases of robbery, shoplifting, online solicitation of a minor, and home invasions in Houston. The technology can also help track down a known victim or suspect.

Losing access to facial recognition would be a significant loss for Gable’s investigators. “Particularly for technology crimes,” Gable says, “with video and pictures of young people being abused, the biggest impact is not being able to identify victims in horrible situations.”

Although his department also uses other means of investigation—including social media, internet searches, and in-person inquiries by boots-on-the-ground officers—Gable claims the app gives police a distinct ability to put names to anonymous people in videos.

Others agree. Former New York City Police Commissioner James O’Neill called
facial recognition technology a “uniquely powerful tool in our most challenging investigations.” Sheriff Bob Gualtieri of Pinellas County, Fla., told NBC News, “The technology has changed policing almost entirely for the better.”

ANY PRIVACY advocates are alarmed by the growing reach of facial recognition.

Early last year, The New York Times ran a series of articles about Clearview AI, a small company that until then had remained largely unknown. Founder Hoan Ton-That marketed the software by offering trial versions in “cold call” emails to law enforcement personnel.

Reaction to the Times coverage was swift. In New Jersey, Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal subsequently instructed all of the state’s prosecutors to ban police use of the Clearview AI app.

Twitter, Google, YouTube, Venmo, and LinkedIn sent cease-and-desist letters to Clearview, attempting to stop the app from mining their platforms for pictures. Responding to criticisms of privacy infringement, Ton-That argued Clearview does nothing more than run a “Google-type” search for images already posted online.

In Illinois, the American Civil Liberties Union sued Clearview under the state’s Biometric Information Privacy Act, challenging the company’s collecting of online images without explicit consent. Additional lawsuits in California, Virginia, and New York alleged similar privacy law violations.

Amid last summer’s protests against police brutality, IBM, Microsoft, and Amazon.com halted or suspended sales of their respective FRT applications to police agencies.

In 2016, Georgetown Law’s Center on Privacy and Technology published “The Perpetual Line-Up,” the first of three reports based on a yearlong investigation. Georgetown sent over 100 records requests to law enforcement agencies, surveying their use of “face recognition and the risks it poses to privacy, civil liberties and civil rights.” The study concluded that the faces of 1 in 2 U.S. adults (117 million people) could be found in government databases, compiled from driver’s license photos and booking mugshots.

Clare Garvie, a lead author for the Georgetown study, said there exists a cognitive bias by police to assume “the machine got it right”—as evidenced in the arrest of Robert Williams.

The machines don’t always get it right.

Faces, like fingerprints, include biometric features unique to each person. Facial recognition software uses specialized algorithms to map features such as the shape of the chin, size of the forehead, or the distance between the eyes. In this process, the image is converted into a numerical code. The computer can then compare that code with other encoded images, searching for a match.

However, researchers like Garvie question the accuracy of the technology, especially in the context of police investigations: For example, a low-quality or altered “probe” image—the image submitted for matching to the database—can result in misidentification. DataWorks, the FRT software used by the New York Police Department, allows the user to edit an imperfect probe image before running the match. This editing, known as “face normalization,” includes actions such as rotating the image from a side to a front view, inserting features such as eyes, or performing a mirrored effect on a partial face. Garvie compares these actions to adding your own DNA to a DNA sample.

Another problem is the “inherent bias” in FRT software. Arun Ross, a Michigan State University computer science professor, said that bias stems from the training sets—large databases of facial images—used to develop the software. Instead of telling the computer which features it should use, programmers ask the computer to decide: The computer scans hundreds, thousands, or millions of faces in an image database to create an FRT software algorithm.

But if that training set is not diverse
If the training set involves subjects mainly from a certain demographic group (Caucasian Americans, for example), then the resulting software won’t perform well with other demographic groups (African Americans, Asians), resulting in less accurate matches. Reliable FRT software needs a training set sufficiently diverse in terms of gender, race, age, lighting of images, and facial expressions.

