



OLYMPIC  
PREVIEW

# TIME

**'IT'S O.K.  
TO NOT  
BE O.K.'**

**NAOMI OSAKA**

ON HER FIRST OLYMPICS,  
PRIORITIZING MENTAL  
HEALTH AND WHY SPORTS  
NEEDS TO CHANGE—NOW

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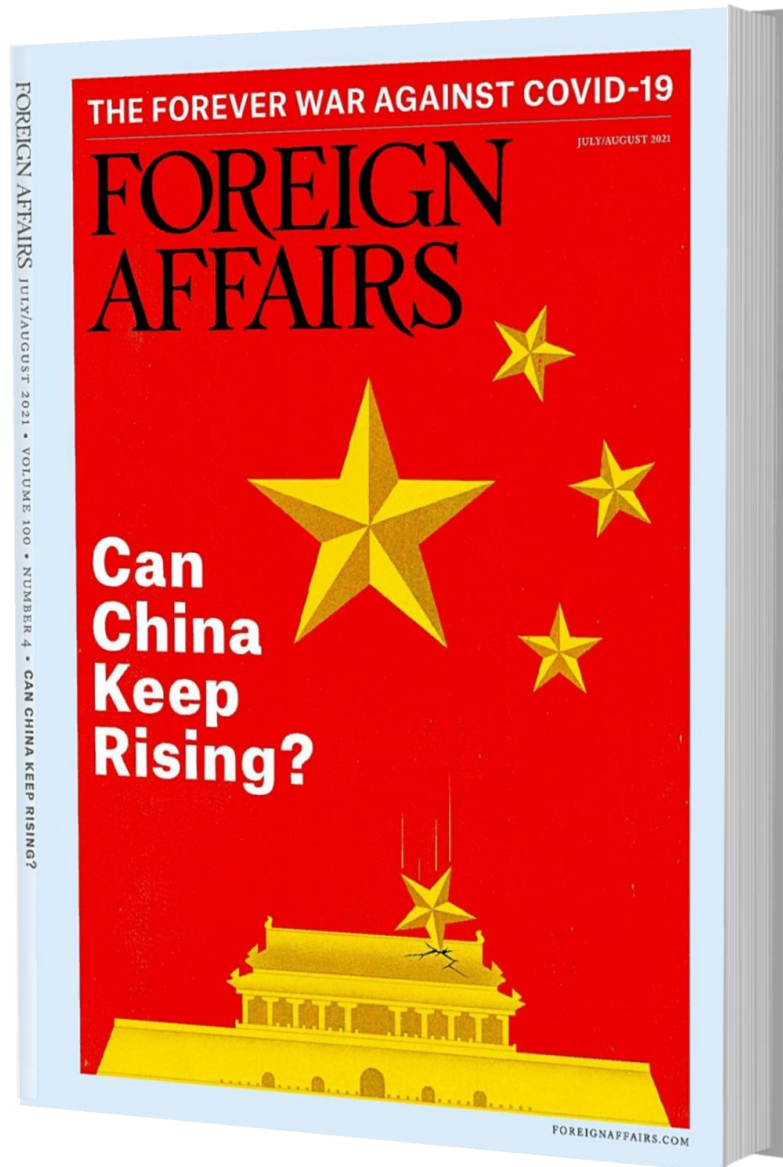
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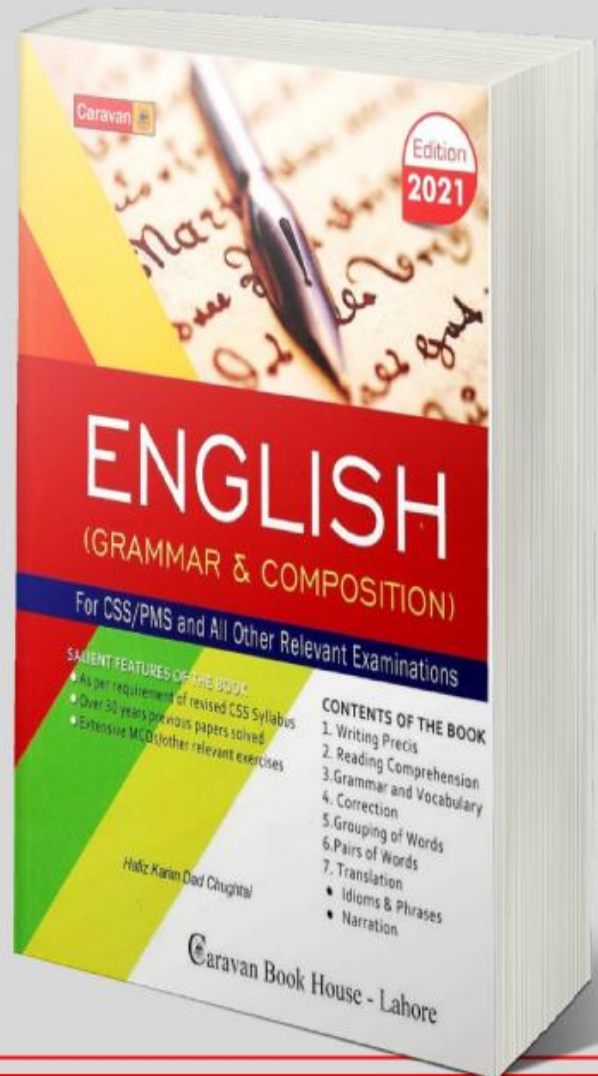
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**2** | Conversation  
**4** | For the Record

## The Brief

News from the U.S.  
and around the world

**5** | Climate risk and  
the **Surfside** condo  
collapse

**8** | The toll of the  
Pacific Northwest  
**heat wave**

**10** | How the  
**Britney Spears**  
case could change  
conservatorship

**14** | Milestones:  
former Defense  
Secretary **Donald**  
**Rumsfeld**

**16** | TIME With ...  
Ohio GOP Senate  
hopeful **J.D. Vance**

**18** | A **memorial** for  
Indigenous children

## The View

Ideas, opinion,  
innovations

**21** | Angelina Jolie  
on victims of an  
**overlooked** war

**23** | Weyerhaeuser  
CEO **Devin**  
**Stockfish** on  
housing and the  
timber surge

**23** | Ian Bremmer on  
the future of **South**  
**Africa**

**24** | Koritha Mitchell  
on **self-validation**

## Features

### Soldier at the Siege

A combat veteran's journey to the Jan. 6 riot  
By Vera Bergengruen and W.J. Hennigan **26**

### Life Lines

India prepares to ban commercial surrogacy  
By Neha Thirani Bagri; photographs by Smita Sharma **34**

### China vs. Diversity

Minorities forced to learn what it means to be Chinese  
By Charlie Campbell **44**

### Reclaiming Black Widow

Scarlett Johansson on a role that had to change  
By Eliana Dockterman **50**

### ▣ Tokyo Olympics Special

The pandemic games  
By Alice Park **58**

Why I took a break  
By Naomi Osaka **62**

Profiles of Allyson Felix and Sue Bird  
By Sean Gregory **64**

Frontline athletes and stars to watch **84**

Turmoil on the Refugee Olympic Team  
By Vivienne Walt **88**

## Time Off

What to watch, read,  
see and do

**99** | Books: **romance**  
**novelists** on their  
changing genre

**102** | Movies: music  
docs **Summer of**  
**Soul, The Sparks**  
**Brothers** and  
**McCartney 3,2,1**

**105** | Television: fun  
at **The White Lotus**,  
a superfluous **Gossip**  
**Girl** and the generic  
**Fear Street** trilogy

**108** | 7 Questions for  
author **Elie Honig**

^  
**The Refugee**  
**Olympic Team**  
trains on June 18  
at the camp in  
Ngong, Kenya  
Photograph by  
Brian Otieno  
for TIME

# Conversation



## WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT...

**THE HISTORY WARS** Responding to Olivia B. Waxman's July 5/July 12 cover story on how the controversy over critical race theory (CRT) is impacting a St. Louis school district, readers highlighted the importance of learning history—and learning from it. “Historical context is extremely important” as part of a “reconciliation with our past,” wrote Kathleen Sallee of Ames, Iowa. “It is not to make us feel bad but to enlighten us to be who we were meant to be.” But Shari Deranja of Ballwin, Mo., a town within the school district featured in Waxman’s piece, worries that teachers are trying to do too much: “I do not want ANYONE teaching my child morals and values as part of a curriculum or lesson plan,” Deranja wrote. “That is MY responsibility as a parent.”

“It’s not the ‘claims of systemic racism’ that threaten national unity. It’s the systemic racism,” wrote @IAMJenMcG on Twitter of CRT being seen as tied to larger racial-justice movements, while Jason Milke, a high school history teacher in Waverly, Iowa, voiced concerns about the issue being politicized, with efforts “to change/divide how history is taught.” Jane Taeger of St. Augustine, Fla., argued that such change is both fair and inevitable. “My

**‘There stands to be so many education leaders lost to this witch-hunt.’**

@MSBERBIAGE,  
on Twitter

**‘Many Americans know little about the past, so how can they question it?’**

DAVID COOMBS,  
Portland, Ore.

children’s generation is not the same as mine, nor my parents’, nor their parents,’” Taeger wrote. “As history and society continue to evolve, so should the school curricula.”



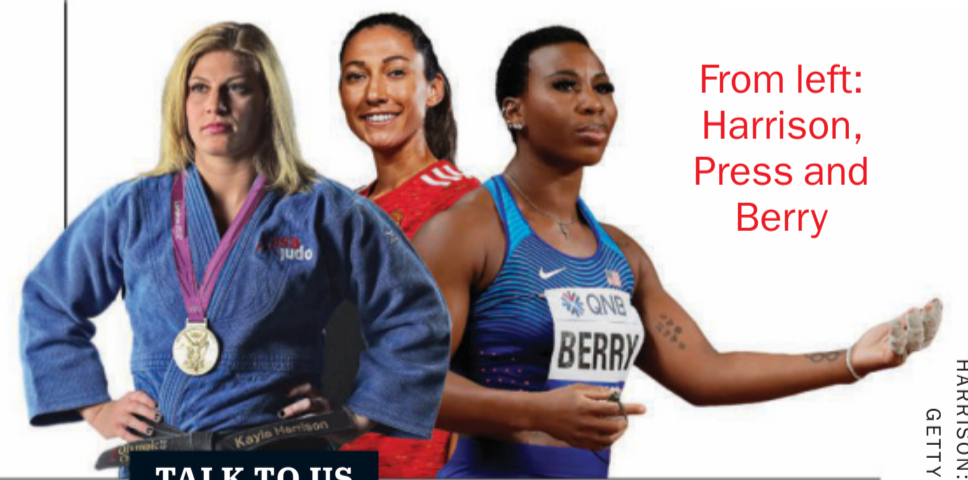
## ON THE COVERS

Clockwise from top left: **Naomi Osaka:** Photograph by Williams + Hirakawa—AUGUST; **Allyson Felix:** Photograph by Djeneba Aduayom for TIME; **Susana Rodríguez:** Photograph by Gianfranco Tripodo for TIME; **Sue Bird:** Photograph by Paola Kudacki for TIME



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**WATCH** Ahead of the Tokyo Games, tune in to an Olympics edition of TIME100 Talks for conversations with Team USA athletes Gwen Berry (track and field), Kayla Harrison (judo) and Christen Press (soccer), among others. Plus, TIME contributing editor Angelina Jolie speaks to members of the IOC’s Refugee Olympic Team about the significance of their participation. Watch on July 16 at 1 p.m. ET at [time.com/time-100-talks](https://time.com/time-100-talks)



From left: Harrison, Press and Berry

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**‘Don’t judge me, because I am human ... I just happen to run a little faster.’**

**SHA’CARRI RICHARDSON**, American sprinter, speaking to the *Today* show on July 2 about her suspension from the U.S. Olympic team after testing positive for THC

*‘We will fully support our producers and their excellence. Long live French champagne!’*

**FRANCK RIESTER**, French trade minister, in a July 5 tweet addressing a new Russian law banning foreign producers of sparkling wine from using the term *champagne*, even those in the French region from which the name originates

**‘I DO NOT WANT TO WIN SOMEONE ELSE’S GAME.’**

**NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES**, Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* journalist who created the 1619 Project, announcing on July 6 that she was declining a tenured position at the University of North Carolina, offered after an outcry over its trustees’ earlier refusal to consider her for the appointment; she instead accepted a position at Howard University

**‘It’s very quiet. The other horses know.’**

**JERRY GILBERT**, the owner of Big Jake, the world’s tallest horse, in a July 5 interview with local news channel WMTV after Big Jake’s death at the age of 20

*‘The most important thing is that my people are free—free from the invaders.’*

**DEBRETSION GEBREMICHAEL**, leader of the Tigray region in Ethiopia, in a July 3 interview with the *New York Times* after his guerrilla forces retook the city of Mekelle from Ethiopian troops stationed there since last fall



**146,000 years**

Minimum age of a fossilized skull of an ancient human found in northern China, nicknamed the Dragon Man, scientists announced on June 25

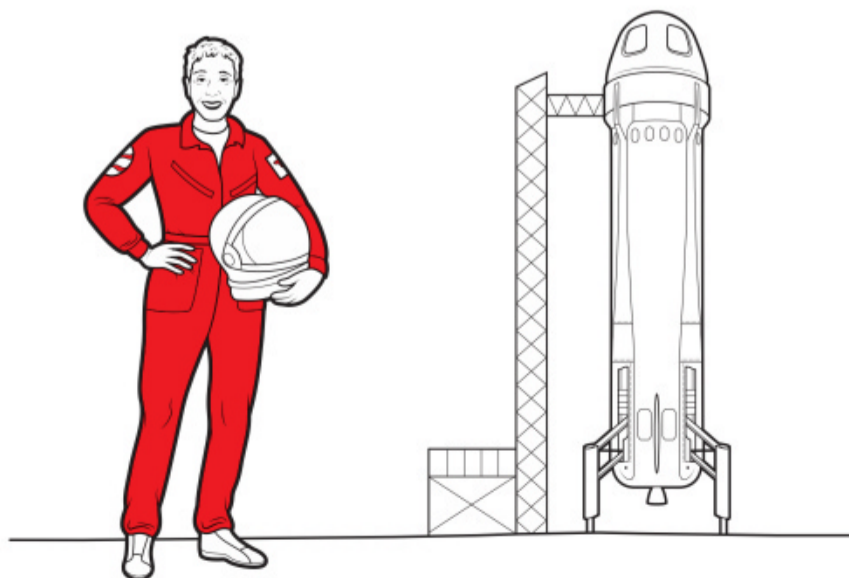


**GOOD NEWS**  
*of the week*

**Trials run in Iceland from 2015 to 2019 found that reducing the workweek from 40 hours to around 35 hours without lowering pay was an “overwhelming success” with no productivity loss, researchers said on July 4**

**82**

**Age of Mary Wallace “Wally” Funk, who underwent astronaut training in 1961 as part of the canceled “Mercury 13” Woman in Space Program, and will travel with Jeff Bezos to space on July 20 aboard a rocket made by his company Blue Origin**



# The Brief



**LOOMING  
DISASTER**  
The view of a  
collapsed condo  
building from  
the beach in  
Surfside, Fla.,  
on June 30

## INSIDE

SPEARS' CASE BUOYS CALLS FOR  
CONSERVATORSHIP REFORM

'MEDICAL POPULISM' HOBBLER  
PHILIPPINES' COVID-19 RESPONSE

CANADA'S INDIGENOUS VICTIMS  
OF 'CULTURAL GENOCIDE'

PHOTOGRAPH BY YSA PÉREZ FOR TIME

The Brief is reported by Madeleine Carlisle, Sanya Mansoor, Ciara Nugent, Billy Perrigo, Nik Popli, Simone Shah and Olivia B. Waxman

# The Brief Opener

NATION

## Condo collapse raises fears of climate risk

By Vera Bergengruen/Surfside, Fla.  
and Justin Worland/Washington

**E**VER SINCE THE DEADLY COLLAPSE OF A CONDO tower in Surfside, Fla., residents of Miami's waterfront have found themselves looking up more often. Cracks in garage ceilings, corroded rebar in concrete columns and signs of saltwater seepage after bad weather—not uncommon features of older seaside buildings in this part of the state—are being viewed with new and wary eyes. They've been documented on social media, distributed on group chats and shared in unnerved emails to building managers and inspectors.

The June 24 collapse of the 13-story Champlain Towers South building, just north of Miami Beach, has not only left 46 people confirmed dead and more than 94 still missing as of July 7. It has also shaken Miami residents who had grown used to natural disasters and regular warnings that they are in the crosshairs of climate change. But this feels different, they say, and experts warn that fresh sense of panic could shake years of breakneck growth in Miami real estate and threaten a regional economy that depends on a robust real estate sector. Already, two other condo buildings on Miami Beach have been evacuated after closer inspections revealed safety concerns, leaving hundreds of residents displaced over a holiday weekend. And on July 4, what remained of the Surfside building was demolished in a controlled explosion as a tropical storm approached South Florida.

"I think this just makes the coast a lot less valuable," says Jesse Keenan, an associate professor at Tulane University who has led research on climate change and financial risk. "That value plays out in the market, it plays out in public finance, and it plays out in people's perception of what it means to move to Florida."

**FOR PEOPLE LIVING** on Florida's coast, waking up with an ocean view has long come with calculated risk. From June to November, homes can be battered by hurricane-force winds that drive occupants to evacuate inland. It's not unusual for people to wade through knee-deep water to get to their cars after heavy rain, or watch U.S. Army Corps of Engineers trucks dump tens of thousands of tons of fresh sand to replenish the beaches that serve as a buffer from the rising water. The city of Miami (pop. 470,000) is home to 26% of all U.S. homes at risk from rising seas, according to real estate site Zillow. Studies by the Risky Business Project, a nonpartisan climate-change research initiative, suggest \$15 billion to \$23 billion of property in Florida could be underwater by 2050.

But that was supposed to happen gradually, and real estate agents have continued to flog the sunny Florida dream. The pandemic drove the local market to record



**Top left:** An officer stands guard as people take photos of Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and Miami Heat player Udonis Haslem on June 30 at a memorial wall for victims of the Champlain Towers South collapse

**Bottom left:** Flowers attached to barriers on the beach near the site of the building collapse on June 30



**Top right:** Search-and-rescue efforts resume the day after the demolition of the remaining part of Champlain Towers South on July 5

**Bottom right:** A memorial wall with flowers and posters of missing people, set up on a tennis-court fence near the Champlain Towers, on June 30

highs: from May 2020 to May 2021, sales of existing condos jumped 286%, according to the Miami Association of Realtors. It remains to be seen what role—if any—climate-related conditions played in the Champlain Towers collapse. But the event has brought into sharp focus concerns about whether Miami's real estate market can sustain its pace of growth, as the region is increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change—and with questions arising about what that means for the safety of people's homes today. "Before, when you hired an inspector to inspect your condo, you would never think the building could just fall," says Miami real estate analyst Ana Bozovic. "It just doesn't happen. That's crazy."

The immediate aftershocks have created a raft of investigations and audits meant to reassure anxious residents. On June 26, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava ordered a review of all buildings in the county that are five stories or taller and constructed more than 40 years ago. (The Champlain Towers condos were built in 1981, before Florida's building codes were strengthened after Hurricane Andrew devastated the area in 1992.) The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), a federal agency that investigated the collapse of the World Trade Center on 9/11, has dispatched researchers to the site. The town of Surfside has also hired a leading structural engineer to analyze what caused the collapse and determine if the nearby buildings are at risk.

The tragedy has also brought attention to the mismanagement and lack of transparency apparent in some Florida condo associations. Infighting among condo board members over the astronomical cost to fix buildings has often deferred necessary maintenance. Residents of Champlain Towers South were looking at \$15 million in assessments to repair "major structural damage" flagged by engineers in a 2018 report, with owners being asked to pay between roughly \$80,000 and \$336,000 per unit.

Experts say it may take months before clues emerge in publicly reported data on what effects the collapse will have on real estate in the long term. In the coming weeks and months, buyers may be reluctant to choose condos in

# The Brief

older buildings located on the ocean's edge out of concern that they may have some of the same issues as Champlain Towers, leaving owners to sell at a steep discount or take their property off the market. In the medium term, insurance companies may decide to reprice their policies for oceanside condos, raising costs and likely decreasing value. In a region where much of the population—and the tax base—is in close proximity to the waterfront, this devaluation could have a ripple effect, drying up public coffers in a state where 30% of local-government revenue comes from property taxes.

**FOR YEARS**, experts have warned that South Florida is vulnerable to a climate-related real estate devaluation. Before Brian Deese joined the Biden Administration as head of the National Economic Council, he told *TIME* the region faced the possibility of a housing shock as awareness of climate risk grows. “Physical risks are not being appropriately priced in,” Deese said in January 2020. “The degree of capital reallocation and the speed of that is going to be larger and happen more quickly than most market participants expect.” (The White House did not respond to a request for comment.)

For now, the specter of oceanfront homes disappearing underwater remains distant. Condominium associations are reassuring residents that the factors in their buildings “vary drastically” and that they should have “peace of mind,” according to emails seen by *TIME*. And as far as the market goes, demand in Miami was so high that it can survive a small dip following a one-off event—if that’s what the Surfside disaster proves to be.

But the sudden wake-up call to the tangible and deadly consequences of ignoring costly inspections, maintenance and necessary repairs on the waterfront will inevitably lead some to conclude their Florida dream is simply not worth it. “The fear is very real,” says Bozovic, the real estate analyst. The older condo buildings dotting the beach may be hard hit in the short term, especially those around the site of the collapse, which she says new buyers will avoid. “People died there. Who wants to look at that? It’s very sad.” □

## ECONOMY

### Heat wave offers preview of climate business losses

Portland, Ore., food-cart co-owners Eric and Nicole Gitenstein didn’t have much choice about whether to open for business during the unprecedented recent heat waves plaguing the Pacific Northwest. Excess heat from their refrigerators and burners often raises temperatures inside their cart 10 to 15 degrees higher than those outside. With area temperatures peaking at 116°F on June 28, working in such conditions could well have put their lives in danger. “It’s better to lose a weekend than to lose your life, or be hospitalized for heat exhaustion,” Eric Gitenstein says.

His fears were warranted: the heat wave is believed to have been responsible for more than 100 deaths in Oregon alone as of July 7, officials say, while more than 1,100 people across Oregon and Washington State were hospitalized with symptoms of overheating.

The record-breaking temperatures have also exacted a serious economic toll, with businesses across the region—many still recovering from coronavirus shutdowns—closing their doors, many to keep their employees safe. “It just seemed incredibly unsafe to ask anybody to work,” says Cathy Whims, owner of Nostrana, an Italian restaurant in Portland. “We couldn’t possibly do that with any good conscience.”

As the planet continues to warm, business losses across the U.S. are also likely to mount. Up to 1.8 billion workforce hours—or about 11 on-the-clock hours per U.S. worker—could be lost annually within the next three decades because of extreme heat caused by climate change, according to research published in February in the scientific journal *Climatic Change*.

Concerns surrounding extreme heat as a worsening effect of climate change are beginning to make the rounds in Congress. In March, Democrats introduced legislation in both chambers that would direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to set new rules meant to protect workers from dangerously hot conditions, like mandating paid cooldown breaks for employees working




Too hot to handle: a business in Portland, Ore., closed early on June 27

in high temperatures. Those measures are particularly important for agricultural workers, who often spend long hours working in extreme heat conditions. At least one farmworker, Sebastian Francisco Perez, 38, was killed in the Pacific Northwest’s heat wave. On June 29, the United Farm Workers, an agricultural union, urged Washington Governor Jay Inslee to implement emergency standards to protect workers from excessive heat.

If the economic impacts of extreme heat are a threat for the U.S., they may be much worse in parts of the world without the resources and institutions to mitigate the growing problem. “In the long run, rich places, as they get hotter, will spend money to adapt,” says Bob Kopp, director of the Rutgers Institute of Earth, Ocean & Atmospheric Sciences. “That option isn’t available to people in much of the rest of the world.”

And even the best efforts may not help the U.S. escape all the economic consequences of extreme heat, which could knock \$170 billion off the country’s GDP by 2100, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. For individuals, that could mean lower paychecks and new medical bills; for businesses, it’s lost revenue on top of already thin margins. Eric Gitenstein, for instance, says the days lost to the heat wave badly hurt Portland’s food carts, which have to make sales during the crucial summer months in order to get through the winter season. “It’s one thing for this to be a random occurrence,” Gitenstein says. “If this is the norm, that’s going to destroy our income.” —Alejandro de la Garza



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in the world.



**VACATED** An Afghan National Army soldier stands guard at the gate of Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan's Parwan province—the former center of the U.S. military presence in the country—on July 2, the day the last U.S. troops vacated the facility and handed control to Afghan forces. The AP reported July 6 that the final American troops exited the base during the night without notifying its new commander. The full withdrawal of U.S. forces from the nation is nearly complete, following a February 2020 deal with the Taliban. —*Billy Perrigo and Madeleine Carlisle*

## NATION

### Britney Spears' case highlights flaws in conservatorship system

IN EMOTIONAL TESTIMONY TO A COURT in Los Angeles on June 23, pop star Britney Spears asserted publicly for the first time that she wants to end the conservatorship she has been placed under for 13 years. Her legal guardians have dictated where she lives, works and receives therapy, Spears claimed, forced her to take medication and prevented her from removing her IUD. Now, disability advocates who've long fought to reform conservatorships hope the high-profile case can inspire changes to the system.

**"OVERPROTECTED"** Conservatorships, also called guardianships, are typically used for elderly adults, or people with mental illnesses or intellectual or developmental disabilities. They are intended to be protective mechanisms by which a court-appointed "conservator" makes decisions for individuals deemed incapable of managing their own affairs. "It's supposed to be a last resort because it's so invasive," says Zoe Brennan-Krohn, a staff attorney at the ACLU's Disability Rights Project. "But in reality, it's very often the first resort." And once a conservatorship is in place, there is little oversight, and it is difficult to end it.

**"MY PREROGATIVE"** A judge first granted Spears' father control over her finances and personal life in 2008 amid concerns about her mental health and alleged substance use. A professional conservator and wealth-management firm were later added. After Spears' testimony, the firm asked to resign, her manager and court-appointed lawyer resigned, and her mother said Spears should get to choose her own lawyer. The next hearing in Spears' case is July 14. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bob Casey have called for more data on guardianships and alternatives in light of Spears' situation.

**"STRONGER"** If people are stripped of their rights, they can't learn to make decisions, says Jonathan Martinis, a disability-rights lawyer at Syracuse University—and their mistakes can be used against them. Today, advocates are promoting a model called "supported decisionmaking," which lets individuals build a network of people whom they trust to help make their choices, instead of conservatorship. "Every time we shine a little bit of light, things get easier for everyone after that," Martinis says. "Britney's not just shining a light; she's a huge spotlight." —*ABIGAIL ABRAMS*

## NEWS TICKER

### Supreme Court upholds voting limits

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld **two controversial Arizona voting policies** on July 1. Critics say the ruling weakens the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and will make it harder to challenge laws restricting the time and manner of voting that have been passed in 17 states this year.

### Haiti's President assassinated

Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was **assassinated in an attack on his private residence**, the country's Prime Minister said July 7. Opposition leaders had demanded that Moïse step down amid controversy over his rule by decree, but officials did not say who the perpetrators were.

### Boy Scouts reach \$850m settlement

Tens of thousands of people involved in a lawsuit against the Boy Scouts of America alleging sexual abuse reached a **\$850 million settlement agreement with the organization** on July 1—the largest in a child sexual-abuse case in U.S. history. The group filed bankruptcy in 2020 in the face of rising allegations.

## NEWS TICKER

### Oil leak in Gulf of Mexico sparks fire

A 12-in. leak in an underwater gas pipe in the Gulf of Mexico created a **raging fire** on July 2 that **burned on the ocean surface for over five hours**. Pemex, the Mexican oil company that controls the pipeline, said the fire was created after lightning struck gas that had risen to the surface.

### Trump Org. and senior exec charged

New York prosecutors charged the **Trump Organization and its chief financial officer**, Allen Weisselberg, with tax-related crimes on July 1—the first criminal charges resulting from the yearslong investigation of the former President's business. Weisselberg pleaded not guilty, and Trump called the charges a “witch hunt.”

### Eswatini forces fire on protesters

Ongoing anti-monarchy protests in the kingdom of Eswatini, in southern Africa, **were met with gunshots and tear gas that left dozens dead or injured**, according to reports. The U.N. said July 6 it was “deeply concerned” and called on security forces to exercise “utmost restraint.”

## POSTCARD

### Do Duterte's threats make the Philippines safer from COVID-19?

NURSE DELTA SANTIAGO HAS REACHED THE top of her field. She works at one of the best hospitals in the Philippines, frequented by billionaires and celebrities. But the 32-year-old can't wait to leave.

Santiago, who asked to go by a pseudonym because of potential backlash from her employer, is concerned about the risk of bringing COVID-19 home from the hospital to her family. Because of the pandemic, authorities have imposed strict curbs on public transport, making her 15-mile commute a time-consuming ordeal. So for the past eight months, she has been sleeping in a hospital utility room, just steps from the plush, private medical suites where high-paying patients recline in relative comfort.

There, on a thin mattress spread between rolls of garbage bags and toilet disinfectant, an exhausted Santiago has video calls with her 8-year-old son, whom she rarely sees in person. And she seethes with fury at what she says is the needless suffering the pandemic has brought to the Philippines.

The Southeast Asian country of 109 million people was already struggling to contain COVID-19 when numbers began to climb sharply in March. Typical daily caseloads have ranged from 3,000 to 7,000 over the past three months but have peaked as high as 11,000. Total COVID-19 deaths have doubled, rising

from 12,300 on March 1 to nearly 25,000 at the start of July. (Experts say those figures are almost certainly undercounts.)

Like Narendra Modi's India or Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil, the Philippines is ruled by a “medical populist” in President Rodrigo Duterte, says physician and medical anthropologist Gideon Lasco. It's a term Lasco coined to describe how authoritarian leaders have responded to the public-health crisis: making belittling threats, maligning data and proffering improvised solutions.

Duterte's approach has been to put the Philippines on a war footing, Lasco says, which is part of a deliberate “pattern of spectacle.” The President appears on TV to give COVID-19 updates, flanked by top military brass; lockdown orders, in place across the archipelago since March 2020, are enforced by armed security personnel in a manner described by U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet in April as “highly militarized.” Duterte has himself told police to kill anti-lockdown protesters who resist arrest.

The President has recently started espousing vaccinations as the country's way out of the pandemic, but achieving herd immunity anytime soon looks highly unlikely, as vaccine hesitancy is deep-rooted. Less than 3% of the population was fully vaccinated by early July. So, more intimidation could be in the cards. On June 21, Duterte threatened to lock up anyone refusing a COVID-19 shot. “You choose, vaccine or I will have you jailed,” he warned on television.

—AIE BALAGTAS SEE/MANILA



## WORLD

### Out of step

Women in the Ukrainian military will wear high heels as they march in an upcoming parade marking the 30th anniversary of the country's independence from the Soviet Union, officials said July 1, sparking an outcry from lawmakers who labeled the decision sexist. Here, other occasions when military style has brought people to attention. —Madeleine Carlisle

#### BRONZED MEDALS

Viral footage of an October 2020 police academy graduation ceremony in Cairo showed hundreds of buff and shirtless police recruits posing and flexing on a procession of cars, boats and armored trucks.

#### SPLITTING HAIRS

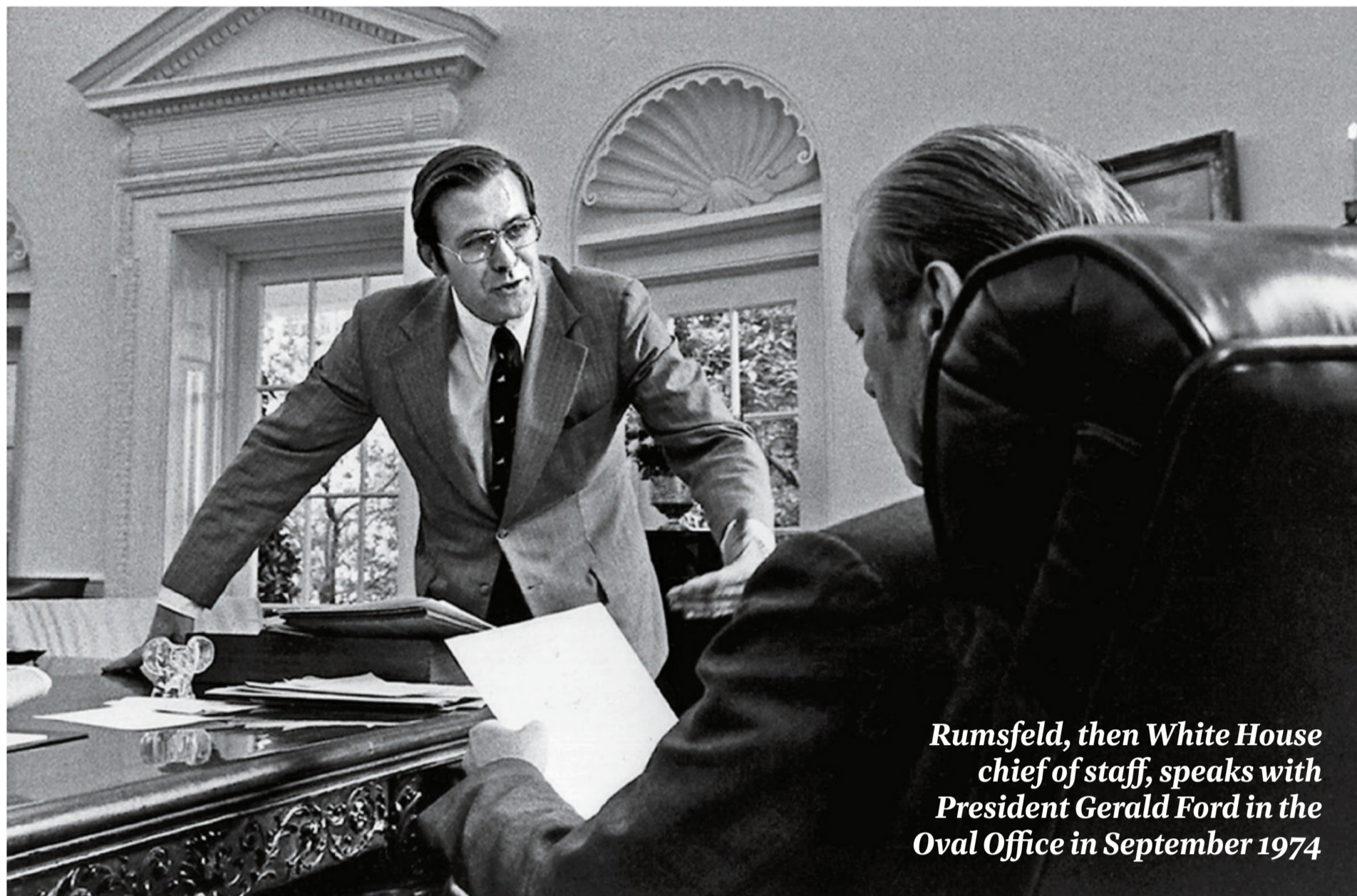
The U.S. Army announced on May 6 that female soldiers can now wear ponytails and braids while in uniform. Many soldiers had complained the previously required bun made it difficult to wear helmets.

#### WEDGE ISSUES

Photos of a North Korean border-patrol unit received much attention in 2013 for appearing to show female soldiers marching in 4-in. platform heels along the banks of the Yalu River in the town of Sinuiju.



# The Brief Milestones



*Rumsfeld, then White House chief of staff, speaks with President Gerald Ford in the Oval Office in September 1974*

## DIED

### Donald Rumsfeld

*Led U.S. troops into the (known) unknown*

HAD HE ONLY A SINGLE STINT AS U.S. Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld would likely be remembered as a wunderkind who, under President Gerald Ford in the 1970s, became the youngest man ever to run the Pentagon. But Rumsfeld, who died on June 30 at 88, is instead best known for his second go-round, as President George W. Bush's defense chief, and for his role as the architect of the nation's problem-plagued war on terrorism.

Finding someone in Washington who's indifferent about Rumsfeld's legacy is a near impossibility. To a few, he's a crafty bureaucratic knife fighter who spent four decades rising to the highest offices in government. To everyone else, he's an acerbic, argumentative leader who set the U.S. in motion toward

unwinnable wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—wars that are only now, some 20 years later, beginning to come to an end.

Although Rumsfeld repeatedly stoked fears over Saddam Hussein's supposed weapons of mass destruction ahead of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, he refused to accept blame when the arsenal never materialized; his decision to maintain a "light footprint" of U.S. forces in the country is believed to have helped foster conditions that led to violent insurgency and the deaths of thousands of Americans and Iraqis. And he was later pilloried for the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and detainees at Guantánamo Bay.

This all contributed to Rumsfeld's eventual resignation in 2006. It marked the end of a tenure in stark contrast to his work for Ford, when he was widely seen as a reformer leading initiatives that ultimately helped end the Cold War. That record, however, was eclipsed long ago. —W.J. HENNIGAN

## RELEASED

### Bill Cosby Conviction overturned

AFTER PENNSYLVANIA'S supreme court on June 30 freed Bill Cosby from the state prison where he had been held since being convicted of sexual assault in 2018, the disgraced comedian was quick to offer himself as an exemplar of the problem of wrongful convictions. But the court's decision to free him on a procedural matter included no findings of innocence.

Procedural claims are a powerful tool for people who *are* wrongfully convicted—but those people tend to be unable to afford the kind of legal team Cosby had, notes Samuel Gross, a co-founder of the National Registry of Exonerations. Cases like Cosby's "are as similar to [other trials as] a high school football game and the Super Bowl."

—JANELL ROSS



## DIED

Bollywood actor and producer **Dilip Kumar**, at 98, on July 7.  
> Haunani-Kay Trask, a **leader of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement**, at 71, on July 3.

## SPIKED

**Oil prices**, on July 6, to their highest level in six years, after OPEC, Russia and other oil-producing allies failed to reach a deal on production.

## HALTED

U.S. **federal executions**, the Attorney General said July 1, for a review of policies after the Trump Administration executed a record 13 people.

## SENTENCED

Belarusian opposition leader **Viktor Babariko**, to 14 years in prison, on July 6, on corruption charges his supporters say were fabricated.

## WON

The Miss Nevada USA title, by Kataluna Enriquez, on June 27, making her the **first openly trans woman** set to compete in the Miss USA pageant.

## ARRESTED

A **spectator at the Tour de France**, on June 30, whose cardboard sign had caused a massive bike crash during the race's first leg four days earlier.

## RELEASED

**The Ever Given cargo ship**, on July 7, after authorities reached a settlement over its blockage of the Suez Canal in March.



# Introducing ATEM Mini Pro

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Blackmagic Design is a leader in video for the television industry, and now you can create your own streaming videos with ATEM Mini. Simply connect HDMI cameras, computers or even microphones. Then push the buttons on the panel to switch video sources just like a professional broadcaster! You can even add titles, picture in picture overlays and mix audio! Then live stream to Zoom, Skype or YouTube!

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ATEM Mini..... **US\$295**

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## Former skeptic **J.D. Vance** tries to follow Trump's playbook in Ohio's GOP Senate primary

By Molly Ball/Cincinnati

"I'M NOT JUST A FLIP-FLOPPER, I'M A FLIP-flop-flipper on Trump," J.D. Vance says with a laugh, slicing into a half-stack of breakfast pancakes. The *Hillbilly Elegy* author and newly minted Republican Senate candidate is sitting at the counter of a Cincinnati diner on July 2, explaining why he thinks he can win.

The prior evening, Vance had launched his 2022 bid at a steel-tube factory in his hometown of Middletown, Ohio, with paeans to the American Dream and blasts of populist rhetoric. "The elites plunder this country and then blame us for it in the process," he told a crowd of several hundred.

Running for office was a predictable next step for Vance, whose hit 2016 memoir traced his rise from troubled Appalachian roots to the Marines and Yale Law School. *Hillbilly Elegy* was cited by Hillary Clinton and feted at pointy-headed panel discussions, though some liberals criticized its up-by-the-bootstraps framing. At a time when elites struggled to comprehend Trump's appeal, Vance's diagnosis of rural white Americans' disillusionment with a government and society that had left them behind seemed prescient.

These days, Vance's persona is more right-wing provocateur than establishment darling. But it's his stance toward Trump that seems destined to dominate his campaign in a primary that could be a bellwether for the post-Trump GOP. As his rivals strain to outdo one another with displays of fealty to the former President, Vance's past opposition has been cited as proof of an all-too-convenient conversion.

Vance admits it took him time to come around, but points to his book and commentary as evidence he understood Trump's appeal before most. "I sort of got Trump's issues from the beginning," Vance says. "I just thought that this guy was not serious and was not going to be able to really make progress on the issues I cared about."

But as the longtime Democrats he grew up with, including his family, embraced Trump, Vance, who voted for independent candidate Evan McMullin in 2016, reconsidered. Once he looked beyond the hysterical media depictions of Trump, he claims, he saw someone changing the debate around issues like China and immigration. In March, the two men held an hourlong meeting brokered by Vance's friend and former boss Peter Thiel, the Silicon Valley titan who has seeded a \$10 million

super PAC on Vance's behalf.

Trump is "the leader of this movement," Vance tells me, "and if I actually care about these people and the things I say I care about, I need to just suck it up and support him."