How many faces would constitute a sufficient training set? “That is the million-dollar question,” said Ross.

Joy Buolamwini, an MIT researcher, has shown that widely used FRT systems are much more likely to make errors detecting dark female faces than light male faces. A 2019 conference paper Buolamwini wrote with co-researcher Deborah Raji asserted that Amazon’s facial recognition software, Rekognition, mislabeled darker-skinned women as men 31 percent of the time.

Amid these concerns about software accuracy is the overarching problem that police can use the systems without forensics training. Jerome Greco, a public defender in the Digital Forensics Unit of the Legal Aid Society in New York City, notes that although developers offer courses in biometric forensic technology, there’s no standardized training requirement for law enforcement personnel running the FRT matches.

In Massachusetts in December, lawmakers passed a police reform bill curtailing the use of FRT except with a warrant or in cases of potentially imminent death or injury. Gov. Charlie Baker, citing examples where FRT helped to convict a child sex offender and a double murderer, only agreed to sign the bill after the state Senate relaxed restrictions that were in an earlier draft. He had told The Boston Globe he was “not going to sign something that is going to ban facial recognition.”

Ross believes legislation alone cannot address the tensions: It will also require advancements in privacy enhancing technology embedded in FRT systems.

The trade-off between liberty and safety remains a struggle in every society. Facial recognition technology, like the internet, is a neutral tool—not inherently good or evil. But how police use it will determine whether it becomes a boon or bane to society.

Michael King, a professor of computer science and cybersecurity at Florida Institute of Technology, participated in a recorded panel discussion last August at IEEE.tv titled “Facing the Truth: Benefits and Challenges of Facial Recognition.” King described the conflict society must grapple with:

“If, for some reason, I happen to be wrongfully arrested as a result of some false match that occurred with face recognition, I’ll be probably the first one marching to some city hall somewhere saying ‘Ban the technology completely,’” he said. “But if the following week somebody hits me across the head as I’m pumping gas at some convenience store and the only thing you have is an image, I’ll be right back down to city hall saying ‘Give me that technology, I need it to try and identify this person.’”

To ban or not to ban? That is the question—with no simple answer. ■

—Maryrose Delahunty is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course
Myanmar’s military toppled the civilian government. A country up for grabs
Now the country’s diverse population is banding together in protest by Angela Lu Fulton

ry up for grabs

Protesters in Yangon make the three-finger salute while holding a portrait of imprisoned leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

AUNG KYAW Htet/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images
Despite the 95-degree heat, Naw Thazin Hpway felt goosebumps as she saw thousands of mostly young protesters gathered outside the Hledan Center shopping mall in Yangon Feb. 6 to protest the military’s takeover of Myanmar.

That morning, the military had shut off the city’s internet, so the 25-year-old decided to come out with two friends to pass out water bottles and see what was happening. Soon she joined the peaceful demonstration. ¶ “We demand democracy!” “Free Mother Suu!” they chanted, referring to arrested leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Some waved the red National League for Democracy flag emblazoned with a star and peacock, while others held up cardboard signs decrying the Feb. 1 military coup. Cars honked horns as they zoomed by, and drivers raised a three-finger salute in solidarity. ¶ That was Hpway’s first protest but not her last. Since then, protests have spread across the country and grown in size even after police banned gatherings of more than five people. Day after day, hundreds of thousands of people gathered in streets in large cities like Yangon and Mandalay, in the military-designed capital of Naypyidaw, and in smaller townships across the country. The military sent troops to quell the protests, and three protesters had died as of late February.

Hpway had lived almost half her life under Myanmar’s quasi-democratic system. So she was shocked to wake up on Feb. 1 to a phone call from a friend telling her the military had arrested the elected civilian government and returned the country to military rule: “I didn’t think this would happen in 2021. We started to taste democracy 10 years ago.”

She tried calling her parents in Karen state, but the military had suddenly cut off phone service. Using her private internet network, she learned the military detained Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and other top elected leaders in a predawn raid before the start of the new Parliament session. The military declared a state of emergency over alleged voter fraud in November’s election and placed Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing in charge for one year.