**REPUBLICAN VOTERS STILL LOVE TRUMP**, but it's unclear what that means for other aspiring pols. Should they be loud and racist and lie a lot? Should they spout conspiracy theories? Should they be businessmen and "outsiders"? Should they adopt Trump's positions on issues, to the degree that he had positions on issues?

However you define Trumpism, it had a powerful effect in Ohio. Barack Obama took the state twice before Trump won it by back-to-back 8-point margins. The GOP's conundrum is how to hang on to Trump's white working-class supporters as suburban and college-educated white voters jump ship. "This is our first post-Trump test case," says Josh Culling, a Toledo-based GOP consultant. "How many of Trump's positions have staying power vs. the old Chamber of Commerce priorities of lower taxes, less regulation and smaller government?"

The former President has not endorsed a candidate, leaving Vance's rivals to compete to embody Trumpian outrageousness. Josh Mandel, who aligned himself with Mitt Romney during his unsuccessful 2012 run, now gets himself suspended from Twitter for posting about "Mexican gang-bangers" and "Muslim terrorists." Jane Timken, a Harvard-educated lawyer and longtime GOP donor, also tries to channel the former President's furies.

To some Ohio Republicans, the field is not inspiring. "There's a significant void," says Republican state senator Jay Hottinger, who has served in the legislature for more than two decades, of "serious candidates that are trying to address the real issues and talk about potential solutions." Hottinger would prefer someone like Senator Rob Portman, the straitlaced fiscal conservative whose retirement created the vacancy Vance hopes to fill.

Vance thinks the party is looking for a new direction. "Rob's a good guy and he's done a lot of good, but he's sort of out of alignment with where a lot of voters are right now," Vance tells me at breakfast. "He's a cautious guy, and the voters are not in a cautious mood."

**VANCE, 36, BELIEVES** he has a finger on the pulse of this new GOP, for whom Fox News host Tucker Carlson and Missouri Senator Josh Hawley are role models. "Voters *really* want us to do something about the tech industry," he tells me by way of example as the server delivers his plate of bacon. It's not uncommon, he says, for people to approach him "and say things like, 'I love what you said, but why don't we break up these companies and put all the CEOs in jail?'"

### VANCE QUICK FACTS

**Smash hit**  
Vance's 2016 memoir spent 74 weeks on the New York Times best-seller list and was made into a Netflix film directed by Ron Howard.

**Postscript**  
Vance's mother Bev, whose addiction issues he has chronicled, has been sober for more than six years and attended his campaign launch.

**Midwest venture**  
In 2019, Vance launched a firm based in Ohio and backed by top tech investors.



Vance is a venture capitalist with deep ties to Silicon Valley, but says knowing the industry will help him figure out how to fix it. He answers charges of hypocrisy by pointing out that Thiel is a conservative outlier: “It’s not like I’m being funded by Mark Zuckerberg.” When I ask if any of the policies he favors would affect Thiel adversely, he replies, “Oh, absolutely, I think Peter should pay higher taxes,” and lets out a big laugh.

In his Middletown speech, Vance excoriated corporations for not paying their fair share to the country that’s given them so much: “Who built the roads and bridges that allow you to do your business?” The sentiment echoes Obama, but when the former President said, “If you’ve got a business, you didn’t build that,” in 2012, conservatives lambasted his “demonization” of industry.

Vance supports free markets, but only to a point. “This is a mistake of the modern conservative movement, to say, Well, these are private companies; we have to keep our hands off,” he tells me. “I do generally think that cutting people’s taxes is a good thing. On the other hand, when there are companies that have effectively rigged the

economy such that they pay a lower tax rate than my middle-class sister, that’s not fair.”

Vance favors punitive tariffs and pulling out of Afghanistan, and he’s taken up the faddish right-wing crusade against critical race theory. He won’t say the 2020 election was stolen, exactly, but contends it was “unfair.” “I think Josh Hawley did the right thing,” he says of the Senator’s objection to certifying electoral votes on Jan. 6. Nor does he think Trump deserved to be impeached over the insurrection. “There were some bad apples on Jan. 6, very clearly, but most of the people there were actually super peaceful,” he says of a riot that left five dead and more than 100 police officers injured. “Some of them were, like, let into the Capitol by the police officers!”

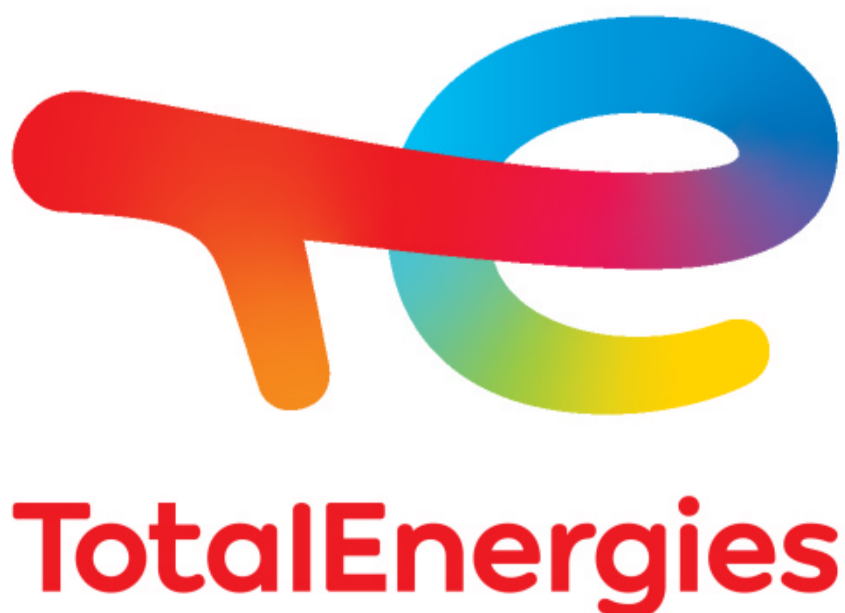
As for his evolution on Trump, Vance describes it as an awakening. “It’s sort of a—what is the word people online use—blackpilling or redpilling or whitepilling,” he says. “I’m not trying to cop his style. But when you stop trusting what the press is saying in the same way, it does have a transformative effect on the way you see not just Donald Trump the man, but the whole movement.” □

**‘There were some bad apples, very clearly, but most of the people were actually super peaceful.’**

J.D. VANCE,  
on the Jan. 6  
riot at the  
U.S. Capitol



Energy is  
reinventing itself,  
Total is becoming  
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# The View

WORLD

## FLEEING AN OVERLOOKED WAR

By Angelina Jolie

Burkina Faso is gripped by a war we seldom hear about, even though Western nations had a hand in its creation. Until the NATO bombing campaign in Libya in 2011, the West African nation had enjoyed decades of peace and, though it faced challenges including endemic poverty, was considered a beacon of stability in the Sahel region. ▶

INSIDE

THE POST-PANDEMIC  
LUMBER RUSH

THE LAW COMES FOR A FORMER  
SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT

GIVING MYSELF THE  
AFFIRMATION I DESERVE

# The View Opener

After the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's government, militants and weapons flooded southwest across the Sahara and into Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. By 2015, those guns had been turned by extremist groups upon villagers, cattle herders and children in rural Burkina Faso. More than 1.2 million Burkinabe people have fled their homes because of the intensifying violence. Camps for refugees from neighboring Mali have also been brutally attacked.

In the days before I arrived, militants attacked a village in the north of Burkina Faso and executed at least 138 people. Separately, a convoy of the U.N.

Refugee Agency and partners came under fire traveling to a refugee camp I was due to visit. It was my first experience with the insecurity experienced daily by the Burkinabe people. Most of the families I met had moved several times, with nowhere truly safe for them.

A striking number of the outwardly calm men I met told me that they lived in a constant state of terror. Many of the displaced had seen male relatives murdered for refusing to join the armed groups.

**I WAS VISITING** Burkina Faso with the U.N. Refugee Agency, to mark June 20—World Refugee Day—with displaced people. I've taken a trip like this nearly every year for the past two decades, but this journey felt different. I had to keep moving, spending only a short while in each location, because of the high risk from terrorist groups. I traveled by road from the capital Ouagadougou to Kaya, a city that is home to some 110,000 displaced people. The next day we flew—the road judged unsafe because of roadside bombs—to Dori, and then made the 10-minute drive to Goudoubo refugee camp in the remote, isolated and arid north of the country, close to the border with Mali.

It is a measure of their grace that not a single person I met in Burkina Faso called out the role Western intervention in Libya played in fueling the instability that plagues their country. In Goudoubo camp, I met 16-year-old Ag Mossa, a poet and refugee from Mali. He asked me if my children were in school, and when I said yes, he congratulated them. Schools

are a prime target of militants in the Sahel, and millions of children across the region are missing out on their education as a result. Ag Mossa gave me one of his poems. "These little verses are a cry from the heart," he wrote. "Oh for a roof for a small child from the Sahel, and help for him not to suffer fear."

Humanitarian aid is no substitute for a livelihood, and the funding trickling into the country doesn't come close to matching the scale of the suffering. The U.N. appeal for Burkina Faso is less than a quarter funded. This means that UNHCR and partners have only been



Women line up for water at Goudoubo camp in Burkina Faso, on June 20

able to provide shelter—a basic plastic tent with a wood frame—to 1 in 10 displaced people in the country.

As my visit progressed, a feeling of dread took hold of me. It felt like I was glimpsing the future. I've made more than 60 visits to refugees globally in the past 20 years. I've watched as political solutions to conflicts have dried up for an ever growing population of forcibly displaced people and their children—born displaced or stateless, passing their entire childhoods in limbo.

Wars no longer seem to end; they simply shift, just as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have shifted their operations from Afghanistan and the Middle East to the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, the number of forcibly displaced people has doubled globally in a decade, to more than 80 million people. Looking back on those lost decades, it is as if everything was leading us to the kind of conflict now seen in Burkina Faso, combining the reality of a protracted war fueled by terrorism.

These threats are made worse by the

devastating effects of man-made climate change. African nations have generated only a tiny fraction of the emissions heating our planet. Yet in Burkina Faso, arable land and their natural water supplies are drying up at a terrifying rate, making it next to impossible for families that have farmed the earth for generations to feed their children. One Malian refugee, who had fled to Burkina Faso with his family and their livestock, described how their cows died one by one from the lack of grazing and water.

We had decades to try to prevent conflicts from breaking out or to find peace agreements to enable refugees to return to their home countries. We now face the prospect that climate-change effects will mean there is no home for displaced people to return to.

Governments in wealthy industrialized nations act as if refugees can be treated as someone else's problem if they simply fortify their borders or pay developing nations to continue to host millions of displaced people. They make shiny new humanitarian announcements to distract voters, and themselves, from decades of unkept promises.

The hypocrisy makes it harder to hold to account governments that commit mass atrocities against their own people, causing them to flee.

At which point will we be concerned enough to recognize that the model is broken as well as immoral? When 100 million people are displaced? Or 200 million, a number we could reach within the next 20 years?

As citizens, we need to shift our thinking. We're learning to understand the human cost of the minerals mined in conflict zones to meet our demand for smartphones and the environmental cost of manufacturing our clothes. Our foreign policies—the promises we break, the allies we indulge, the exceptions we make and the atrocities we overlook—also carry a vast human cost. That price is being paid by millions of children like Ag Mossa.

*Jolie is an Academy Award-winning actor and Special Envoy of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees*

## LEADERSHIP BRIEF

# The American timber surge

When the British navy was the most powerful military force in the world, towering straight trees suitable for the masts of warships were a prized strategic resource from its colonies, the rare earth resources of their day. Nearly 250 years later, the U.S. is still home to some of the most valuable timber stands in the world, and lumber has been one of the most in-demand commodities this summer, as the strongest housing market in more than a decade has caused its value to soar, peaking in May. Although lumber prices have fallen recently, experts expect prices to remain high relative to historical levels. Housing “demand is just off the charts now,” says Devin Stockfish, CEO of timber company Weyerhaeuser. “We have massively underbuilt housing in the U.S. The whole supply chain broke down coming out of the Great Recession.” Stockfish expects housing demand to stay strong for some time as the U.S. struggles to overcome years of failing to build enough new homes to keep up with population growth. —Eben Shapiro



Devin Stockfish, CEO of Weyerhaeuser

## THE RISK REPORT

# A South African court offers hope for the rule of law

By Ian Bremmer



IN ANY COUNTRY, the central political question is, What is the role of the law? Does it exist to protect every individual from abuses of power? Or

does it exist mainly to protect the powerful? A landmark court decision gives many South Africans reassurance that their governing institutions work. But it's not the end of the story.

On June 29, South Africa's Constitutional Court ruled that former President Jacob Zuma must serve 15 months in prison for failing this year to appear before a commission investigating corruption during his presidency (2009–2018). Zuma not only rejected the commission's authority and refused to answer charges or mount a defense, but he also wrote a 21-page letter to the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court that charged that the corruption commission was “established to destroy the work that I did when I served my country as President.”

He then essentially dared the court to jail him: “My imprisonment [by the Constitutional Court] would become the soil on which future struggles for a judiciary that sees itself as a servant of the Constitution and the people rather than an instrument for advancing dominant political narratives.” That sounded like a threat that any judgment against him would trigger social unrest.

The court ordered Zuma to surrender to authorities. The former President has launched an appeal to the same court and so far refused to obey. Supporters have surrounded his home and vow to protect him. Authorities are bracing for protests in other parts of the country. The justices accuse Zuma of trying to “destroy the rule of law.”

Zuma was once a hero of the struggle against apartheid, and like Nelson Mandela, he was imprisoned for years on

Robben Island. But controversy has followed Zuma throughout his political career. In 2005, he was charged with accepting bribes as part of a large arms deal while serving as South Africa's Deputy President in 1999. In response, then President Thabo Mbeki fired him. In 2006, he was acquitted of raping a woman in a case that revealed he had no idea how AIDS was transmitted in a country battling an HIV epidemic.

But despite all of this, Zuma, an undeniably charismatic politician, wrested control of the African National Congress (ANC) from former boss Mbeki in 2007 and was elected President in 2009. As President, he faced more charges of corruption and abuse of power. In 2016, South Africa's Constitutional Court ruled that Zuma had illegally used more than \$15 million in public funds on his private home. He drew ridicule after insisting that the addition of a swimming pool was needed to protect the house in case of fire.

After the ANC suffered losses in 2016, it became clear that Zuma was losing political strength, and in 2018 he resigned the presidency. He was replaced by Cyril Ramaphosa.

After the ANC suffered losses in 2016, it became clear that Zuma was losing political strength, and in 2018 he resigned the presidency. He was replaced by Cyril Ramaphosa.

**OFFICIAL CORRUPTION HAS** cost a great deal over the years. Public money diverted to private use deprived South Africa of the funding for infrastructure needed to create jobs and spark growth and for social safety net protections. It also undermined the country's reputation for governance and financial management needed to secure foreign investment. South Africa has scored poorly in global corruption rankings for many years. When Zuma stepped down, he left a nation with high wage inequality, high unemployment and low global competitiveness.

But the country's Constitutional Court has now shown that it will hold even the country's most powerful men accountable.

**The justices accuse Zuma of trying to ‘destroy the rule of law’**







## SOCIETY

### Refusing to wait for others to validate me

By **Koritha Mitchell**

YOU GET BETTER AT *WHATEVER* YOU PRACTICE.

That's why I have gotten serious about giving myself the gifts that only I can give. Walking outdoors. Running to clear my head. Maintaining so much clarity about my life's work that others' agendas don't become mine. Being generous with no. Saying yes only when I actually want to do something.

The value of these gifts cannot be easily measured. They are priceless. So I usually don't think of self-care in material terms. Anyone else can give me tea or perfume, a handbag or a piece of jewelry. They can't take a walk for me. And yet in April, I picked up a custom ring I had purchased for myself.

It wasn't entirely my idea: in January 2020, I had lunch with the scholar and poet Therí Pickens. When we finished, I accompanied her to pick up a ring she had ordered as a gift to herself for being promoted to professor at Bates College. The outing felt not only joyful but also sacred. I would soon put myself up for promotion review at my own university, and I vowed that I too would be deliberate in my celebration.

I would not find out for another month or so whether the institution was promoting me to full professor. But as my case was reviewed by various committees, and administrators demanded explanations of minor aspects of my record, it became clear that those empowered to judge my achievements had not accounted for the racism and sexism that I had faced while still making significant contributions to the university.

I entered my department with two other new assistant professors, and from the beginning, we were told that becoming an associate professor with tenure required publishing a book with a top-ranked university press. The two people of color did just that. The white person did not. We all got tenure.

A decade later, I have written a second book and edited

another, and that white colleague still hasn't published a first book. That fact reflects less on this individual than on the people who weighted my contributions equal to his and still believed they had credibility to judge my record. As I always say, I've been surrounded by white people my entire life, and that has not meant being surrounded by excellence.

**AS A BLACK WOMAN**, I am constantly reminded that I was never meant to do anything at the university but clean, so the standards for promotion were not set with me in mind. White men created them, so they are the ones best positioned to meet them. Nevertheless, I have met those standards, while white men often fall short. When they do, criteria magically change, but no one considers this a "lowering" of standards. That language emerges only if the beneficiary isn't a straight white man.

I've spent my career watching white people use job-performance standards to judge everyone but themselves and each other. I therefore don't put stock in their opinion of my work. I don't waste time and energy believing that if I had done something differently, I would have had a better outcome. My refusal to ignore the injustices that shape my profession has been my truest form of self-care.

But freedom from the burden of taking personal responsibility for inequities I didn't create is only part of what I deserve. I also deserve joy that cannot be extinguished by the discrimination I cannot avoid experiencing.

Every time I searched for rings, I told myself this was about my own affirmation. At some point, I started thinking about the number 3, for the three areas of the job—research, teaching and professional service—and how I've excelled in all of them. The ring that I now wear daily, the ring that delights me, contains three stones and has the appearance of three bands. And every time I look at it, I am reminded that I don't need to wait for others to tell me I earned it. I did get the promotion, but this is a gift only I could give myself.

**My refusal to ignore the injustices that shape my profession has been my truest form of self-care**

*Mitchell is the author of From Slave Cabins to the White House*



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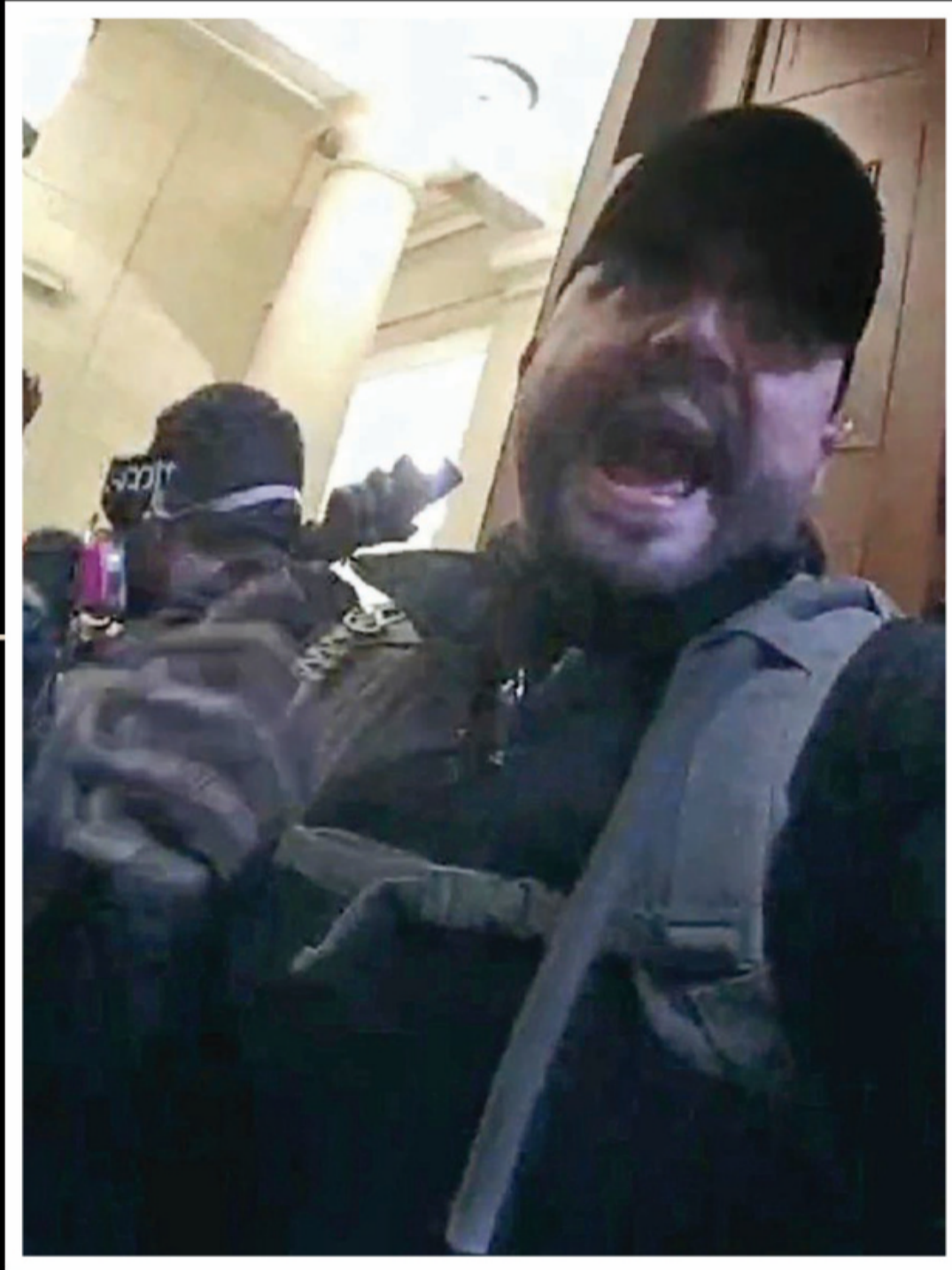


# Nation

On June 7, 2007, Joshua James earned a Purple Heart for his service in Iraq.



# From combat



On Jan. 6, 2021, he joined  
the siege of the U.S. Capitol.

# to conspiracy

By Vera Bergengruen/Arab, Ala., and W.J. Hennigan

# T

THE CRACKLE OF HANDHELD RADIOS broke the morning stillness. Sound carries in the country, and on the rural outskirts of Arab, Ala., curious neighbors stepped onto their porches, craning their necks to see what was going on. Some thought the police had found an escaped inmate who had been a leading story on the local news. But even from afar, there was no mistaking the outsize yellow letters on the uniformed figures entering the single-story house at the end of the two-lane road: FBI.

The word spread quickly. Claudia Schultz was walking out of her jewelry shop on the town's small main street when another store owner told her Joshua James had been arrested. Schultz was incredulous. "Josh? You mean our Josh?" In Arab, a town of 8,380 in northeastern Alabama, much of the community knew James, 34, as a soft-spoken, God-fearing family man with three young kids who ran his own pressure-washing business. Those who knew him better considered him a local hero—an Army combat veteran and Purple Heart recipient who got choked up when he talked to local teenagers about enlisting in the U.S. military.

But the federal agents who showed up on James' doorstep on March 9 described a very different man: an extremist who had not just broken the law but also carried out an assault on the same government he had sworn to defend as a soldier.

For weeks, James had helped plan an operation to disrupt the certification on Jan. 6 of President Joe Biden's electoral victory, investigators say, by coordinating and recruiting others to travel to Washington with paramilitary gear, including guns, tactical vests, helmets and radio equipment. A federal conspiracy indictment contends James and at least 15 other members of the Oath Keepers, an antigovernment militia, had organized, equipped and trained ahead of the siege that left five dead and dozens more injured. James was among the throngs of supporters of defeated President Donald Trump who rammed their way into the

seat of American democracy. "Get out of my Capitol," James allegedly shouted at riot officers. "This is my f-cking building!"

For many, reconciling the war hero and family man with the Jan. 6 insurrectionist is not easy. Federal prosecutors have described the Capitol rioters as a fringe group of violent extremists, conspiracy theorists and madmen. The man presiding over James' case professed bafflement. "Mr. James, I've got to tell you, I'm not sure of why anyone in your position, given the life that you've led, would do this," D.C. District Judge Amit Mehta told him at an April hearing.

If James' decision to leave his family to join an attack on the U.S. Capitol is a mystery, there are clues to what drove him. After his service, and rehabilitation from his injuries, he struggled to rebuild his life. In that, he was not alone. Of the more than 500 people arrested in connection with the Jan. 6 riot, at least 1 in 10 was a current or former member of the U.S. military, according to a George Washington University analysis. Many had served in the protracted post-9/11 conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, returning home to a country that paid them lip service but moved on without much notice to the wars they had fought.

Over time, James found community in the Oath Keepers, which used the familiar terminology and camaraderie of military life to mobilize vets in support of a variety of right-wing causes. In doing so, prosecutors allege, its members miscast criminality as patriotism. The communications between James and other veterans on Jan. 6 were full of phrases like *save the Republic* and *defend America*, according to court filings. Many claimed they had been betrayed by U.S. politicians who were the true enemies of the state. The insurrectionists' grievances were so strong, prosecutors allege, that they took the law into their own hands.

**In many communities like Arab, James' actions on Jan. 6 seem normal, not delusional**

But this view has found strong support across the country. In Arab, where American and Confederate flags compete for space on some front porches with MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN banners, more than two dozen residents described the events of Jan. 6 to TIME as a legitimate protest over an election they wrongly believed to have been fraudulent. Yes, it got out of hand, they say. But many saw James as a man motivated by love of country, exercising First Amendment rights, who was ensnared in a politicized witch hunt. "I quite frankly believe him to be an American hero," says Rachel Ann Halligan, who lives close to the Jameses in Arab. "The corruption and fraud that is being perpetrated by our government is absurd."

This account is based on interviews with more than two dozen friends, neighbors and community members in Arab; people who knew James through his military service and business dealings; his archived social media posts; and a review of FBI and federal prosecutors' legal filings.

James' guilt or innocence will be determined at trial. Federal prosecutors will present evidence that he violated multiple laws in an insurrection against the country he had sworn to defend.

But the forces that fed James' alleged insurrection may be too deep-rooted to be resolved by the trials. In many communities like Arab, the radical path James took on Jan. 6 seems patriotic rather than criminal; for some, the law itself seems almost a sideshow. "Everyone has the right to stand up for what they believe," says Ramsay Vandergriff, a 38-year-old electrician. "It could easily have been me. It could easily be any of us."

"I'M A NORMAL DUDE," James tells the camera in a video posted to his wife Audrey's TikTok account in early June. He plants kisses on her cheek and turns back to the grill as she films them in their yard. "Just a normal man," she repeats, punctuating her words with exasperated sighs. "A Purple Heart recipient, veteran, grilling dinner for his family." Audrey tells her new followers that she can't reveal much more; since posting about James' arrest and her family's ordeal, she has gained a sympathetic audience of more than 18,000 on the social app. But the video pans out to show the ankle monitor that has tracked James' movements since



April. “The FBI is kind of crazy,” she says. “It’s unreal every single day.” (Both James and his wife declined interviews for this story, citing ongoing court proceedings.) He has pleaded not guilty.

The man in these posts comes across as a devoted dad and husband with a wry sense of humor, who likes fishing, grilling and secretly watching *The Golden Girls*. He occasionally jumps into Instagram videos advertising Audrey’s real estate business. The oldest of six siblings, James grew up in San Jose, Calif., playing football and the guitar. As he approached the end of high school four years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he decided to follow in his uncle’s footsteps and enlist in the Army, motivated by the idea of serving his country while also setting up a stable life for himself. Before he deployed to Iraq in March 2007, at the height of the U.S. military surge, he got a tattoo on his right forearm: **DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR**.

On June 7, the 19-year-old Army private was in the turret of his armored truck outside Baghdad. His eight-man unit had spent hour after eye-glazing hour staring

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*At least 10% of the people arrested in connection with the siege at the Capitol were current or former military members*

at the arid terrain, hunting for signs of buried roadside bombs. Suddenly the road erupted into a fireball. “A dump truck full of 2,000 lb. of homemade explosives blew the bridge in half that my squad was on,” Sergeant David Aleman, the unit’s squad leader, tells TIME.

The blast killed three and wounded several others, including Aleman. It rocked James’ head and neck, shattering his jaw as the column of a nearby building collapsed on him. Smoke and blood filled James’ nostrils. Scrambling in the chaos, someone in the unit managed to radio for medical support. “It is a miracle,” Aleman says, “that some of us survived.”

For James, the months that followed were a blur of surgeries and physical-therapy sessions, first in Europe and then in Fort Bragg, N.C., before he settled in Florida. His body slowly healed, but he was forced to take medical retirement

from the Army, and struggled to adapt to postmilitary life. He suffered from PTSD, anxiety and depression as his personal relationships came under strain, according to legal filings. In 2011, James was charged with prowling when he was found handing out flyers for a moving company in a gated parking lot in Jacksonville. He faced a felony charge of impersonating a law-enforcement officer after police said he falsely claimed he was a member of the military police. The charges were ultimately dropped.

Things finally started falling into place on the night in 2014 when he took Audrey on a first date to a comedy club. She later posted on Facebook that she laughed so loud, she embarrassed him. The two had met years earlier, when Audrey was still married to another soldier and James’ jaw was still wired shut. She would later joke to friends that she liked it better that way. They married in 2016.

**ALL THE WHILE**, James’ prior military service remained an important part of his life. He became involved with local

chapters of the Oath Keepers in central Florida, whose recruiting materials reminded members that their oath was forever. “America’s veterans truly are like a sleeping giant. It is time to awaken them and fill them with a terrible resolve to defeat the domestic enemies of our Constitution,” says one chapter’s mission statement, according to documents reviewed by TIME. “If we can’t get the veterans to step up ... to save our Republic, then how can we expect to get the rest of our people to do what must be done?”

In September 2017, James traveled to the Florida Keys with members of the group to help disaster-relief efforts after Hurricane Irma devastated the area. He volunteered to drive one of the trucks, delivering pallets of rice and beans. “As Oath Keepers, we are on location helping ... by any means necessary,” he wrote in a now deleted Instagram post with the hashtags #patriots, #selfless and #forthepeople. Videos posted to YouTube at the time show him standing next to the local chapter’s self-professed leader, Kelly Meggs, passing out water bottles to locals.

In 2018, Joshua and Audrey moved their newborn son and Audrey’s two children from her previous marriage to her hometown of Arab to be closer to her family. There, he received treatment through Veterans Affairs and launched American Pro Hydro Services, a pressure-washing business that advertises with patriotic red, white and blue logos that it is “veteran-owned.”

James also seemed to stay in touch with members of the Oath Keepers back in Florida and make connections with new ones in the region. On social media, his wife referred to James’ network of “fellow vets/retired police,” seemingly in reference to the Oath Keepers. But with no active chapters near him, James seemed to drift toward right-wing spaces online. His YouTube habits mixed fishing and cooking accounts with a range of far-right conspiracy and survivalist channels. On Pinterest, he saved images of American flags and eagles with quotes like “I have the right to bear arms: your approval is not required.” His page included posts linked to sites like Patriot Depot, which advertises “supplies for the conservative revolution,” alongside styling ideas for his daughter’s hair.

By 2020, even the professional social



## Militia groups like the Oath Keepers exploit the sense of isolation that may plague returning combat veterans

media presence of the pressure-washing business James had painstakingly built had started to slip. “Invoke the Insurrection ACT NOW!!!” the handle for American Pro Hydro tweeted at Trump in August 2020 in response to the President’s tweets about racial-justice protests. The following month, James joined Parler, a largely right-wing social media site, where he followed a slate of conservative figures, accounts like the conspiracy website Infowars and fellow Oath Keepers. “Looking forward to meeting everyone!” he posted on Sept. 8.

After the election, James began traveling with the Oath Keepers to events in Texas, Georgia and D.C. to provide “security” for right-wing speakers, including longtime Trump adviser Roger Stone, retired general Michael Flynn and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. These trips were frequent enough that his wife received \$1,500 in several payments from January

to March from an Oath Keepers account through a mobile cash app “to help support my children while he was not there,” according to her March 11 deposition.

On Nov. 21, James attended a “Stop the Steal” rally in Atlanta, where speakers urged participants to “accept nothing less than a Donald Trump victory.” A photo from the event shows him wearing a bulletproof vest with the Oath Keepers logo and the motto “Guardians of the Republic/Not on Our Watch.” Although James deleted most of his social media, an archived version of his Parler account shows his posts were peppered with hashtags like #stopthesteal2020, #saveamerica and #deepstatecorruption. He posted a photo from a “Stop the Steal” rally in front of the White House on Nov. 14 with the caption “Communists and CCP Loyalists want to change our way of life!”

It was a dramatic evolution for a man who hadn’t been registered to vote before



Left: James with Audrey on their wedding day in October 2016; below: James, front right, and fellow Oath Keepers escort former Trump adviser Roger Stone to a rally in Washington the night before the insurrection



2015 and only joined the NRA the following year. Friends and neighbors never thought of James as particularly political beyond holding the standard conservative views that are common in Arab, which is in the nation's most conservative congressional district. As with other veterans whose involvement in right-wing groups like the Oath Keepers led them to the Capitol on Jan. 6, James' descent into alleged extremism seemed less an expression of long-held political fervor than the desire to be part of a larger patriotic cause.

**LITTLE DATA IS KEPT** on how often and why veterans get involved with extremist groups, but there are plenty of high-profile examples throughout American history. Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate army general, was the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. George Lincoln Rockwell, a Navy veteran, founded the American Nazi Party. Timothy

McVeigh and Terry Nichols, both Army veterans, were convicted of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

Founded by a former Army paratrooper in 2009, the Oath Keepers has quickly become one of America's largest antigovernment extremist groups. It heavily recruits current and former military and law-enforcement members, encouraging them to see themselves as "the last line of defense against tyranny," according to Oath Keepers websites. The group's name refers to the oath sworn by members of the military and law enforcement "to defend the Constitution from all enemies, foreign and domestic." Some members falsely believe that the federal government has been taken over by "a cabal of elites actively trying to strip American citizens of their rights," according to the FBI.

Groups like the Oath Keepers exploit the sense of isolation that plagues many returning combat veterans. Most U.S. service members have no ties to extremist organizations, but the government has long warned about such groups' desire to enlist returning veterans into their ranks to exploit their tactical skills and combat experience. A 2009 Department of Homeland Security assessment said right-wing extremists "will attempt to recruit and radicalize returning veterans in order to boost their violent capabilities." This disaffection is often particularly acute for soldiers of James' generation, who served in America's longest wars as the country gradually became more detached from overseas conflicts, says Kathleen Belew, author of *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*. The Oath Keepers peddles an opportunity to continue their service. "Militia groups have really familiar structures of command," Belew says. "They have structures of fraternal bonding, they have the organizational social elements that are very similar to the armed forces—and they're built that way deliberately."

Prosecutors say James' main contact at the Capitol was Kelly Meggs, with whom he had distributed disaster-relief aid in 2017. According to federal investigators, the Florida militia leader not only organized the Oath Keepers but also planned to join forces with other extremist groups, including the Proud

Boys and Three Percenters, on Jan. 6.

Court filings in James' case portray him as a key figure in the plan to storm the Capitol. Chats with other Oath Keepers on the encrypted messaging app Signal "demonstrate that the defendant was designated as a leader in the group, and that he operated as one early on," according to prosecutors. James allegedly fielded messages from other men in Alabama eager to join his "quick reaction force" (QRF) team. When one said he had friends near D.C. willing to help with "a lot of weapons and ammo if you get in trouble," James responded, according to prosecutors. "That might be helpful, but we have a sh-tload of QRF on standby with an arsenal." On Parler, James chatted with Roberto Minuta, a New York tattoo artist and member of the Oath Keepers. "I've been hoarding any ammo I can get my hands on lol," Minuta responded in December to a photo James had posted of his guns and ammunition.

At around 2:30 p.m. on Jan. 6, James and Minuta were allegedly spotted on security cameras speeding toward the Capitol in two golf carts as James shouted directions from the map on his phone. While they made their way, a group of seven Oath Keepers were preparing to climb the Capitol's east stairs in a tactical formation, according to the federal indictment. To pierce the mass of people gathered there, each group member placed a hand on the back of the person ahead—a military-style tactic prosecutors called a "stack." The group forcibly entered through the Capitol doors, where James and Minuta followed 25 minutes later. "Patriots storming the Capitol building," said Minuta, according to prosecutors. "F-cking war in the streets right now."

Investigators say James exchanged at least 10 calls and texts that day with fellow militia members, nearly all of whom were clad in tactical vests, helmets and other gear, while terrified lawmakers inside the building hid and ran for their lives. In the process, prosecutors allege, James had broken multiple laws barring conspiracy, obstruction and entering a restricted building.

**IN ARAB, THE CHAOS** in Washington felt far away. A town that was named after a typo, it was meant to honor the founder's son, Arad Thompson, but the U.S. Postal





Left: a statue of Stephen Tuttle Thompson, Arab's founder; right: Civil War memorabilia at the Arab public library

Service misspelled the name in 1882 and the mistake stuck. The community decided to lean into the moniker, referring to their football team as the Arabian Knights. Arab is 98% white, with more than three dozen evangelical churches and what locals fondly refer to as “strong traditional values.” Stores in town sell “Rulers of the South” memorabilia featuring Confederate generals. It holds an annual Back-When Day to demonstrate 1800s “quilting, cornmeal-grinding, and black-smithing.”

When James quietly returned to Arab from the capital, he resumed his life as normal. He pressure-washed driveways, posed for selfies on Valentine’s Day, donned a tie for Audrey’s real estate banquet and collected disaster-relief supplies with fellow veterans after a deadly tornado in Fultondale, Ala.

But privately, James seemed to grasp the gravity of the situation. Two days after the insurrection, he encouraged other Oath Keepers to delete and destroy their communications on Signal, texting them to “make sure that all signal comms about the op has been deleted and burned,” according to federal investigators.

Sixty-two days later, a new customer rang James’ phone in need of a pressure-washing job. It was a ruse. While he was away, FBI agents, with the local sheriff and police in tow, rumbled up to his front door in a vehicle neighbors described

as a tank. After asking James’ wife and 3-year-old son to step out of the house, they demanded to know if he was building a bomb. Then they flew a drone inside to make sure. For eight hours, they searched the family’s 1,300-sq.-ft. home, rummaging through closets, cabinets and garage boxes. James was arrested and charged with crimes carrying a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

In a courtroom in Birmingham two days later, his lawyer argued that James was being treated unfairly. “He didn’t kill anybody. He wasn’t acting violently. He is a person who has followed orders all his life, your honor. An individual who would risk his life for strangers.” The judge disagreed. “You were involved in

planning some of this operation,” he told James. “There’s no remorse there, and there’s no recognition of the lasting damage that was done on Jan. 6.”

The judge ordered James to be kept in jail because of his past record of PTSD, anxiety and depression, as well as a previous hospitalization. James’ lawyers objected; to them, it seemed the judge felt he posed a danger to the community because he had suffered unseen wounds during his combat service. Many of those previously arrested for their alleged roles in the Capitol riot, the lawyers noted, had already been set free.

The news shook the town. At first, Audrey tried to defend her husband online. “He wasn’t in the riot,” she posted in the Facebook comments section of Arab’s small newspaper. “He’s not the man the media is making him out to be.”

Many in the community offered an outpouring of assistance. Complete strangers knocked on the door of the James’ home to drop off small amounts of cash and tell them “we’re praying for you.” The family also received an outpouring from outside Arab. More than \$184,000 in donations flowed in through an online fundraiser for which Audrey provides regular updates. The funds allowed them to hire Washington lawyers, Joni Robin and Chris Leibig, who say James intends to fight the charges. “There are two sides to this story, and

## To Patrick Tays, a 73-year-old veteran who lives in Arab, James and his allies are ‘traitorous scumbags’



so far the only version of events you've heard is the government's," Robin says.

Those in Arab who don't support James have mainly stayed quiet. "Little towns ain't no joke," one person who lives near James tells TIME. "I'd really rather my house not get burned down, ya feel me?" Another neighbor who spoke to local media the day of James' arrest was attacked on social media as a "rat-faced snitch."

That hasn't stopped everyone from speaking out. "I wish he had stayed home with his family," wrote one Arab resident on the local paper's Facebook page. "He should have thought about them when he decided to be a domestic terrorist," another community member retorted.

To Patrick Tays, a 73-year-old disabled Navy veteran who lives in Arab, James and his allies are "traitorous scumbags." "Washington would have hung them," he says. "Lincoln would have shot them. Teddy Roosevelt would have them all in prison."

**ONLY NOW ARE** federal authorities formally drawing up a strategy to handle the problem of military veterans' joining extremist groups. The Biden Administration's strategy to combat domestic terrorism includes plans to prevent veterans from being recruited by extremists. Currently, there are no efforts that focus on veterans once they have left service,

Left: one of dozens of churches in Arab; right: the Arab High School football stadium

despite evidence that they are increasingly the targets of online misinformation and extremist recruitment.

Security analysts, veterans' groups and experts say it will be vital to combat both the isolation and the fearmongering that lead former service members to think of their fellow Americans as the enemy or, worse, take the law into their own hands. "It's important not to fixate too much on the Oath Keepers as an organization but to think of them as a concrete example of a broader phenomenon in America," says Sam Jackson, a homeland-security expert at the University of Albany who wrote a book on the group. The alleged radicalization of James, the growth of local chapters and the national organization should be "seen as a Russian nesting doll" that shows a much larger movement, he says, "of people who view America as being hijacked by internal and external enemies." But little is likely to change unless more Americans come to agree on what it means to be an extremist and what it means to be a patriot.