Tensions in the delicate, yearslong power-sharing arrangement between the military and Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) party led the military to usurp power once again. But massive demonstrations around the country reveal the generals may have underestimated the resolve of a people who have tasted freedom and refuse to return to life under a military dictatorship. Minority ethnic groups that have suffered government persecution have joined too.

The military intended the coup as a way to wrest power from Suu Kyi, writes author and historian Thant Myint-U in Financial Times: “instead the generals may have inadvertently set off a revolution dynamic at a time of intense social and economic upheaval. The country’s future is now up for grabs.”

FOR NEARLY 50 YEARS a military junta ruled Myanmar, also known as Burma, with an iron fist. It kept the country impoverished, mired in ethnic conflicts, and isolated from the rest of the world. Pro-democracy protests in 1988 and 2007 led to bloody crackdowns and the imprisonment of activists. Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her efforts to resist the military, spent 15 years under house arrest.

But in 2011, Myanmar began opening up in ways once unimaginable—freeing political prisoners including Suu Kyi, allowing free speech, and giving people
the right to vote. Old generals stepped down, paving the way for a government in which the military and mostly elected Parliament share power. Trade opened and companies poured in, bringing the isolated country into the 21st century. In the early 2000s, only a select few could afford cell phones. Today 80 percent of the population has a smartphone.

Still, the reforms were on the military’s terms: A constitution implemented in 2008 gave the military control of a quarter of the parliamentary seats—allowing them to veto any changes to the constitution—as well as the ministries of defense, border, and interior. The military also controls massive amounts of wealth: It owns two major conglomerates through which the generals wholly or partially oversee at least 133 companies in industries like beer, transportation, and tourism, according to a report by
rights awards in disgust, the country’s Buddhist majority regaled her as the defender of their people. Her popularity continued to grow.

THE UNEASY POWER BALANCE between the NLD and the military threatened to topple as the civilian government sought to wrest control from the military’s hands. In 2020, the NLD drafted an amendment that would gradually decrease the proportion of the military’s seats in Parliament from 25 percent to 5 percent, allowing other groups to amend the constitution. It didn’t pass, but it signaled growing defiance.

Before the coup, Suu Kyi and Gen. Hlaing hadn’t spoken in months. Hlaing, who faced mandatory retirement in July, wanted to be president, but Suu Kyi refused to discuss it, according to The New York Times. Others noted the general feared the bad blood between them meant he’d lose the massive wealth he had accumulated.

In 2019, Suu Kyi defended the military’s actions at the International Court of Justice. She said some actions may have been disproportionate, but they didn’t amount to genocide. While international groups rescinded her human activist group Justice For Myanmar. It also controls most of the country’s lucrative jade and ruby trade.

Most importantly, the military had all the guns.

In 2015, NLD won a sweeping victory allowing it to take charge of day-to-day governance. Suu Kyi became the de facto leader as the newly created state counselor (she was barred from being president because her late husband and children were foreign citizens). The United States saw this as a historic success and lifted decades-old trade sanctions.

Yet the West failed to understand Suu Kyi’s ethnonationalist beliefs and balked when she supported the military’s attacks on stateless Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state. After Rohingya militants targeted 30 security posts in 2017, government troops responded with “clearance operations”—they shot civilians, raped women, and burned down villages. Since then, more than 750,000 Rohingya have fled into neighboring Bangladesh.

In 2019, Suu Kyi defended the military’s actions at the International Court of Justice. She said some actions may have been disproportionate, but they didn’t amount to genocide. While international groups rescinded her human
crisis in the senior military,” said George Duncan, an American teacher and researcher in Yangon. (WORLD is using a pseudonym for Duncan’s safety.) “These guys spent their entire lives in the military, so they grew up admiring the rise and power of other generals. I think with the results of the election, there was a real concern that the NLD had the mandate to change the constitution.”