After a month in jail, James was granted bond under the condition that he get mental-health treatment, surrender

his passport and agree not to communicate with other members of the Oath Keepers. The evening James returned to Arab, Schultz, the jewelry-store owner, drove to the family's house with steaks to welcome him back. "He's a good man," Schultz says. "It's just so scary. My daddy says they're going to make an example out of him."

James has been living under house arrest, allowed to leave only for mental-health appointments. In May, during what would be a busy season for his business, his company truck sat idle in the backyard.

At least three co-defendants in the Oath Keeper case have pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy and obstructing Congress, and are now cooperating with the government. These witnesses' testimony could have a major impact on James' case.

Over the July 4 weekend, Audrey pored over their plea deals with a highlighter to understand what it might mean for her husband. Sounding incredulous, she told her TikTok followers that she was "blown away at the constitutional rights they're signing away." Even though his fellow Oath Keepers had pleaded guilty, she maintained James had done nothing wrong on Jan. 6. His day in court has yet to be set.

—With reporting by SIMMONE SHAH/NEW YORK and CHRIS WILSON



*Savitri Vasava, 23,  
plans to take up  
surrogacy after her  
sister-in-law built a  
house from money she  
earned as a surrogate*

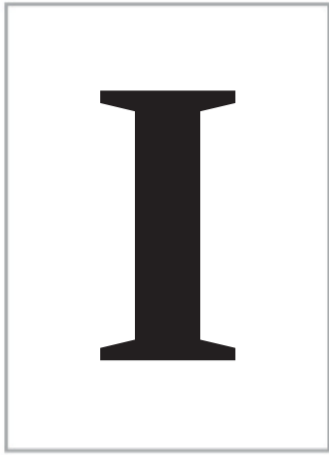


World

# PREGNANCY AT A PRICE

Commercial surrogacy has long been seen as a route out of poverty for women in rural India—  
but now a ban is on the horizon

By Neha Thirani Bagri/Anand, India  
Photographs by Smita Sharma for TIME



IT'S NEARLY NOON WHEN PINKY MACWAN WAKES up and rubs her eyes, shifting uncomfortably. She's in her second trimester of pregnancy with twins and finds herself constantly sluggish. Still in her floral nightgown, she walks down the fluorescent-lit hallway and splashes cold water on her face in the bathroom she shares with 46 other women, all surrogates at various stages of pregnancy. It's late February, and Macwan has spent the past four months living in the basement of the Akanksha Hospital in bustling Anand, a town in the western Indian state of Gujarat. Home to the headquarters of the major dairy cooperative Amul, Anand has long been known as the milk capital of India. But booming business at Akanksha has also garnered the town another label: India's baby factory.

A few months earlier, Macwan, 24, was earning \$94 a month as a supervisor in a garment factory, overseeing 50 tailors making women's clothes. The daughter of an iron-factory laborer, Macwan was a bright child and was sent to boarding school, but left at the age of 16 to support her family during hard times. She was married off at the age of 20 to a security guard from a nearby village, but in 2019, sick of feeling "more like a servant" than a wife, she walked away. Things began to look up when she started to work at the garment factory, but when a tough national lockdown was imposed in March 2020 as the first wave of COVID-19 hit India, Macwan and most of her co-workers were fired. She had no savings and struggled to put food on the table, often relying on support from charitable organizations. Worried about caring for her 3-year-old child, she began to look into surrogacy. "If things continue in this vein, then my son's future is also going to be like mine," says Macwan, her soft voice shaking. "I thought, If I go once, then I will be able to stand on my own feet."

In October, Macwan arrived at the Akanksha Hospital, one of the biggest surrogacy facilities in the country. Her mother—who had been a surrogate herself 10 years earlier—had tried to dissuade her. But Macwan argued that the money was much more than she would ordinarily be able to make. Surrogates at Akanksha are paid in installments during the process for a total of about \$6,230 for a successful surrogacy for a single baby; in the event of a miscarriage, a woman receives what she has been paid up to that point as well as an additional \$135. Because she

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*Pinky Macwan lost her garment-factory job during the pandemic; she wants to use the money she'll make from surrogacy to start her own business*

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is having twins, Macwan will make \$7,395 in addition to the \$245 she earned for egg donation. With her living costs taken care of by the hospital, she is able to save most of that money.

Macwan is one of thousands of women in India who have chosen to become surrogates since 2002, when the country legalized the practice, in which a woman carries and delivers a child on someone else's behalf and is financially compensated for it. (In some cases, surrogacy uses the eggs and sperm of the prospective parents, but if there are health or quality issues, donor eggs or the surrogate's eggs are used.) Though official numbers are hard to come by, a U.N.-backed study in 2012 by the Delhi-based Sama Resource Group for Women and Health estimated India's surrogacy business was worth more than \$400 million a year, with some 3,000 fertility clinics across the nation.

Macwan, like the majority of those making up India's workforce, was employed in the informal sector, which was particularly badly hit by the pandemic. Many of the women at Akanksha previously worked as domestic help or manual laborers or at small manufacturing units. The amount of money



they can make from surrogacy can be life-changing: it could help them secure their family's future, start a business, educate their children, pay medical expenses or build a solid home. Macwan hopes to use the money to start a small clothing business selling her own brand. While the majority of surrogates are poorer women from rural areas, many educated women have also come to the Akanksha Hospital amid a startling loss of jobs across India during the pandemic to act as egg donors or surrogates.

They might be among the last women in India to be paid for surrogacy. For many years, the country

**‘I THOUGHT, IF I GO ONCE, THEN I WILL BE ABLE TO STAND ON MY OWN FEET.’**

—Pinky Macwan, 24, who turned to surrogacy during the pandemic

has been one of the few places—including Russia, Ukraine and some U.S. states—where commercial surrogacy is legal. But the ethics of the practice have been under scrutiny for some time, and now a ban on all commercial surrogacy is on the horizon. The ban is part of a new bill that, if enacted, would also prevent LGBTQ couples and single women from accessing surrogacy. Activists have criticized these new restrictions, saying they're part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's conservative agenda to legally define "family" in traditional terms. And while lawmakers argue that the industry exploits impoverished women, experts fear that the ban would cut off one of their few paths out of poverty—especially as COVID-19 continues to batter India's economy—and push the market underground.

That could leave these women more vulnerable than ever. "If they stop commercial surrogacy, it is not good for poor people like me," says Savita Vasava, a 34-year-old mother of three from Dakor, a small town 21 miles from Akanksha Hospital. She is about to be a surrogate for the second time in order to save up for her daughter's wedding. She's currently waiting to hear if the embryos recently transferred into her uterus have resulted in a pregnancy. "It is one way for us to make a better life. If we work day and night, we cannot save this kind of money."

**IT'S HARD TO MISS** the Akanksha Hospital, a shiny edifice of glass and steel that towers over the banana field across from it. As you enter, a screen plays a video on loop showing its charismatic founder, Dr. Nayana Patel, talking about reproductive health. Since 2003, her practice has put Anand on the map as a hub for commercial surrogacy in India. The new hospital building, inaugurated in 2015, is a one-stop shop for fertility, offering egg extraction, in vitro fertilization (IVF), embryo transfer, prenatal care, delivery of children and neonatal care. In the reception area is a photo of Oprah Winfrey, whose endorsement in 2007 led to the clinic's attracting a large foreign clientele. A floor-to-ceiling collage of press clippings touts the hospital's success, and pictures of smiling babies—many of them white—adorn the walls. A maze of rooms in the basement of the building houses surrogates for the duration of their pregnancy.

Since its legalization nearly two decades ago, commercial surrogacy has thrived in India, driven by a lack of bureaucratic red tape, a supply of skilled English-speaking doctors, low labor costs and a push to promote medical tourism. At its peak, the industry attracted hundreds of clients a year from wealthy countries, especially the U.S., Australia and Israel, according to Amit Karkhanis, a Mumbai-based lawyer who specializes in contracts between surrogates and intended parents. Akanksha Hospital, India's most famous clinic, has been praised in international media



for its research and innovation. But how the process works and how surrogates are treated and compensated varies widely from clinic to clinic.

At Akanksha, some women directly approach the clinic, but Patel also has a network of about 20 “caretakers,” women in different areas of Gujarat who help find potential surrogates. After becoming a surrogate herself for the first time in 2019, Vasava has since joined the caretaker ranks. Married off at 16, she eventually divorced her husband and moved back to her mother’s home with her three children. While cleaning a woman’s home in a town nearby, Vasava spoke of her plight, and her employer showed her a video of Patel on YouTube. Vasava soon signed up to be a surrogate at Akanksha. “Sometimes we slept with an empty stomach,” she says of her life before she went to the clinic. She used the money from her surrogacy to build a small store, which stocks milk, chips, chocolate, lentils and rice. “After the surrogacy, there is at least always something to eat.”

Vasava still has a picture on her cell phone of the infant she delivered and looks at it every day. “He would be 2 years old now,” she says, recalling her sadness when she handed him over to his intended parents after her cesarean section. Akanksha staff encouraged her to recommend surrogacy to other women she knew, and promised her a fee of \$269 for every woman who becomes pregnant at the clinic.

Most clinics in India use agents (who coordinate everything from finding potential surrogates to arranging their housing and medical checkups) or middlemen (sometimes employed by agents to just find the surrogates). However, the methods used by middlemen and agents can vary greatly, as can the fees they charge facilities and the amount they pay surrogates. “There is [no] regulation of agencies or even clinics right now; there are only guidelines,” says Karkhanis, the lawyer. “All these agents do whatever they want to do in their own manner.”

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*From left: posters of babies born through surrogacy decorate the walls of Akanksha Hospital; Kajal Vasava, seven months pregnant as a first-time surrogate, undergoes a checkup; nurses with a patient after an IVF procedure*

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Patel is careful to distinguish the fees she pays to the women who recruit surrogates for her from those paid to middlemen. She prefers to call the fee a “caretaker charge,” saying that the women she hires are responsible not only for vouching for the surrogate’s character and background, but also for acting as liaisons between the hospital and the surrogate until the delivery date, checking in on the surrogate’s family and conveying messages from doctors. “She’s the bridge. You can’t rely on anyone who walks in and says, ‘I want to be a surrogate.’ We don’t have any background checks,” says Patel, who created the system in 2007 after having a bad experience with several surrogates.

When Vasava is working for Akanksha, she approaches women in her neighborhood and tells them about the opportunity and her own experience being a surrogate. She has made \$538 through this system so far, and will be paid \$269 more for a third referral who has just become pregnant. “Earlier they were thinking it is a kind of prostitution, but I explained it to them,” says Vasava. “I told them that they should go there for the future of their children. I have gone there myself, and it is very good.”

Her neighborhood is mostly home to people on the lowest rung of India’s caste system, many of whom belong to the Vasava community. (The women in this story and the accompanying photos who share the Vasava surname are not related.) They subsist on daily wagework at construction sites or cleaning homes, and live in shanties that flood with every monsoon. Six women from the neighborhood have signed up to be surrogates, and some have built solid concrete homes with the money they have earned.

**DESPITE THE OPPORTUNITIES** that commercial surrogacy offers some women, the industry has been embroiled in controversy for years. Since 2012, news reports of women confined to hostels,



paid insufficiently and not given adequate information about the health risks of procedures carried out on them have highlighted the need for reforms, particularly as India has become a top destination for foreigners looking for surrogates.

In 2013, concerned about the lack of binding legal standards for how surrogates were being treated, Dr. Ranjana Kumari, the director of the Centre for Social Research, a nonprofit organization based in New Delhi, set out to study the field in order to push for reforms. She visited clinics across the country, including in Anand, and found the treatment of surrogates was highly inconsistent—and in some cases, the women had no rights at all. A 2014 report from her organization highlighted several issues: surrogates rarely received a copy of the contract they had signed with the intended parents; most contracts failed to protect the health of the surrogate; and some surrogates underwent up to two dozen IVF sessions. (There is little data on exactly how many IVF cycles are safe over the course of a few years, but each round poses some health risks.) The study also found a huge range in compensation among clinics, and there was often a discrepancy between the amount clinics claimed to be paying and what surrogates said they were receiving. Some women interviewed for the study said that clinic staff were rude to them and “treated [them] like objects.”

Things came to a head in 2014, when an Australian couple was found to have abandoned one of their twin babies born to an Indian surrogate. The following year, the Indian Parliament passed new restrictions on surrogacy, making it available only to Indian citizens and putting an end to foreign couples coming to India to find surrogates. Surrogates gathered outside Akanksha Hospital in protest.

“I’ve seen the industry grow. I’ve seen it come down,” Karkhanis says. In the industry’s boom years, he facilitated nearly 200 agreements each

year, meeting 15 new foreign clients each week. These days, he does about 20 agreements annually.

Still, surrogacy has continued to flourish, especially among upper-class, educated Indian women who are looking to have children later in life. Bollywood celebrities like Shah Rukh Khan speaking out about using surrogacy has led to greater acceptance within urban India, but a stigma remains, for both intended parents and surrogates. Macwan told her relatives and neighbors that she was going away for work because she worried that being pregnant while divorced could subject her to malicious rumors. “If I tell anyone, they think that I am going to give away my own child,” she says. “They don’t understand that I am simply giving my womb on rent.”

Prime Minister Modi’s right-wing government doesn’t see it that way, and has pushed for further restrictions, telling the Supreme Court in a 2015 affidavit that it did not support commercial surrogacy. In 2019, the government revived a 2016 bill banning commercial surrogacy that had been languishing in the lower house of Parliament. The only surrogacy option would be for what is known as “altruistic surrogacy”—where the only compensation is for medical expenses and insurance—and that would be limited to childless Indian heterosexual couples who had been married for at least five years, had a doctor’s certificate proving their infertility, and were in the age groups of 23 to 50 for women and 26 to 55 for men. Under this proposal, only a close relative between the ages of 25 and 35 could act as a surrogate.

Passed by the lower house in August 2019, the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill was broadly criticized as too restrictive and failed to clear the upper house. A committee of 23 members of Parliament was directed to examine the surrogacy industry, and recommend amendments to the legislation. In the course of their research, committee members met with Patel and Karkhanis, both of whom voiced opposition to



# World

several clauses of the bill. The committee ultimately recommended allowing any “willing woman” and not just a “close relative” to be a surrogate, removing the five-year waiting period, waiving the requirement for an infertility certificate, allowing widows and divorced women to avail themselves of surrogacy services, and extending insurance coverage for surrogates from 16 months to 36. In February 2020, the union Cabinet—the government’s most senior ministers—approved these recommendations, which will likely be passed by the upper house of Parliament this year and become national law.

Still, the bill would ban anything except altruistic surrogacy, with the Modi government insisting that the commercial-surrogacy business takes advantage of low-income women. “While many couples benefited from surrogacy facilities in India, the practice has persisted without any legal framework,” Bhupender Yadav, a member of Parliament who chaired the select committee, wrote in a February 2020 *Hindustan Times* column. “Under these circumstances, there have been many reported incidents of unethical practices surrounding surrogacy. These practices include the exploitation of surrogates, abandonment of children born out of surrogacy, and the import of human embryos and gametes.” The new legislation, he argued, would protect surrogates from exploitation and protect the rights of children born through surrogacy.

**WOMEN’S-RIGHTS ADVOCATES** agree that the industry needs more regulation. The issue with the proposed law, they say, is that it fails to address the main problems with current practices and does not take into account the interests or voices of surrogates. They are primarily concerned with the mandate that makes only “altruistic” surrogacy legal, arguing that it will lead to women being pressured into becoming surrogates against their will. “We believe very strongly that altruism in a patriarchal society like ours could lead to coercion,” says Sarojini N, founder of Sama, the Delhi-based group working on women’s health issues. Not remunerating a woman for reproductive labor is not enough to prevent exploitation, she argues.

In the recommendations she submitted to the government in 2014, Kumari had pushed for legal protection for the surrogates and intended parents, guaranteed medical insurance for the surrogates and a minimum amount of compensation. “We never wanted the ban, but we wanted the total protection of the women who are offering the womb for a child,” she says. “Banning never works. It hasn’t worked for drugs or alcohol. How will it work for something which is so human?”

Usha Vijay Parmar’s experience is a common one in India, where uneducated women with few other employment opportunities sign up to be surrogates,



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*First-time surrogate Heena Sodaparmar combs the hair of Neha Makwana, who is at Akanksha for the second time to save money for her family*

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live away from home for the duration of their pregnancy and agree to medical procedures without a full understanding of their health risks. Parmar’s husband died three years ago from liver failure brought about by alcoholism. Since then, she has struggled to keep up with the expenses of taking care of her mother-in-law and two children; the \$161 she makes each month through farming and raising cattle is spent on household expenses, leaving her with little savings. When her aunt—who had previously been a surrogate at Akanksha—suggested she do the same, Parmar didn’t understand what that meant. Her aunt told her that it was similar to how they insert sperm in buffaloes, a process Parmar was familiar with.

Parmar visited the hospital two years ago with her aunt and submitted her application to be a surrogate, along with her national identity card, birth certificate, her husband’s death certificate and passport-



size photographs of her whole family that she had to have specially taken. Prospective parents often tell the clinic that they would like to choose a surrogate on the basis of religion, diet, skin color and age.

On Feb. 29, 2020, she delivered a child through a C-section. She was 33 at the time and says she chose the surgery because it took less time than a vaginal delivery, and she believed it might be safer for a woman of her age. “There are some surrogates here who have a normal delivery, but it is rare,” Parmar says. “Some surrogates insist on it; then the hospital does it.” She met the intended parents for the first time the day she gave birth, and appreciated that they took a picture while she held the baby girl. Fifteen days later, she went home. “I am giving a couple that cannot have the opportunity to have a baby a child, and in return, they are giving me money that can help my children,” she says. “This is not a business. It is a service.”

But while Parmar may describe it as a reasonable exchange, experts like Sital Kalantry, a clinical professor of law at Cornell Law School who has written extensively about surrogacy, worry about the lack of informed consent often involved in commercial surrogacy, especially given that many of the women are unable to read the contracts written in English, and sign them using their thumbprints. Kalantry says there is a conflict of interest created by the doctor acting as both the fertility doctor and the surrogate’s ob-gyn, which she believes means that the health of the fetus is often prioritized over the health of the surrogate. Like Parmar, most surrogates get C-sections, Kalantry explains. “Those are more invasive than a vaginal birth,” she says. “But it’s probably safer for the fetus, and it’s probably also more convenient for the doctors. It’s more convenient for the intended parents so that they don’t have to wait around.” (Patel says she tries to help surrogates deliver vaginally, but if there is a medical issue or the woman requests it, they do a C-section. She says her clinic has a C-section rate of 70%; the national rate is 17.2%.)

Kalantry also takes issue with the convention of having surrogates stay away from home, though some say they prefer it in order to avoid the prying eyes of neighbors and relatives. “I think putting women in a surrogate home is problematic,” Kalantry says. “It’s almost like a jail-like situation.” While well-established clinics like Akanksha do not require surrogates to spend nine months in the center, they strongly encourage it. Women’s-rights advocates cite the troubling power dynamics of wealthy urban doctors asking uneducated rural women to stay in clinics where they can monitor them. Meanwhile, experts say conditions in smaller clinics are considerably worse.

After her first time being a surrogate, Parmar was able to save some money in a fixed deposit. Now, she is back at Akanksha, hoping to earn more money to save for her children’s education and marriage. With schools closed because of the pandemic, she has brought her 10-year-old son Satyam; he sits beside her eating lunch in the room she shares with seven other surrogates. But Parmar’s stay is different from her previous one in other ways too.

The first time, Akanksha offered classes in makeup, sewing and making decorative objects. This time around, pandemic restrictions mean the women have no activities to distract them. Parmar was restless when she first arrived at Akanksha, not allowed to go beyond the hospital complex except for family emergencies. By lunchtime on the day we spoke, she had already washed her clothes and visited the temple on the hospital’s lawn; the rest of her day would be spent chatting with the other surrogates and watching television. Soon, the women would be served coconut water and fruits, a luxury Parmar could not afford back home.



**PATEL HAS BEEN** at the center of the ethics debate surrounding surrogacy in India. When she is not in scrubs, she can be found in her office wearing a gleaming string of pearls, several diamond rings and a graceful silk sari. People stream in and out, handing her papers to sign and asking her advice on medical procedures. Patel argues that regardless of what you think of the moral debate, the altruistic approach is simply impractical. “Of course it should be a willing woman. You should not force anyone; the surrogate has to voluntarily understand the procedure,” she says. “But if she comes, stays for nine months, gives the baby and in return is not compensated in any way, how will it work? Why would anyone do this for free?”

If she’s right and the number of surrogates plummets, that would leave few options for women like Navpreet Gambhir, who has been trying to start a family for 12 years. In November, with the pandemic still raging, she and her husband drove 700 miles from her home in Dehradun, a small city in the northern state of Uttarakhand, to Anand. “I had almost lost hope in being able to have a child,” says Gambhir, recalling how she cried when she first met the young

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*Pooja, a nonresident Indian who lives in the U.S., with her 2-week-old son, born through surrogacy at Akanksha*

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woman who would be her surrogate. “She said, ‘Don’t worry, I will do this for you.’ I was so touched.”