The defeated military spun a narrative of election fraud, claiming evidence of 8.6 million voter irregularities. But multiple international observers dispute the claim. Safeguards such as indelible ink pressed onto voters’ fingers and strict COVID-19 restrictions made it difficult for voters to vote twice.

The military pressed the Supreme Court to hear the fraud claims and whether the NLD-appointed election committee carried out its duties. The election committee said it was investigating fewer than 300 complaints—not enough to overturn election results.

Days before the new Parliament session was set to open with the newly elected leaders, representatives of Hlaing demanded representatives of Suu Kyi reschedule Parliament’s Feb. 1 start date, disband the election committee, and reexamine the election results, insiders told Reuters. But Suu Kyi’s side refused. “You people are going too far, rude and insolent,” replied the military representative.

On Jan. 26, the military spokesman refused to rule out a coup. A day later, Hlaing said the constitution should be revoked if not observed. Pundits and citizens thought the threats were military posturing until they woke up Feb. 1 to armored vehicles rolling into the capital.

SINCE THE COUP, the military has arrested at least 680 people, including human rights activists, lawmakers, journalists and protesters, according to Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Police abducted members of the election committee and protesters under the cover of night. The military promised new elections in a year, but most citizens didn’t believe it: The past two military coups in 1962 and 1988 led to junta control for more than two decades.

In the first few days after the coup, the streets remained empty except for pro-army supporters blasting celebratory music from their trucks. But every night at 8 p.m., people all over the country poured out their anger by banging pots and pans, honking car horns, and drumming on metal banisters. Medical doctors began to strike—causing concerns as the country had been hit hard by COVID-19—followed by teachers, civil servants, bank employees, railway workers, and other industries seeking to bring the country to a standstill.

To disrupt communication, the military intermittently shut off or slowed internet and cell phone services. It blocked Facebook—the main reason people in Myanmar access the internet—as well as WhatsApp and Twitter. Still, young people used VPNs to circumvent the ban and openly expressed their anger at the military coup and their support for the NLD. Through social media, they organized protests, planned strikes, and shared protest safety tips.

Charles Petrie, a former UN humanitarian and resident coordinator in Myanmar, pointed out that Hlaing “must have thought that he could go back to the 1990 playbook,” he told King’s College London. “He is wrong. The Myanmar of today no longer has much in common with the closed and isolated Myanmar of the 1990s. ... [The youth] have been inspired by the other peaceful revolts around the world.”

Photos of the Myanmar protests are reminiscent of recent democracy movements in other Asian countries—young people donning yellow hard hats like in the 2019 Hong Kong protests and lifting the three-finger salute (which the Hunger Games movies popularized) like in Thailand’s protest movement. They also flocked to Twitter to get the hashtag #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar trending to attract international attention. Myanmar youth joined the “Milk Tea Alliance,” an online solidarity movement composed of netizens from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, and India fighting oppression and China-backed trolls.

On Feb. 6, the day of the first major demonstrations, the entire nation experienced an internet blackout. After returning from protests at the Hledan Center, Naw Thazin Hpway saw in the yard of her apartment complex people clapping and singing at rumors that Suu Kyi had been freed. But others claimed the news was...
fake. “I was not able to know what was real,” she said. “This was the worst day of my life. I feel like I stayed in the dark even though there was electricity.”

In reality, Suu Kyi remained under house arrest. Authorities charged her with illegal possession of walkie-talkies and breaking coronavirus restrictions.

Authorities continued internet shutdowns each day from 1 to 9 a.m., coinciding with midnight raids on dissidents.

Each crackdown brought more people protesting. When the military banned gatherings of more than five people and set a curfew in 36 townships on Feb. 8, Hpway feared no one would show up to protest the next day, but she returned to Hledan to support the movement. Her fears were wrong: Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated across the country. Police used tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets, and in some cases even live rounds against protesters. In Naypyidaw, police fatally shot a 20-year-old woman in the head.