Gambhir, 34, who runs a small catering business from her home, was married in 2009 and began planning for a child soon after. But she is a lupus patient, which made her journey to motherhood complicated. Pregnancy for women with lupus, a chronic autoimmune disease, can be very risky if the disease is not under control, and may lead to flare-ups of the condition, miscarriage or stillbirth. After trying unsuccessfully for many years to get pregnant, she finally conceived in 2016, only to have a miscarriage. She thought about adoption, but the process is extremely complicated in India, with prospective parents often waiting several years to be matched with a child.

When she and her husband began considering surrogacy, their family voiced concerns, Gambhir says. They had heard rumors of surrogates asking for more money than was agreed upon, blackmailing the family and even terminating the pregnancy. Gambhir and her husband visited a fertility clinic in New Delhi, closer to their hometown, but were troubled by the clinic’s plan to put them in touch with a middleman who would find a surrogate and bring

# ‘BANNING HASN’T WORKED FOR DRUGS OR ALCOHOL. HOW WILL IT WORK FOR SOMETHING WHICH IS SO HUMAN?’

—Dr. Ranjana Kumari, Centre for Social Research

them to the clinic. The clinic would not have the surrogate’s medical history and would not require the surrogate to live at the clinic during the pregnancy.

“It was very important to us that the surrogate lives at the hospital,” Gambhir says. “We would be worried about how she is staying, her nutrition. Also, she can say, ‘Sorry, ma’am, I’ve aborted the child.’” They eventually decided to go ahead with surrogacy at Akanksha, impressed with how the hospital was run. The procedure was costly—\$2,689 for the egg retrieval, and an additional \$18,823 for the surrogacy—and the Gambhirs had to dip into their savings to pay for it. The surrogate did not become pregnant on the first try, but they were back three months later, hoping for a better outcome.

“To people who say that this is a baby factory, they should see the couples who are suffering, unable to have a child,” Gambhir says. “If they want their own genetic baby, what will they do?”

**AS INDIA STRUGGLES** to recover from a brutal second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the amended surrogacy bill that awaits consideration by the upper house of Parliament has been put on the back burner. But the new restrictions have already become a flash point in a broader culture war under way in India around the rights of women and LGBTQ people. Activists point out that the surrogacy bill limits access to those currently or formerly in heterosexual marriages, while other legislation in India has recognized the rights of live-in couples, single people and LGBTQ people. “If the legislation passes in its current form, it will be challenged before the Supreme Court,” says Aneesh V. Pillai, an assistant professor of law at Cochin University who completed his Ph.D. research on the legal framework of surrogacy in India. He believes the Supreme Court will object to the law because it violates the constitutionally guaranteed right to equality—though the court has, in recent years, rarely ruled against the central government.

Same-sex sexual relations were decriminalized in 2018, but the government continues to oppose same-sex marriage, telling the high court in February that the “Indian family unit concept ... necessarily presuppose[s] a biological man as ‘husband,’ a biological woman as ‘wife’ and children born out

of union.” As recently as 2016, India’s Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj declared that allowing gay people to have a surrogate child “doesn’t go with our ethos.”

“The Indian constitution talks about equality, but this legislation does not even consider that,” says Sarojini N, the Delhi-based activist. “Social morality has been put at the center. It is definitely discriminatory toward LGBT people and people not in the institution of marriage.” While single women would still be allowed to adopt in India under other legislation, she notes, they would not be allowed access to surrogacy unless they are widowed or divorced.

If the ban goes ahead and is upheld by the court, experts are concerned it will create an underground economy with worse conditions, where paid surrogacy would continue unregulated.

This would leave the surrogates with no protections at all and unable to demand safeguards. Clinics and intended parents could circumvent the law by using cash transactions or inflating the costs of medical expenses or insurance on paper to conceal compensation for a surrogate. And while established clinics in larger cities might stay away from surrogacy under these circumstances—Patel says she would opt to close her hospital’s surrogate ward to avoid being a party to any transactions that were not aboveboard—more rural clinics might continue to operate unregulated. That’s how things have played out in other countries. Despite commercial surrogacy being banned in China, the *New York Times* estimated that more than 10,000 children a year are born there through that process.

If all goes well for Macwan, whether or not commercial surrogacy is banned will not directly affect her. Many of the women she has met at Akanksha have been surrogates before, but she hopes she will never be in such dire need again. She misses her son, who lived with her at the hospital until discomfort from the pregnancy made it difficult for her to look after him. She speaks to him by phone every day, but finds it hard to carry him when he visits because she recently had to get cervical stitches to ensure that she does not deliver prematurely. She wishes she could leave the hospital premises, but is worried about health complications that might occur while away.

Last year, she got engaged to Vivek, a young man who worked alongside her at the garment factory. She is glad he is open-minded and was supportive of her decision to become a surrogate. They plan to get married after she delivers the twins, but do not want more children of their own. Yet she does not regret her decision to be a surrogate.

“Someone is not able to have a child, I am able to get pregnant, I am giving them a child,” she says. “They have a need. We also have a need. So what is wrong with this work?” —*With reporting by* MADELINE ROACHE/LONDON □



*Gulzira Auelkhan,  
a survivor of  
the notorious  
“re-education  
centers” in  
Xinjiang, China*

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# The Han Supremacy

**BEIJING'S OMINOUS CAMPAIGN TO DEFINE WHAT IT  
MEANS TO BE CHINESE** BY CHARLIE CAMPBELL/SHANGHAI

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IN JULY 2017, GULZIRA AUULKHAN'S father fell ill. So she made the short hop from her village in the windswept Kazakhstan countryside into her native China to care for him. Upon arrival in the western province of Xinjiang, however, she was arrested, for no given reason. No charges were ever brought, but she spent the next 15 months being ferried between five different prison camps with barbed wire and watchtowers, during which she was interrogated 19 times and tortured with electric batons. Her interrogators had no clear explanation for her detention. "Once they asked me, 'Do you have a TV in Kazakhstan?'" says Auelkhan, 42. "In which case your ideology has been corrupted."

Auelkhan, an ethnic Kazakh Muslim who grew up speaking a Turkic dialect, was forced to learn Mandarin Chinese, salute the Chinese flag and sing songs exulting the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) beneath photos of President Xi Jinping.

"We all had to eat pork, and I was forced to burn a Koran and a prayer mat," she says. "There was to be no more praying." Afterward, she was sent to a labor camp for two months, where she sewed gloves until she says her neck ached and her eyes turned bloodshot.

Auelkhan was told she would be paid 6,000 yuan (\$930) but received only 220 yuan (\$33). Camp guards told detainees that "from now, all ethnicities will be as one and must share the same language and food," she says. At one point, Auelkhan was given what she was told was a flu shot, and afterward her periods became infrequent and irregular. "I became lethargic and today can't even knead bread without feeling tired," she says.

China says allegations of mass detention, rapes and forced sterilization in Xinjiang province are "lies and absurd allegations." Yet seemingly everybody there knows a friend or family member who has been disappeared. The new rules

governing the province are clear: men can no longer sport beards, nor women headscarves. Fasting during Ramadan is forbidden, as is the Islamic greeting "*As-salaamu 'Alaikum*," or "Peace be upon you."

CCP officials are assigned to live with minorities in their own homes, while AI-powered facial-recognition cameras enable predictive policing in what Amnesty International calls a "dystopian hellscape." Wearing a slightly longer dress, or forgetting to shave, is enough to flag the surveillance algorithm, according to recently leaked internal files, possibly resulting in detention. "They want to destroy [non-Han] language and culture," says Auelkhan, who is now based in the U.S. "To brainwash the people."

Life for Xinjiang's Muslim minorities—mostly Uighurs but also Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Kazakhs like Auelkhan—is a daily grind of surveillance, indoctrination and detention. The U.N. estimates over 1 million have been placed in "re-education

centers” across the Alaska-size region—abuses that the U.S. and other nations have labeled genocide. China, however, justifies its stifling security apparatus as battling the “three evils” of “separatism, terrorism and extremism,” heaping blame on the collective rather than individuals.

The 21st century rebooting of concentration camps in Xinjiang province has horrified the world, but it obscures a more insidious campaign rolling out across the world’s most populous nation. China is in the final stage of a covert and until now little-understood crusade to transform people in peripheral regions perceived as “backward” and “deviant” into “loyal,” “patriotic” and “civilized.” “Xinjiang might be the sharp end of the arrow, but there’s a very long shaft that stretches right across China,” says James Leibold, an expert on race and identity in China at Australia’s La Trobe University.

Although Article 4 of the constitution of the People’s Republic of China theoretically guarantees equality for all its 56 ethnic groups, in reality the Chinese Communist Party rules according to a Han Chinese orthodoxy, which claims a direct lineage from the early Yellow River basin tribes and alone defines the national vision. It is this ideology that drives not just the assault on religion in Xinjiang but also the erosion of freedoms in semiautonomous Hong Kong, curbs on local language in Inner Mongolia and the corralling of 2.8 million Tibetans into urban work groups under the guise of “poverty alleviation.”

The goal, according to an official ordinance on the government website for the Xinjiang city of Kashgar, is to “break lineage, break roots, break connections and break origins.”

Across China, minority languages are being purged from schools, workplaces and media, while Mandarin education is universalized. Mandatory birth control and incentivized interethnic marriage dilute the size and concentration of minorities, who are dispatched to faraway provinces for work and education at the same time as

Han settlers are beckoned in. Activists now fear that the project of forced assimilation seen in Xinjiang offers a framework for other regions.

As the CCP turns 100 in July, thoughts are now turning to the party’s vision for China in the next hundred years: which, under Xi, is “a Han male, Beijing-centric definition of what it means to be Chinese,” says Leibold. But just as Xi has said the Soviet Union fell because its leaders were not “man enough to stand up and resist,” his aggressive assimilation policy presents a different challenge to longevity, expunging millennia of art, music and literature in what is arguably history’s most comprehensive cultural genocide, all while turning the world’s No. 2 economy into a pariah republic. “The persecution of other minority groups in China is just like the beginning stage of what the Uighurs went through,” says Jewher Ilham, a Uighur human-rights activist based in Washington, D.C. “I just hope it doesn’t go that far.”

**UNNERVED BY RIOTS** in Tibet in 2008, and Xinjiang a year later, the influential “scholar-officials” who serve as the CCP’s chief ideologues proposed ending the constitutional benefits then enjoyed by minority groups, modeled on those in the former Soviet Union. Instead of so-called

*Uighur men strolling through Kashgar, Xinjiang, in January 2019*



Autonomous Regions where ethnic groups enjoy enshrined rights, they proposed a “melting pot” formula that curtails distinctions by forging a common culture, identity and consciousness.

Soon after Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, violent rebellion once again erupted in Xinjiang, and what is sometimes dubbed the “second-generation ethnic policy” moved from the fringe into the mainstream. China’s strongest leader since Mao Zedong was convinced that only aggressive subjugation could prevent China from following the USSR into balkanization along ethnic seams.

It was shortly after Xi took control that Ilham last saw her father, the Uighur economist Ilham Tohti, inside an interrogation room at Beijing Capital International Airport on Feb. 2, 2013. She was supposed to accompany him on a teaching assignment to Indiana, but at the last moment the Chinese authorities barred his exit. With the words, “Go, go, don’t cry, don’t let them think Uighur girls are weak,” Tohti instructed his then 18-year-old daughter to travel alone to a strange land whose language she didn’t comprehend.

Tohti was universally recognized as a moderate voice whose life’s work was to promote understanding between Uighurs and Han. But in September 2014, he was found guilty of “separatism” and sentenced to life imprisonment. (In 2019, while incarcerated, he was awarded both the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize and Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.) Ilham bristles when the Chinese government claims that it is saving her people from poverty and extremism: “I only see Uighurs dragged into sorrow, disappointment and devastation, in massive pain every day, not knowing if their family members are safe or not, even alive or not.”

Under Xi, “ideological education” has been ramped up across China over the past couple of years, most intensely in areas of historic resistance. It begins early; in 2019, a CCP directive on patriotic

education has been ramped up across China over the past couple of years, most intensely in areas of historic resistance. It begins early; in 2019, a CCP directive on patriotic



education instructed cadres to “start with the babies” to teach “love for the motherland and pride of being Chinese.” Cartoons specifically targeting Mongolian children highlight the importance of national unity and ethnic harmony. In Tibet, toddlers are required to march alongside soldiers in Chinese military uniform. Last year, China’s Education Ministry called for “the infiltration of patriotic education into children’s games and daily activities in preschools.”

At the high school level and above, these programs intensify. A uniform set of textbooks has been unveiled, designed to “strengthen the importance of upholding national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity” by stressing how Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan and the South China Sea are indivisible parts of Chinese territory. Equally key is the universalization of Mandarin Chinese, under the guise of “bilingual education” that will make graduates more competitive. Tens of thousands of Tibetan children have been sent away to residential schools where they are “paired” with Han teachers. On the rare occasions they can see their families, typically two weeks each year, many struggle to communicate in their native tongue.

In Inner Mongolia, the Chinese territory of dunes and prairie approximately

four times the size of Arizona and home to 4 million ethnic Mongolians, Mongolian was the chief language of instruction for ethnic schoolchildren in local schools until September. Since then, however, new directives decreed Mandarin Chinese be used for key subjects, prompting parents to engage in rare public protests. Within hours, photos of demonstrators taken from CCTV cameras began circulating on social media with 1,000-yuan (\$150) rewards for information. Rights groups say 8,000 to 10,000 local people were arrested. “China is trying to get rid of the Mongolian minority within its borders,” says former Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj. “That’s unacceptable.”

Elbegdorj is no anti-China hard-liner. During two presidential terms from 2009 to 2017, he met some 30 times with Xi, who in 2015 hailed bilateral relations as their “best ever.” But China’s toughening ethnic policy has driven Elbegdorj to become one of Xi’s harshest critics in a region where few in power dare speak out. Says Elbegdorj: “I fear Mongolians in China will become the next Uighurs.”

**IT ONLY STARTED** in schools. From Jan. 1, Mongolian content on state media has been replaced with Chinese cultural programs that promote a “strong sense

of Chinese nationality common identity.” The provincial department of education issued a 47-page internal training pamphlet quoting heavily from Xi’s seminal 2014 speech in Xinjiang: “The Chinese cannot separate from national minorities, national minorities cannot separate from the Chinese, and national minorities cannot separate from each other either.” One trainee told the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC) the pamphlet is “the bible to this new cultural genocide movement, equivalent to Mao’s red book to the Cultural Revolution.”

The slogan “Learn Chinese and become a civilized person” captures the state’s contemptuous view of Mongolian culture—now called “Chinese grassland culture.” At Tsagaan Sar, or Mongolian lunar new year, Peking operas and the high-pitched Chinese *suona* horn have replaced Mongolian dances and the horse-head fiddle in televised celebrations. “The goal of this policy is very clear: they want to completely eradicate Mongolian language, culture and identity,” says Enghebatu Togocho, director of the SMHRIC.

For those above school age, work enforces assimilation. Farming and herding communities across Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia are being forced to



# World

settle in new, fixed and thus monitorable communities. The Xinjiang government's 2019 Five-Year Plan includes a "labor transfer program" designed to "provide more employment opportunities for the surplus rural labor force." At least 80,000 Uighurs were removed from Xinjiang between 2017 and 2019, according to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), noting that birth rates in Xinjiang fell by almost half during the same period, the most extreme drop of any global region in the 71 years of U.N. fertility-data collection, including during genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia. In Tibet, 604,000 workers were "transferred" to urban areas during 2020 alone, according to state media. Today, ads on Chinese websites offer factory owners Uighur workers in batches of 50 to 100.

Freedom of religion, long suppressed in China, is now being squeezed to the limit. While Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama has long been reviled by Beijing as a dangerous "splittist," his image was still displayed discreetly. No longer. The portrait of His Holiness that until recently adorned the main prayer hall at the Ganden Sumtseling Monastery has been removed. In its place are dozens of CCTV cameras and a mural urging the Tibetan people to embrace Xi's "China Dream."

Under Tibet party chief Wu Yingjie, there's been a renewed focus on separating "religion from life." Tibetan society is divided into a "grid system" of five to 10 households, each with a nominated representative responsible for political activities forced to keep track of individuals via an integrated electronic system. Cadres are installed in every monastery or religious institution, while "convenience police posts" at road junctions track the populace. Across Tibet, "transformation through education" facilities targeting monks and nuns for "correction" have produced reports of torture and sexual abuse that mirror testimony from the Xinjiang camps. Inmates are forced to denounce the Dalai Lama and learn CCP propaganda by rote in a bid to obliterate memory of a time before party control.

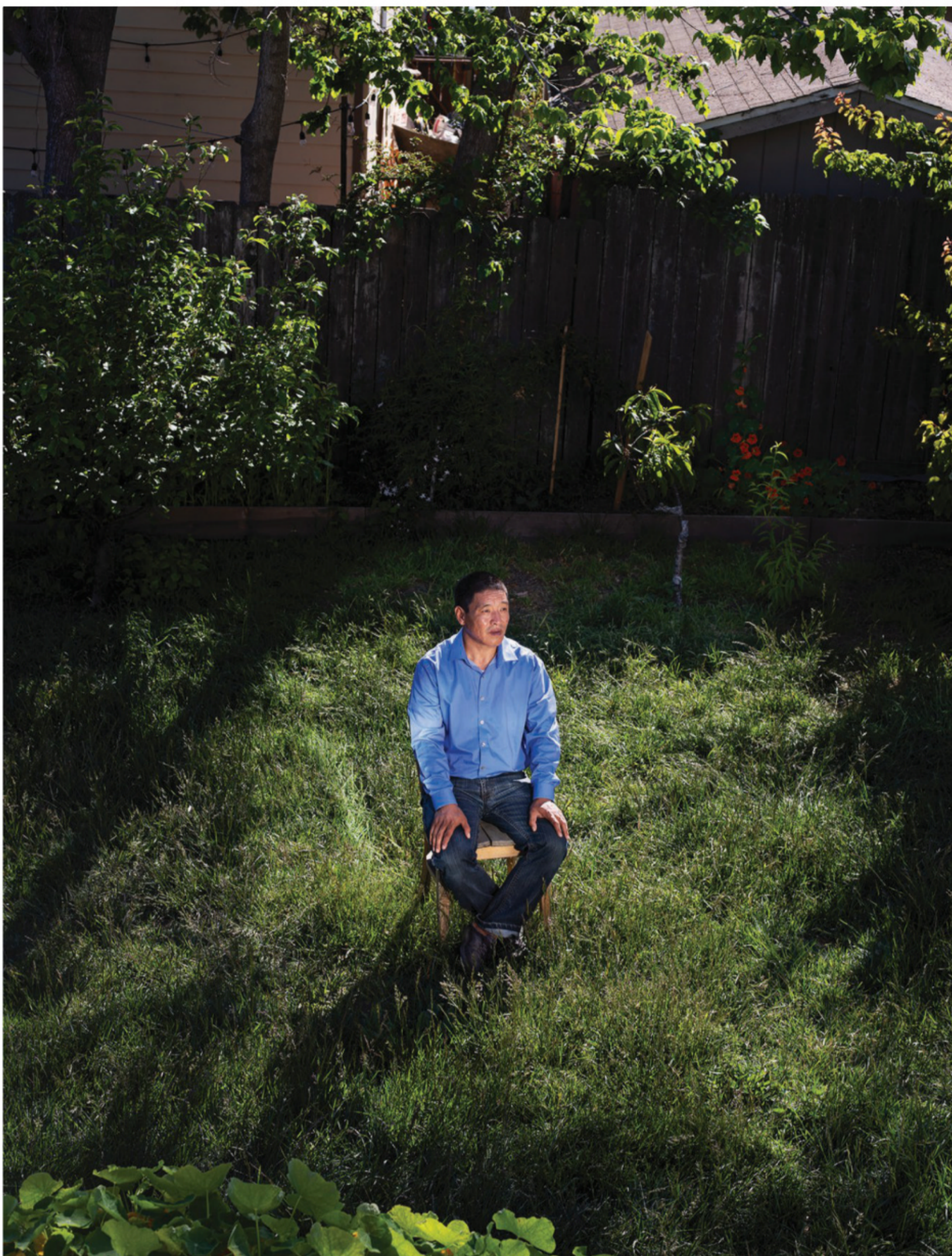
Muslims fare worse. The demolition or "rectification" of mosques and shrines is being ramped up across China, with 16,000 damaged or destroyed in Xinjiang alone, according to the ASPI. Cemeteries have also been bulldozed, leaving bone

fragments protruding from the russet earth. In Linxia, Gansu province, a city once nicknamed Little Mecca, the elaborate dome and minarets of Tiejia mosque were demolished last year for seeming too "Arabic," say locals, and the call to prayer forbidden as a "public nuisance." Although the elderly can still worship, police bar children from entering the mosque. In the Silk Road oasis town of Hotan, the main mosque has been razed and cabbages now grow in its place. "It's a wretched thing," says a passing neighbor.