Violence again escalated on Feb. 20 when police and soldiers opened fire at striking shipyard employees in Mandalay, killing two and injuring at least 30. The 33rd Light Infantry Division—responsible for attacks on the Rohingya—was involved.

Ethnic groups also joined, even though they had been deeply disappointed by the NLD and Suu Kyi. In the past five years, ethnic minorities continued to suffer as the peace process stalled and the new leadership refused to grant the groups autonomy. In some areas fighting has continued as the military broke cease-fire agreements and continued attacks. The NLD’s election committee also barred voting in several ethnic areas in November, disenfranchising more than 1 million people in Rakhine state. Yet now they’ve found common ground with the Buddhist majority in opposing the military.

At a park in Yangon, members of ethnic minority groups waved flags representing their various groups—Karen, Kachin, Ta’ang, Rakhine—some donning brightly colored woven longyis, a long fabric running to the feet, and traditional headdresses. In Shan state, thousands held a demonstration on traditional fishing boats on Inle Lake, while in Karen state, villagers in Papun District protested not just the coup but recent military shelling that caused 5,000 people to flee. Ethnic armed organizations joined the civil disobedience movement and said they would not tolerate a crackdown on protesters.

“What is happening right now is not about party politics,” Ke Jung, a youth leader from the Naga tribes by the Indian border, told Reuters. “It’s a fight for a system. We cannot compromise with the military, it will give us a black mark on our history.”

WHAT COMES NEXT? The international community condemned the coup, with U.S. President Joe Biden announcing sanctions against Hlaing, deputy Soe Win, as well as several generals and their families on Feb. 10. The sanctions prevent them from accessing more than $1 billion in Myanmar government funds held in the United States, but the measures’ effectiveness may be minimal: The military already faces sanctions for actions against the Rohingya.

Aware of the internet’s power, authorities drafted a cybersecurity bill that would require online service providers to store user data for three years and hand over information if the government decides users threatened “sovereignty and territorial integrity.” Critics say the law is so broad that authorities can arrest anyone who criticizes the government online, bringing the country under censorship.

People like Hpway recognize they have little power to change the military leaders’ minds. Yet she sees the protests as a continuation of past democracy activists’ work, while hoping for a better outcome: “We feel we need to finish this, not pass it on to the next generation.”
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DAYLIGHT SAVING DEBATE

Some lawmakers want to end the spring and fall time change for good

by Michael Malament

RETIRED COLORADO school bus driver Dennis Pesce remembers how, every year in mid-March, his job would get exponentially harder as the school drop-off lane became congested with parents dropping off students who missed the bus. The reason: the beginning of daylight saving time, or DST.

Tired parents and cranky children across the country know the confusion resulting from loss of sleep as the
clocks spring forward one hour to increase the amount of evening daylight. But some lawmakers in state legislatures as well as Congress are pushing legislation to eliminate the time change each spring and fall, citing energy and health benefits.

DST, which starts on March 14 this year, has always been controversial: The practice began in 1918 with the Standard Time Act as a means of conserving energy (from lighting and heating) to support the war effort. A year later, the time change was repealed and became optional for states and municipalities. In 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt re instituted DST, maintaining it year-round until 1945. Over the next two decades, the question was left to states and local governments.

In 1961, a transportation industry study found that an hourlong drive between West Virginia and Ohio required passing through seven time zones. This finding drove passage of the Uniform Time Act of 1966, bringing the whole country to observe daylight saving time for six months of the year while allowing states to pass bills to opt out. Today, DST is in effect eight months of the year in all but two states—Arizona (excluding the Navajo Nation) and Hawaii.

DST is up for debate yet again. Legislatures in at least 10 states from Alabama to Washington have pending bills to make DST year-round, eliminating the semiannual clock change. In January, Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla., resubmitted the Sunshine Protection Act, which would make DST permanent across the country. He touted the purported benefits: Americans can engage in more outdoor physical activities, cutting down on childhood obesity. The extra hour of evening light could reduce violent crime such as robberies. A study found DST reduces artificial light use, decreasing electricity consumption.