China insists it is in fact committed to promoting ethnic culture, and says its minorities live better than ever before, with new roads, hospitals and opportunities. But PR is not Beijing's strong suit; in early January, the Chinese embassy in the U.S. tweeted that Uighur women were "baby-making machines" before "emancipation" by CCP policies, prompting Twitter to suspend its account for dehumanizing

content. Anyone who has taken an official trip to a minority region is familiar with the requisite dance performance by awkward locals as smug officials stand by.

March brought the release of a state-produced musical set in Xinjiang (supposedly inspired by the Hollywood movie *La La Land*) portraying a romantic idyll where pretty girls frolic in meadows and accordion-playing heroes stand atop galloping horses. Completely absent is any reference to Islam or a suffocating security leviathan. In Beijing's eyes, minorities must fall into neat stereotypes: Uighurs are entertainers, pickpockets and extremists. Tibetans are ruddy-cheeked religious fanatics. Mongolians are backward *ger*-dwelling nomads. Each, in their own way, are retrograde and requiring correction. And the party is panacea for all. "You cannot just put a few people dancing in front of the camera and say we are preserving their culture," says Ilham.



CAROLYN DRAKE—MAGNUM PHOTOS FOR TIME

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Dhondup Wangchen, who was jailed for six years after making a documentary about Tibet, is today exiled in San Francisco

“They also showed people dancing and playing games in Nazi camps. Does that mean that crimes against humanity did not happen then?”

**FOR A WATCHING WORLD**, the question is how to hold China to account for its transgressions while accommodating another reality: its economy props up much of the world’s (and more so with the pandemic).

Action is only beginning. In March, the U.S., E.U., U.K. and Canada imposed sanctions on Chinese officials for abuses in Xinjiang (and Beijing retaliated in kind). In April, Australia canceled two projects under Xi’s signature Belt and Road Initiative, and Italy is reconsidering its own participation. Growing opposition globally to abuses in Xinjiang and elsewhere have spurred calls to boycott everything from Chinese-manufactured goods to Disney’s remake of *Mulan*. Such moves have elicited petty reprisals from Beijing; after international firms like Nike and H&M took steps to extricate their supply chains from Xinjiang’s cotton market, the latter’s logos were blurred in TV news reports and store locations purged from local map services.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has been asking for access to Xinjiang since 2018. In late February, Beijing said it was discussing a visit, but no plans have been finalized. There is reason for skepticism. The last U.N. rights chief to access Tibet was Mary Robinson in 1998. To date, U.N. experts have at least 19 outstanding visit requests to China. And the pandemic has provided China with a convenient excuse to delay and demur. Hobbled by China’s sway over the world body, democratic nations are finding other ways to act. “The PRC is a totalitarian regime that’s become more internally repressive and more externally aggressive,” says Kevin Andrews, an Australian MP for the center-right Liberal Party and a former Cabinet Minister, who backed a parliamentary motion to condemn China’s abuses in Xinjiang. “Multilateralism has its limitations,” says Andrews, meaning countries are increasingly forming smaller alliances to protest “what’s

probably the most egregious example of human-rights abuses on a systematic basis in the world.” The U.K., Australia and Canada have all recently changed visa rules to make it easier for Hong Kong citizens to claim asylum. Meanwhile, the Mongolian diaspora across Australasia, Japan, Europe and North America are uniting to form a World Mongol Congress, says Elbegdorj, “to protect our historical, cultural heritage and Mongolians as human beings” by offering free online courses.

Although President Donald Trump viewed the relationship with China purely through a competitive lens, his successor, President Joe Biden, has made it clear that China’s treatment of minorities will be a central issue in diplomatic relations. To become a world leader, China must “gain the confidence of other countries,” Biden said in February. “As long as they are engaged in activity that is contrary to basic human rights, it is going to be hard.”

The U.S. Congress has also made its feelings clear, first by passing the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019, which sanctioned Chinese officials and companies believed to be complicit in abuses. Then the bipartisan Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which makes it U.S. policy to assume all Xinjiang goods are tainted with forced labor unless proven otherwise, unanimously passed the House and is currently in the Senate. “The Chinese government and Communist Party continue to enrich themselves at the expense of Uighurs and other ethnic groups,” Republican Senator Marco Rubio, co-sponsor of both bills, tells TIME. “[I] urge fellow democracies to follow suit with similar legislation.”

U.S. allies are certainly feeling emboldened. In May, the G-7 group of leading economies stated it was “deeply concerned” by human-rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong.

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**‘Xinjiang might be the sharp end of the arrow, but the shaft stretches right across China.’**

—James Leibold, La Trobe University

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(China responded by saying it “strongly condemns” any “intervening in China’s internal affairs.”) In June, a final communiqué by leaders of the 30-member NATO alliance said China’s “stated ambitions and assertive behaviour present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order.”

Dhondup Wangchen wants the world to pick a side. In 2007, as Beijing was preparing to host the Olympics for the first time, he picked up his camera and crisscrossed Tibet, emboldened by the government promises to protect human rights and press freedom that helped secure its bid. Wangchen gathered 40 hours of interview footage from 108 Tibetans discussing the upcoming Games, the Dalai Lama, political persecution and Han migration. The 24-minute film he produced, *Leaving Fear Behind*, landed him six years in a squalid prison, where he was “tortured day and night and kept in solitary confinement for over 86 days,” he tells TIME from exile in San Francisco. “China broke every one of its promises.”

Today, Beijing is preparing to host the Olympics once again, further burnishing its image, though this time on its own terms. China no longer makes pledges to respect human rights according to international definitions, and secured the Winter Games without vowing to protect its minorities. Wangchen says any country participating at Beijing 2022 “will further embolden the CCP to commit all kinds of crimes against humanity without any consequences or accountability.”

The disconnect between ideals and reality grows only more stark. In late 2020, a Pew Research report found that majorities in all 14 countries surveyed across Europe, North America and East Asia had a negative view of China. Meanwhile, speaking at a study session for top CCP cadres on May 31, Xi emphasized the importance of presenting the image of a “credible, lovable and respectable China” that wants “nothing but the Chinese people’s well-being.” The irony, of course, is that document after document, testimony after testimony, indicates that the repression is ordered by Xi himself.

“In the camp, guards openly said it was Xi Jinping’s policy,” says Auelkhan. “We had to publicly thank him for everything.” —*With reporting by* MADELINE ROACHE/LONDON □



ILLUSTRATION BY TULA LOTAY FOR TIME



X Culture

# BLACK WIDOW'S REVENGE

A character rooted in sexist origins reclaims the narrative

By **Eliana Dockterman**

BLACK WIDOW SAUNTERED INTO MAINSTREAM consciousness in 2010's *Iron Man 2*. Not walked—sauntered. Natasha Romanoff, the Russian agent turned U.S. spy played by Scarlett Johansson, first meets Tony Stark, a.k.a. Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.) when he's working out in a boxing ring with his employee, played by Jon Favreau, the film's director. Favreau's Happy Hogan condescendingly offers to teach Natasha how to box, so she slips off her high heels, slinks into the ring and immediately kicks the man's butt. That's the joke: Surprise! This unbelievably fit woman can fight.

But it's the moment *after* Natasha handily beats Happy that truly rankled fans. Stark turns to his assistant turned girlfriend Pepper Potts, played by Gwyneth Paltrow. "Who is she?" Tony asks. To which Pepper replies, "Potentially a very expensive sexual-harassment lawsuit, if you keep ogling her like that." Tony, after Googling for photos of Natasha in her underwear, quips, "I want one."

Victoria Alonso, executive vice president of production at Marvel Studios, never liked the line. "It bothered me then and it bothers me now," says Alonso, who was a co-producer of *Iron Man 2*. "I remember thinking, 'She's not a thing.' But how apropos: the world sees a sexy woman and thinks that because she is beautiful, that's all she has to give." The scene feels like a relic of a pre-#MeToo Hollywood.

It was a different Hollywood, and certainly a different Marvel: for 10 years, more white men named Chris headlined Marvel movies than women and actors of color combined. It took 17 movies for the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) to introduce a female

villain (Cate Blanchett in 2017's *Thor: Ragnarok*) and 21 to debut a solo female lead (Brie Larson in 2019's *Captain Marvel*). Now, 11 years after she first appeared onscreen, the MCU's first major female character is finally getting her own movie.

*Black Widow*, due July 9 in theaters and on Disney+ Premier Access, is a repudiation of the character's retrograde origin story. After suffering countless indignities in nine preceding films—written as a seductress, an ogled object, a love interest, a self-described “monster” due to her infertility—*Black Widow* now headlines a movie that grapples directly with the very things that once oppressed her: sexism, objectification, even human trafficking.

Directed by Cate Shortland—the first solo female director of an MCU film—*Black Widow* makes a radical new female-dominated action space suddenly seem possible. It's also a terrific film, a taut and tense spy thriller populated largely by female heroes and villains. Watching it ahead of its release, I found myself fantasizing about woman-led Bond or *Mission: Impossible* movies. There have been efforts at female team-up action films before (*Birds of Prey*, *Terminator: Dark Fate*), but rarely executed this well. Critics agree, praising the well-crafted *Widow* for giving an unsung hero her due.

The character's reinvention owes much to the woman who originated the role. Over the years, Johansson fought to develop her into a fully realized human being. She helped improve Natasha with each film, even though no female screenwriters wrote for the character until now. (*WandaVision* writer Jac Schaeffer gets a story credit on *Black Widow*.) Johansson is also an executive producer on the film. When we spoke in March 2020, just before the pandemic would delay the movie's release by more than a year, she said she'd frequently been asked why it hadn't been made a decade ago. “And I'm like, ‘It couldn't!’ It was a different climate. I wouldn't have been able to have conversations [about sexism] with my director and see it actually translate onscreen.”

Usually characters in the MCU are introduced in a solo film before they join the big Avengers team-ups. So *Black Widow*'s most evolved iteration arrives both late in her story arc and at an odd time: the character died in *Avengers: Endgame*; *Black Widow* is a prequel set before that film. Johansson's first and presumably last solo outing as *Black Widow* feels like a bittersweet tribute to the character that broke ground for the many women Marvel now spotlights. It also marks a new chapter for one of the most successful movie studios, one in which women, at long last, will redefine blockbusters for millions around the world.

**HOLLYWOOD'S INVESTMENT** in female-led action and superhero films is an embarrassingly recent phenomenon. Even in the years after female-fronted adventure flicks like *The Hunger Games* and *Frozen*

broke box office records, Alonso argues that ingrained prejudices stymied the fight for representation in superhero movies. “There was always a myth that women's stories don't sell,” she says. “That superheroes can't be women. We had to demystify a bunch of these myths that were very much a part of what Hollywood was all about.”

These weren't whispered notions. The 2014 Sony email hack contained a leaked missive with the subject line “female movies” sent by then Marvel Entertainment CEO Ike Perlmutter, arguing that such projects were not bankable. The email went viral just as female fans had begun to lobby for a *Black Widow* movie. But she remained a sidekick. “In the beginning she was used as a kind of chess piece for her male counterparts,” says Johansson. But in those dark years before *Wonder Woman* or *Captain Marvel* graced the big screen, feminist fans of genre film clung to her, flaws and all. She was all we had.

When it came to breaking that barrier for women, Warner Bros. beat Disney to the punch, shattering box office records with *Wonder Woman*'s 2017 solo debut directed by Patty Jenkins. The character has a complicated 75-year history; *Wonder Woman* had been a feminist icon, a soldier, a pacifist and a sex symbol. And because the writer of the first *Wonder Woman* comics in the 1940s, William Moulton Marston, snuck in a lot of bondage imagery, the character's power has always been intertwined with her sexuality. The pressure on Jenkins—to satisfy fans hungry for a high-quality female superhero movie, to “stay true” to a comic-book origin that was alternately sexist and revolutionary, and most of all, to strike gold at the box office—was immense. By waiting, Marvel spared itself the particular burden of proving that female superheroes can work.

The studio also had some time to deal with *Black Widow*'s particular baggage. Like *Wonder Woman*, *Black Widow* has a backstory rooted in her sexuality: in her first comics appearance, she tries to seduce Tony Stark and spends much of her early comics runs mooning after Hawkeye. Natasha is just one of many “widows,” female Russian spies trained in the art of combat and (the films heavily imply) seduction. By the time she made her big-screen debut in *Iron Man 2*, she's left that life behind, but she still deploys her sultry stare as a weapon. In her first scene in 2012's *Avengers*, she's tied up in a chair being interrogated by bad guys. She's wearing a revealing dress and playing vulnerable until she breaks character and takes down the henchmen, wrists still bound.

In 2015's *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Natasha begins a romance with Bruce Banner (a.k.a. Mark Ruffalo's Hulk). The story should have offered Johansson a chance to further explore the character's motivations. But the actor notes that the plotline was “again dependent on another man's desire.” It was in this movie that *Black Widow*, in relating to Hulk's

**Up next**  
Female directors with superhero epics on the horizon



**Chloé Zhao**  
Following her Oscar win for *Nomadland*, Zhao will helm *Eternals*



**Nia DaCosta**  
The *Candyman* director will take on the *Captain Marvel* sequel, *The Marvels*



**Olivia Wilde**  
BooksMart's director will make a female-led *Spider-Man* spin-off



insecurity over turning into an actual green beast, described herself as a “monster” because of her forced hysterectomy and inability to bear children. The line outraged fans, who called out director Joss Whedon on Twitter. He left the platform soon after, though he told BuzzFeed that his departure was unrelated to the blowback and that “militant feminists” were always criticizing his work. (Whedon has since been accused of bullying behavior, particularly toward female and BIPOC actors, on sets.)

This treatment of Black Widow was not restricted to the movie scripts themselves. On the press tour for *Avengers 2*, actors Jeremy Renner and Chris Evans, when asked about Black Widow’s romantic history—she had had flirtations with Renner’s character Hawkeye, Downey’s Iron Man, Evans’ Captain America and Ruffalo’s Hulk over the course of a few films—joked that the character was “a slut,” setting off another Internet firestorm about the misogyny directed toward female action heroes on- and off-screen. Both actors later apologized.

Marvel is far from the only franchise reckoning with its past treatment of female characters as it tries to market itself as a hub of inclusive storytelling. After decades of complaints about Bond girls, this year’s Bond film, *No Time to Die*, got a script treatment from outspoken feminist and *Fleabag* creator Phoebe Waller-Bridge. (She has emphasized that she does not believe she was hired because of her gender.) And even as Jenkins created practical costumes for the Amazon warriors in her Wonder Woman movie, the two subsequent versions of the Justice League movie, directed by Zack Snyder and Whedon, respectively, cropped the armor to expose more skin.

Marvel has seemingly become more deliberate in its treatment of female characters. “I think there is a conscientious effort to not objectify women,” says Alonso. Its team-up movies have grown from featuring one woman to several. *Avengers: Infinity War* largely centered on the relationship Gamora (Zoe Saldana) and Nebula (Karen Gillan) had with their genocidal father Thanos (Josh Brolin). Yet female superheroes continue to be outfitted in impractical heels and body-hugging suits. Alonso claims Marvel gets more criticism for objectifying men with “the shirtless scenes” than women. It’s hard to imagine this could be possible, though fair to assume that any flak along those lines has more to do with society’s sexist double standards than with the studio having a worse track record with men than women.

**SHORTLAND HAD NOT SEEN** all the Marvel movies before she signed on to direct *Black Widow*. Typically, she writes backstories for her characters, but she found Black Widow’s back catalog to be insufficient. “She was a character created for the male gaze,” says Shortland. “Initially, even the way she moved, the way she dressed—it was helpful as a stepping-stone. But it wasn’t who she was.” She invented a history for the character beyond the script, which she shared with Johansson, and they discussed what it would have been like for Natasha to grow up in Russia, watching the Soviet Union get dismantled.

*Black Widow* opens with Natasha’s childhood, which could easily slot into a Cold War espionage show like *The Americans*. Her “parents” are Russian sleeper agents living in Ohio, and in the thrilling opening act, the audience meets a different Natasha

**X** Rachel Weisz, Scarlett Johansson and Florence Pugh join forces for a rare female-dominated spy thriller

than the one we've seen before, a vulnerable child rather than a cold-eyed femme fatale. As an adult, she wears combat boots and a leather jacket more than her bodysuit, and both deals and takes the sort of brutal blows that few directors are willing to show in brawling scenes between women. Those gritty scenes are a potent reminder that in the spy genre, women have played arm candy far more than protagonists.

As the rest of the MCU grows increasingly cosmic, Natasha has remained grounded. She has no superpowers, a boon for viewers who have overdosed on special effects. When Natasha and her sister Yelena patch themselves up after a fight, Yelena points out that the "big" Avengers like the space god Thor probably don't need to pop an ibuprofen after battle.

*Black Widow* is driven by the fraught relationship between these sisters. Set after the events of *Captain America: Civil War* when Natasha is a fugitive from the American government, the film finds her seeking to uncover the secrets of her childhood living with the agents masquerading as her family. Florence Pugh plays her younger "sister." Rachel Weisz is the whip-smart matriarch. The only man, a father figure played by David Harbour, generously plays the butt of the jokes as the entitled man the women can send fleeing with their delightfully abundant talk of lady parts.

Perhaps the most surprising twist in the film is the way it deals with the character's infertility. "Victoria [Alonso] and I are both adoptive mothers," says Shortland. "We wanted to talk about the idea that the fact that you do not bear children does not mean that you are less than. We wanted to empower her." Natasha and Yelena have frank conversations about children (or lack thereof), careers and their futures. They even make jokes—improbably funny ones—about their hysterectomies.

**WHEN I FIRST SPOKE** to Johansson in March 2020, it was supposed to be a banner year for female directors. Studios still rarely grant women the chance to helm action epics, but last year was set to see the release of *Black Widow*, *Wonder Woman 1984*, *Mulan* and *Eternals*, all directed by women and predicted to do top-10 business at the box office. The promise of more equitable opportunities was coming to fruition. Instead, the pandemic drove those movies to trickle out in hybrid theatrical-streaming releases or to delay their releases until this year.

Johansson, who has worked on male-dominated action sets her whole career, believes a female director can crucially change the trajectory of a film. She credits Shortland with deeply interrogating her characters' vulnerabilities and motivations. "Those curiosities, I'm not going to say they're only female, but I do think they're inherently female," Johansson says.

**“SHE WAS CREATED FOR THE MALE GAZE, EVEN THE WAY SHE MOVED, THE WAY SHE DRESSED ... BUT IT WASN'T WHO SHE WAS.”**

—CATE SHORTLAND

Increasingly, despite the setbacks of the pandemic, promising female auteurs are getting tapped by the franchise machine. 2019's *Captain Marvel*, co-directed by the female-male team of Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, earned \$1.1 billion. Chloé Zhao's Oscar-winning *Nomadland* hadn't yet debuted when Marvel signed her to direct this year's *Eternals*, starring Angelina Jolie. The studio has also tapped *Candyman* director Nia DaCosta to helm the second Captain Marvel film, *The Marvels*, which will star a cohort of female superheroes. *Booksmart*'s Olivia Wilde will direct a female-fronted Spider-Man spin-off, and Jenkins will return for *Wonder Woman 3*.

Marvel's expansion to TV via Disney+ is also broadening storytelling opportunities for women. The debut of *WandaVision* in January represented a leap forward in female-centric storytelling, as it redeemed the arc of Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen), the 14th-billed cast member in *Avengers: Infinity War*. The character had largely been defined by her lack of control over her powers, a trait that veers into stereotypes about overly emotional women who can't help but destroy everything around them (see also: *Dark Phoenix*, *Game of Thrones*). But the show leaned into an exploration of Wanda's emotions and served up a treatise on grief and mental health.

The studio seems to have decided to transform its shortcomings into strengths. After underutilizing Natalie Portman as Thor's love interest Jane, they're promoting her to the Goddess of Thunder in 2022's *Love and Thunder*. When director Taika Waititi bestowed the hammer on her at 2019's San Diego Comic-Con, she accepted with a smirk that screamed, "It's about time."

Whether motivated by courage or shame, or perhaps a little of both, this willingness to stare down its own checkered past is critical to Marvel's next phase. At one point during *Black Widow*, Yelena ribs Natasha about the infamous pose in which she lands with her legs splayed, gazing up seductively at the camera. It's been around since the Iron Man era, a blatant male fantasy of how a woman would fight.