Yet critics of the plan note the potential benefits to energy conservation, traffic safety, and crime reduction are minimal, pointing to a 1974 study by the U.S. Department of Transportation. A 2008 Department of Energy assessment found DST only reduced primary energy consumption by 0.02 percent, as the use of air conditioning increases in the early evening hours.

Also, year-round DST has been tried before and failed: In January 1974, President Richard Nixon made the switch in response to the OPEC oil embargo that had sharply curtailed energy supplies. Parents complained about walking their children to school in pitch dark conditions, and the unpopular measure ended the following October.

Still, changing the clocks has another impact—it affects Americans’ health. That’s apparently due to the disruption of sleep patterns.

In the first week after DST begins, the risk of heart attack increases by 17 percent, according to a study published in The American Journal of Cardiology. Researchers suggest alterations in biological clock rhythms are to blame. In Finland, a study found an increase in hospitalization for acute stroke in the first two days after transitioning to DST. Human error also plays a part: Hospitals found a 19 percent increase in serious patient safety events in the first week following transition to DST.

Health effects like these have the American Academy of Sleep Medicine championing fixed, year-round standard time for the entire country.

—Michael Malament is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course
FOR THE PAST HALF-CENTURY, Peter Kushkowski’s words have appeared in publications such as The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and Time magazine, as well as in local papers. He keeps binders filled with his writing, covering topics from World War II to local laws.

Yet Kushkowski is no journalist, and his compositions aren’t featured on the front page or opinion section. Instead, he’s a mainstay on the letters-to-the-editor page. Since the mechanical engineer began his hobby in 1969, he’s seen more than 2,000 of his letters published.

“It initially, I enjoyed seeing my name in print,” he said. Over time, his motivation shifted to expressing his opinions and trying to provoke thought in readers.

“It all began the day after Halloween in 1969 when Kushkowski found vandals had smashed his neighborhood sign. He wrote an angry letter to the editor of his local newspaper in Haddam, Conn. To Kushkowski’s delight, the paper published his letter. A short time later, a neighbor’s dog dug up his yard chasing moles, and Kushkowski wrote another letter to the editor, emphasizing the local leash law.

When Kushkowski wrote to compliment a magazine piece, he received an interesting response: “The editor called me and said that it’s much harder to write a letter of commendation and compliment than to get all ticked off and...”
Finding effective medical treatments for COVID-19 has been a slog, but researchers are finally making progress. Last year, U.K. researchers demonstrated that the steroid dexamethasone can help patients who have severe cases of COVID-19. Dexamethasone was ineffective in less severe stages of the disease, but scientific detective work has now identified a related steroid that can help prevent the worst cases.

A STEROID SOLUTION

New research suggests that, for many patients, an asthma medication could promote COVID-19 recovery

by Charles Horton, M.D.
Asthmatics were a clue to the discovery: We’d expect them to struggle against a respiratory bug, but instead, they fare better than average when fighting COVID-19. Doctors wondered: Could the inhaled steroids they use to manage their condition be the key?

To answer this question, researchers with the STOIC (Steroids in COVID-19) trial assessed a drug called budesonide, commonly prescribed to asthmatics under the trade name Pulmicort. The researchers asked whether giving this steroid within seven days of the onset of mild COVID-19 symptoms might prevent the disease from turning severe. (They defined prevention as avoiding a trip to the urgent care, ER, or hospital.)

The study results left little doubt: Of the roughly 70 patients who received the usual care, 10 worsened. Of the equivalent number on budesonide, only one did. Budesonide also made COVID-19 patients less likely to develop fever, and among those who did, it reduced the number of days with fever.

In short, the drug helps.

The news gets even better. Not only does budesonide help, but it’s cheap and common. As an “essential drug” the World Health Organization believes every country should make widely available, budesonide has helped generations of asthmatics keep their sensitive lung passages calm. It doesn’t last long in the body, so patients must take it twice a day, often for decades. That means the drug, whose patent expired in the late 1970s, is already in wide use.

Researchers measuring a medication’s effectiveness sometimes refer to a figure called the “number needed to treat,” or NNT—the number of patients, statistically speaking, who’d have to receive a given drug or treatment in order for one patient to benefit. For inhaled budesonide, the STOIC study’s authors calculated an NNT of 8. For every eight patients receiving the drug for mild COVID-19, the authors expected one patient to avoid worsening as a result.

Strong treatments normally have a much lower NNT—a drug that benefits every other patient, for example, has an NNT of 2. But the “usually mild, occasionally deadly” nature of COVID-19 may confuse the statistical analysis here. In the study, 6 out of 7 patients who didn’t get the drug still didn’t worsen, meaning the NNT could not have been less than 7. That’s not a surprise with this disease. The researchers’ analysis is sober, and resists the temptation to oversell the results.

Budesonide thus isn’t quite the “silver bullet” that its earliest promoters promised last summer, but it is now the first drug shown by quality research to prevent mild cases of COVID-19 from becoming severe or fatal cases.

The study, involving a team from the University of Oxford, is currently awaiting peer review. Still, Oxford’s lengthy track record of quality research argues strongly for believing it in the meantime. The evidence is certainly enough that if I were to develop symptoms, I would start taking budesonide myself.

One more question to address concerns the balance of accuracy and speed in the research world. The STOIC team originally expected its budesonide results by last September, yet even the online preprint article on MedRxiv wasn’t published until Feb. 8. Such delays are common, but having even a mediocre COVID-19 treatment last September might have saved many lives. We’ll discuss that delay problem in a future article.
Evaluating a body of facts isn’t as easy as it seems

I’ve been thinking about evidence. We used to know what evidence was. Our only question was whether the man bringing his case possessed sufficient amounts of it. We would know it if we saw it. We would be able to say “guilty” or “not guilty.”

I looked up a definition: “the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.”

To read that, you would think everybody sees that “body of facts or information” the same way. Not so. What one person calls evidence another calls malarkey.

I always like to go back to the Bible. There’s the time in Israel’s history when civil war nearly broke out because a bunch of tribes thought they had evidence that another bunch of tribes was defecting from the true God (Joshua 22).

What had happened was that the fledgling Israelite nation, having successfully conquered Canaan, divvied up the land under Joshua. Everyone was now heading home to his own fig tree. Moses had allowed the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh to choose portions on the east side of the Jordan, so off they went, bidding adieu to the other 9½ tribes west of the river.

But just before crossing over, the 2½ tribes built an altar near the river. Word got back to the others. It looked bad to them. They jumped to war preparations (Joshua 22:12). A posse of representatives confronted the eastern brothers for their “treachery” (v. 16). The stunned easterners explained that their pile of stones didn’t mean what the 10 tribes thought it meant. It was for a testimony, not a competing religion. All ended well.

If you guessed the moral of the story is that we should mind our own business and not pursue rumors of corruption, you guessed wrong. Scripture is bullish on good investigations: “If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to dwell there, that certain worthless fellows have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ … then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently.”

The command is thrice repeated: Deuteronomy 13:12-14; Deuteronomy 17:3-4; Deuteronomy 19:15-18. In religion or nations, God loves truth and hates lies. Turning a blind eye is not a virtue.

Circumstantial evidence is a kind of evidence. If a man returns home unexpectedly from a business trip and finds a stranger in his pajamas, who his wife nervously claims is a long-lost cousin, it’s only circumstantial evidence. But I would investigate, wouldn’t you? Especially if I’ve been seeing a pattern.

Multiple witnesses are another type of evidence. The Bible has a two-witness rule: “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15).

But witness evaluation is crucial. A bevy of dubious witnesses is a handful of nothing, as a hundred times zero is still zero.

Peter and Susan Pevensie get a lesson in witness evaluation in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. Though the strangeness of sister Lucy’s story about a land of Narnia makes the siblings assume at first that her testimony is not true and that Edmund’s is, the Professor directs them to consider their past experience with their respective siblings: “If you will excuse me for asking the question—does your experience lead you to regard your brother or your sister as the more reliable? I mean, which is the more truthful?”

This brings us to the matter of discernment, the ability to judge well. The raw data of so-called evidence is nothing without it, and discernment cannot be bought for money but comes from the Holy Spirit.

“The Lord … will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (1 Corinthians 4:5).
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The three tunnels

Ways to oppose abortion

From the pro-life perspective, America has been in a prison camp ever since 1973, when a Supreme Court majority overrode state laws and legalized abortion throughout the land. Since then the court has killed attempts by state legislatures to tear down the prison walls and fences. Occasionally, the court has allowed removal of a watchtower.

Abortion opponents have responded in three ways. Tunnel Tom: Elect pro-life legislators, pass laws, appoint the right judges. Tunnel Dick: Picket, blockade, or destroy abortion centers, or (at the very rare extreme) shoot abortionists. Tunnel Harry: Give compassionate counseling and help to women surprised by pregnancy, create “a culture of life.”

Each of those three tunnels has had faithful diggers. I don’t want to disparage the sacrifices most diggers have made. Still, I’ve just published a short book on where we are now, *Abortion at the Crossroads*, that traces the history of all three tunnels. I’ve found that people frustrated at Tunnel Tom’s slow pace sometimes head over to Tunnel Dick, but that often makes things worse.

Operation Rescue from 1988 to 1990 led to 40,000 arrests for blocking abortion center entrances. Its leaders claimed to have saved many lives. But it also led to a big jump in the percentage of Americans approving of abortion, and that would cost the lives of many more.

It got worse in 1993 when Michael Griffin, whom *The New York Times* called “a fundamentalist Christian and a loner with a bad temper,” shot and killed an abortionist. The *Los Angeles Times* exulted: “The killing of Dr. David Gunn ... has flattened the anti-abortion movement.” In 1994 Paul Hill in Florida killed abortionist John Britton and Britton’s bodyguard. Joe Scheidler, the mighty pro-life tunneler who died this January, opposed such action: “Hill took two lives that could have been changed.”

Matt Waters of Care Net, the umbrella group for pro-life pregnancy centers, called Hill’s action “absolutely negative” for the pro-life cause: Abortion advocates “raise money off of bulletproof vests. It’s a fundraiser for them—a tragedy for us.” One result that year: The U.S. Supreme Court let stand an injunction that kept demonstrators at least 36 feet away from an abortion center. Violence made sidewalk counseling and other nonviolent interventions much more difficult.

As politicians and judges hog-tied pro-life activists, some fiction writers went to town depicting pro-lifers as crazy. In 1994, at the nadir of the pro-life movement, Stephen King came out with *Insomnia*, which focuses on murderous pro-lifers. Viking printed 1.5 million copies: *Insomnia* was the No. 1 bestseller in the United States for three weeks.

Many readers that year saw three King pro-life characters as believable. One, Ed, is a wife-beater whose laughter is “a jagged little sound that made Ralph [the novel’s hero] think of rats dancing on broken glass.” The second character, Daniel Dalton, speaks on a television news show with “dour, jut-jawed determination. ... His eyes glowed in his long, lean face ... nervously snapping his suspenders like big red rubber bands, [he] looked a few sandwiches shy of a picnic.”

The third major pro-life character, Charlie Pickering, has eyes that “floated like strange fish. The expression in them was disconnected and oddly frightened. ... The man’s mouth pulled up in a jerky, humorless smile. Flecks of spittle clung to the corners of his lips.” Pickering sets fire to an abortion center, murders its workers, and yells, “Barbecue all Godless women!”

Abraham Lincoln once said, “In this country, public sentiment is everything. With it, nothing can fail. Against it, nothing can succeed.” Abortion center blockades and shootings, and Stephen King propaganda, contributed to the highest percentage of Americans ever—56 percent—calling themselves “pro-choice.” Tunnel Dick in the 1990s was filled with rubble.
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