"I decided to make a point of it," says Shortland. "Her sister says, 'You're a poser. The way you move, it's not real. Who is it for?' We were pointing at it, allowing the audience to be aware of what they had watched before and what they were watching now." Marvel gets to have its cake and eat it too: Johansson still does the pose, after all. But there's an unspoken promise that characters like Pugh's and the ones that will populate upcoming MCU films and shows—like a young female Hawkeye, teen Muslim superhero Ms. Marvel and Iron Man's successor Ironheart—could shed the expectations that burdened *Black Widow* and set a standard of true empowerment. □

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# A Games Like No Other

**58**  
TOKYO'S  
PANDEMIC  
PLAYBOOK

**62**  
NAOMI OSAKA'S  
JOURNEY

**64**  
ALLYSON  
FELIX FINDS  
HER VOICE

**70**  
THE ATHLETES  
TO WATCH

**84**  
SAVING LIVES—  
AND TRAINING  
FOR GOLD

# The Pandemic Games

**TOKYO ATTEMPTS TO  
AVOID OLYMPIC DISASTER**

**BY ALICE PARK**

**T**HE OLYMPICS AND COVID-19 WERE never going to be compatible. The cardinal rule when it comes to controlling an infectious disease is to limit the contact people have with one another. Yet the very essence of the two weeks of competition, which begin on July 23 in Tokyo, is to invite the world to meet, greet and engage in friendly—and often socially not so distant—contests.

An estimated 70,000 athletes, coaches, staff, officials and media will be descending on Tokyo from July to August for the Olympic and Paralympic Games—at a time when infections in the city are beginning to creep up again, after spiking in April and May and declining in early June. New cases of COVID-19 emerging from any of the Olympic visitors could not only disrupt the Games but also forever tarnish this year's Olympics as an exercise in folly amid a global pandemic that has claimed the lives of 4 million people. “The worst thing that would happen is that the Olympics becomes a superspreading event that goes around the world,” says Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, who has advised the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Japanese health officials on COVID-19 countermeasures.

Olympic organizers are working desperately



to prevent that from happening. After consulting with infectious-disease experts from across the globe, Tokyo 2020 officials have created a playbook of guidelines for everyone who will be traveling to Japan for the Olympics. Many of the measures are familiar and proven from the experience of the past year: frequent testing, mask mandates, social-distancing procedures and creating as much of an isolation bubble for Olympic participants as possible.

The strategy is also realistic. While it might not be possible to prevent the virus from infiltrating the Olympic community, the countermeasures are meant to contain it as much as possible. Infections will happen. The challenge lies in minimizing the risk of those infections and the impact they might have—on not just the Games but also the Japanese public and, ultimately, the world at large when Olympic delegations return home. “We have to closely watch how the situation evolves before and during the Games,” says



Hidemasa Nakamura, the Tokyo Olympic official most deeply involved in coordinating and executing COVID-19 safety measures during the Games. “In that sense, I feel that the Olympics and Paralympics are a microcosm of the world.”

**THE 2020 TOKYO GAMES** were delayed a year in the hopes that the COVID-19 pandemic would be under control by now. As the Japanese government and the IOC forge ahead with plans to hold the world’s largest sporting event even as infections simmer globally, anti-Olympics sentiment has reached a peak in Japan—with just 14% of Japanese polled in May saying they wanted the Games to proceed as scheduled. One of the country’s physicians’ organizations, the Japan Doctors Union, and a leading newspaper, *Asahi Shimbun*, argue that the risk is not acceptable. An online campaign called Stop Tokyo Olympics has amassed nearly 450,000 signatures so far from around the country. The pushback goes

▲  
**HOST-CITY PRIDE  
IS TURNING TO  
APPREHENSION AS  
COVID-19 CASES RISE**

beyond the usual reluctance that citizens of host countries typically express before any Olympics. Public anxiety and medical mandates are clashing with economic pressures and political forces in a showdown that, for now, is tipping in favor of the financial and political interests to go ahead with the Games. “Japan’s government has been saying that it is seeking ways to balance the economy and enforcement of COVID-19 countermeasures, but I think its priority has been the economy,” says Kenji Utsunomiya, a former chair of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and the founder of the Stop Tokyo Olympics campaign.

Some public-health officials warn of unknowns that could unravel even the best-laid plans. Fewer than 15% of the Japanese population are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and new variants of the virus, which spread more quickly, threaten to dismantle any sense of immune security that the countermeasures are designed to establish. “The challenge here is this is an international event where people are coming from all over the world, and you obviously can’t bubble the world and keep the virus from spreading,” says Osterholm.

The danger of convening thousands during a pandemic is very real. On July 3, a Serbian rower tested positive when he arrived at the Tokyo airport and was immediately isolated; he and his teammates were prevented from traveling to their training site. A Ugandan coach, among the first Olympic teams to fly in, also tested positive at the airport, on June 19, and was isolated, despite two negative tests within four days of his flight. The rest of his delegation was allowed to quarantine at their Osaka training site where another member tested positive. Such cases will likely occur with increasing frequency as more teams arrive, and only highlight the knife’s edge on which the Olympics will play out. On the one hand, SARS-CoV-2 continues to run rampant around the world and could find fertile ground in the congregation of international visitors. On the other, expected vaccination rates of around 80% for participants and strict countermeasures could rescue the Games by containing cases and preventing them from flaring up into major outbreaks.

Athletes have been warned that their Olympic experience will be like no other—their chances for interacting with athletes from other countries will be severely restricted (condoms, normally a cornerstone of Olympic Village perks, won’t be distributed until athletes are checking out, and alcohol won’t be served in dining halls). They will be required to wear masks except when they are competing or eating; they will be tested daily, and if they test positive, they will be isolated and likely not allowed to compete. They also won’t be able to enjoy one of the hallmark benefits of

being an Olympian: roaming the different venues and sitting in the stands to check out unfamiliar sports or cheer on teammates.

Athletes will also be missing their family support structure. In March, the Tokyo Organising Committee banned international fans, including families of athletes, from attending the Games. And with a month to go before the opening ceremony, officials announced that they would allow domestic spectators at only 50% capacity, with no more than 10,000 at any venue.

**IOC PRESIDENT THOMAS BACH** has promised that the Tokyo Games will be “safe” from COVID-19. But the reality is there can be no truly “safe” Olympics, only a “safer” one. Experts agree there are no zero-risk scenarios. Yet the actual risk—to athletes, Japanese citizens and the rest of the world—has never been properly calculated or communicated. “As far as I know, there is no risk-assessment report or result,” says Hitoshi Oshitani, the virologist who helped devise Japan’s COVID-19 strategy. “So we do not have any concrete material to judge if the risk is acceptable for Japan and for other countries.” He argues that only after such an evaluation can a decision be made about whether it’s safe to hold the Games. Instead, Tokyo Olympics organizers and Japanese health officials have focused on detection and containment to make it harder for the virus to spread among the Olympic community—and if it does, to pick up cases before they spark clusters or even outbreaks that could spill over into the local population.

Any athlete, coach or trainer who tests positive will be immediately placed into isolation in a designated area in the Olympic Village clinic. Patients who develop symptoms and require longer quarantine will move to a hotel dedicated to COVID-19 cases. And for people who need more intensive medical care, up to 30 hospitals across Tokyo stand ready to accept Olympic participants. However, a spokesperson at St. Luke’s International Hospital, which is listed as the medical center assigned to care for the athletes, says while it has been approached to coordinate care, as of late June, “there has been no progress since.”

Some public-health experts say the greatest danger of spread, however, may come from the tens of thousands of Japanese citizens who will be watching the events as spectators. That risk is amplified by the increasing prevalence of the Delta variant—which Japanese health experts predict could account for half of new infections in the country by mid-July—because it’s considerably more contagious and can potentially cause more severe disease than earlier forms of the virus. To minimize that threat, Olympic organizers are

enforcing stricter testing and quarantine requirements for athletes and team staff arriving from more than a dozen countries where the Delta variant is dominant, like India, the U.K. and Malaysia.

While such testing should pick up most cases of COVID-19 quickly, experience from other large sports events over the past year, including the U.S.’s NBA and NFL and the most recent Euro soccer tournament, shows testing won’t be enough. “From a public-health perspective, we are building countermeasures based on things we know work in reducing coronavirus infections,” says Brian McCloskey, who oversaw public-health services for the London 2012 Olympics and who now chairs the expert panel advising the IOC on COVID-19. “Things like social distancing, hand hygiene and wearing masks are things we know make a difference in reducing spread of the virus.”

Still, even with such carefully planned prevention strategies, viruses have a habit of upending the best-laid plans, and SARS-CoV-2 is no exception. “It would be foolish with this virus to discount the possibility of clusters of cases,” says McCloskey. “We learned last year that the virus has a huge capacity to surprise from time to time.” Disruptions in team lineups, and athletes’ ability to compete, could plague the Olympics even if athletes abide by the rules. But Nakamura believes organizers have strong policies in place to minimize such occurrences, noting they have “established rules so that we can trace the virus if a participant gets infected. I believe such regulations play a role in preventing the Games from becoming a superspreader event.”

Convincing the public and the Japanese medical community of that remains one of the organizers’ biggest challenges. Nakamura says the IOC has tried to avoid putting any extra burden on the Tokyo health care system by not sending Olympic participants to local testing centers or clinics. But to do that, the IOC has requested 200 local doctors and 500 nurses to staff Olympic-based sites, which the chairman of a group representing more than 100,000 doctors and dentists in Japan said in May was “almost impossible.” Fewer than 30% of health care workers in Tokyo are vaccinated, meaning they might pass along new infections to their families and communities if they were to get infected through their Olympic work.

It’s no surprise, then, that health care workers aren’t jumping at the chance to volunteer for the Games. One 47-year-old nurse (who asked not to be named) changed her mind about volunteering for the Olympics because of her family’s fears that she might get infected and endanger the health

BY THE NUMBERS



Number of athletes, staff and media traveling to Tokyo for the Olympics



Share of athletes expected to be fully vaccinated



Share of Japanese citizens with at least one vaccine dose



7-day average of new cases daily in Japan, per capita, as of June 30



7-day average of new cases daily globally, per capita

SOURCES: TOKYO 2020, INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE, OUR WORLD IN DATA, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY



of her husband and four children, since she is not vaccinated. She realizes there are good policies in place to control COVID-19, but says people who aren't in the medical field "have an image that the Olympics imposes more risk than daily life." That could explain the recent wave of 10,000 volunteers who also decided not to participate, with many citing COVID-19 worries in local media. While Japanese athletes are vaccinated, in part using shots donated by Pfizer-BioNTech, volunteers have not been offered the same protection.

Such inequity has been a recurring theme in the public perspective of the Olympics—a sense that, driven by economic rather than public-health priorities, the Olympic community arriving from abroad is being favored over Japanese citizens. "The government of Japan should have aimed to have the majority of its people vaccinated at least by the end of March this year if it

**'I FEEL THAT THE OLYMPICS AND PARALYMPICS ARE A MICROCOSM OF THE WORLD.'**

—HIDEMASA NAKAMURA

▲  
NEARLY 450,000  
PEOPLE SIGNED AN  
ONLINE PETITION TO  
CANCEL THE GAMES

sought to be fully prepared to host the Games," says Utsunomiya, citing one reason he started the petition to cancel the Olympics. "Our campaign reflects the voices of people who have been struggling with the pandemic situation. It is only natural that people are not in a mood to welcome the Games and be festive."

Whether those feelings change once the competition begins will largely depend on how well participants comply with the testing protocols and movement restrictions. "No matter how well the playbooks are designed, whether people abide by the rule is a different story," says Dr. Nobuhiko Okabe, who chairs a panel of independent experts that has been advising the Japanese government on ways control COVID-19 during the Games. If they violate those rules, athletes can be fined, pulled from competing or deported. And presumably, even without these punitive measures, athletes are motivated to follow the rules so they don't get infected and jeopardize years of training. That's what Olympic organizers—and the people of Japan—are counting on. But the reality is that no one can predict what will happen during the three weeks the world's attention is trained on Tokyo. "In past history, nobody had an Olympics during a pandemic, so we don't know what will happen," says Oshitani. "That's the big challenge for everyone." —*With reporting by* MAYAKO SHIBATA/TOKYO *and* LESLIE DICKSTEIN □

# Gaining Perspective

A FOUR-TIME GRAND SLAM CHAMP  
ON PUTTING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST

BY NAOMI OSAKA

**L**IFE IS A JOURNEY. In the past few weeks, my journey took an unexpected path but one that has taught me so much and helped me grow. I learned a couple of key lessons.

Lesson one: you can never please everyone. The world is as divided now as I can remember in my short 23 years. Issues that are so obvious to me at face value, like wearing a mask in a pandemic or kneeling to show support for antiracism, are ferociously contested. I mean, wow. So, when I said I needed to miss French Open press conferences to take care of myself mentally, I should have been prepared for what unfolded.

Lesson two was perhaps more enriching. It has become apparent to me that literally everyone either suffers from issues related to their mental health or knows someone who does. The number of messages I received from such a vast cross section of people confirms that. I think we can almost universally agree that each of us is a human being and subject to feelings and emotions.

Perhaps my actions were

confusing to some because there are two slightly different issues at play. In my mind they overlap, and that's why I spoke about them together, but let's separate them for the sake of discussion.

The first is the press. This was never about the press, but rather the traditional format of the press conference. I'll say it again for those at the back: I love the press; I do not love all press conferences.

I have always enjoyed an amazing relationship with the media and have given numerous in-depth, one-on-one interviews. Other than those superstars who have been around much longer than I (Novak, Roger, Rafa, Serena), I'd estimate that I've given more time to the press than many other players over recent years. I always try to answer genuinely and from the heart. I've never been media-trained, so what you see is what you get. The way I see it, the reliance and respect from athlete to press is reciprocal.

However, in my opinion (and I want to say that this is just my opinion and not that of

every tennis player on tour), the press-conference format itself is out of date and in great need of a refresh. I believe that we can make it better, more interesting and more enjoyable for each side. Less subject vs. object; more peer to peer.

Upon reflection, it appears to me that the majority of tennis writers do not agree. For most of them, the traditional press conference is sacred and not to be questioned. One of their main concerns was that I might set a dangerous precedent, but to my knowledge, no one in tennis has missed a press conference since. The intention was never to inspire revolt, but rather to look critically at our workplace and ask if we can do better.

I communicated that I wanted to skip press conferences at Roland Garros to exercise self-care and preservation of my mental health. I stand by that. Athletes are humans. Tennis is our privileged profession, and of course there are commitments off the court that coincide. But I can't imagine another profession where a consistent attendance record (I have missed one press conference in my seven years on tour) would be so harshly scrutinized.

**PERHAPS WE SHOULD** give athletes the right to take a mental break from media scrutiny on a rare occasion without being subject to strict sanctions. In any other line of work, you would be forgiven for taking a personal day here and there, so long as it's not habitual. You wouldn't have to divulge your most personal symptoms to your employer; there would likely be HR measures protecting at least some level of privacy.

In my case, I felt under a great amount of pressure to disclose

**I HAVE HAD  
THE TIME  
TO REFLECT,  
BUT ALSO  
TO LOOK  
FORWARD.  
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NOT BE MORE  
EXCITED  
TO PLAY  
IN TOKYO**



my symptoms—frankly because the press and the tournament did not believe me. I do not wish that on anyone and hope that we can enact measures to protect athletes, especially the fragile ones. I also do not want to have to engage in a scrutiny of my personal medical history ever again. So I ask the press for some level of privacy and empathy next time we meet.

There can be moments for any of us where we are dealing with issues behind the scenes. Each of us as humans is going through something on some level. I have numerous suggestions to offer the tennis hierarchy, but my No. 1 suggestion would be to allow a small number of “sick days” per year where you are excused from your press commitments

▲  
**OSAKA WITHDREW FROM THE FRENCH OPEN TO TEND TO HER MENTAL HEALTH**

without having to disclose your personal reasons. I believe this would bring sport in line with the rest of society.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who supported me. There are too many to name, but I want to start with my family and friends, who have been amazing. There is nothing more important than those relationships. I also want to thank those in the public eye who have supported, encouraged and offered such kind words. Michelle Obama, Michael Phelps, Steph Curry, Novak Djokovic, Meghan Markle, to name a few. Furthermore, I am eternally grateful to all my partners. Although I am not surprised as I purposefully chose brand partners that are liberal, empathetic and progressive, I am still tremendously thankful.

**AFTER TAKING** the past few weeks to recharge and spend time with my loved ones, I have had the time to reflect, but also to look forward. I could not be more excited to play in Tokyo. An Olympic Games itself is special, but to have the opportunity to play in front of the Japanese fans is a dream come true. I hope I can make them proud.

Believe it or not, I am naturally introverted and do not court the spotlight. I always try to push myself to speak up for what I believe to be right, but that often comes at a cost of great anxiety. I feel uncomfortable being the spokesperson or face of athlete mental health as it’s still so new to me and I don’t have all the answers. I do hope that people can relate and understand it’s O.K. to not be O.K., and it’s O.K. to talk about it. There are people who can help, and there is usually light at the end of any tunnel.

Michael Phelps told me that by speaking up I may have saved a life. If that’s true, then it was all worth it. □



40 ATHLETES TO WATCH

# A Champ Finds Her Voice

**MOTHERHOOD COULD HAVE COST ALLYSON FELIX. SHE WOULDN'T LET IT**

BY SEAN GREGORY

PHOTOGRAPH BY DJENEBA ADUAYOM FOR TIME

**A**LLYSON FELIX CAN STILL HEAR THE screams. In late 2018, the six-time Olympic gold medalist was sitting in the neonatal intensive-care unit of a hospital outside Detroit, watching her weeks-old daughter fight for her life. Camryn, born premature at 32 weeks, was hooked up to monitors; an alarm would go off when doctors needed to stimulate her breathing. But as frightening as those alarms were, it's the screaming from a mother in another area of the NICU that still haunts Felix: piercing howls that wouldn't stop. Nurses rushed to close Felix's doors. She still doesn't know what happened to that mother's baby, but she couldn't help but imagine the worst. And this, she thought to herself, could happen to Cammy.

Up to this point, Felix had planned to return to the track and add to her record-setting medal haul. But in that moment, the most decorated American female track-and-field Olympian of all time could not have felt farther from a finish line. "I just remember thinking, I don't know if I'm going to get back," says Felix. "I don't know if I can."

Felix shares this memory from the driver's seat of her Tesla, while crawling up a congested I-405 in Los Angeles in late May. She's en route to a training session for the Tokyo Olympics, which will be the 35-year-old's fifth Games. Camryn, 2, is healthy and starting preschool. But she's still 2,

which meant that the night before, she had fought her usual 8 p.m. bedtime before finally going down at midnight. So a few weeks out from the Olympic trials, Felix is operating on barely four hours of sleep. "I think lately she knows that trials are close or something," says Felix, with a smile. "She's, like, not letting me live."

It's a feeling familiar to any working parent, though the physicality of Felix's job adds a burden foreign to most. But Felix has deftly handled this juggling act to make it back to the Olympics—this time with a larger mission beyond the track.

For almost of all her career, Felix stayed in her lane: she saw it as her job to win medals, and rarely raised her voice on social issues. "You need to make sure you don't say too much. It has to be this pretty, pretty package. That's always been in the back of my head," Felix says. "And that's not real."

Especially after what she went through to have Camryn. During pregnancy, Felix developed preeclampsia, a condition marked by high blood pressure and adverse childbirth outcomes that is more prevalent in African-American women, which contributed to Camryn's dangerous early birth. Though everyone ended up fine, America's vast racial disparities in maternal mortality could well have pointed to a different outcome: a CDC study published in 2019 found that a Black woman with at least a college degree was 5.2 times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than her white counterpart. That year, Felix felt compelled to testify before Congress on the topic. "We need to provide women of color with more support during their pregnancies," Felix told the House Ways and Means Committee. "Research shows that racial bias in our maternal health care system includes things like providers spending less time with Black mothers, underestimating the pain of their Black patients, ignoring symptoms and dismissing complaints."

Felix then took a bigger leap: in a *New York Times* op-ed, she accused Nike, her longtime sponsor and a kingmaker in her sport, of penalizing her and other pregnant athletes in contract negotiations. The move was fraught. Felix risked losing her primary source of income and could have been blacklisted from major meets.

Felix soon left Nike and signed with Athleta, becoming the women-focused apparel brand's first athlete sponsor, paving the way for Simone Biles to make a similar move to Athleta in April. On June 23, Felix announced the founding of her own footwear and apparel brand, Saysh. Far from following corporate expectations, Felix is now taking full agency over her career—and legacy.

With one more medal in Tokyo, Felix—who

▶  
IN TOKYO, FELIX  
COULD BECOME THE  
MOST DECORATED  
FEMALE TRACK-AND-  
FIELD ATHLETE EVER



has already won more world-championship gold medals than any other track-and-field athlete ever—will become the most decorated female track-and-field athlete in Olympic history. And now her influence resonates well beyond her records. Earlier this year, Bianca Williams, a Nike-sponsored sprinter from Britain who had a baby in March 2020, reached out to Felix. After Felix called out the sportswear giant, Nike expanded payment protections for pregnant women and new mothers. “Without her, I wouldn’t be where I am now,” says Williams. “I’m so grateful for her for speaking up, because she has changed a lot of women’s lives.”

**FOR ALL OF HER RECORDS**, individual Olympic glory has been elusive. She was a key part of gold-medal-winning relay teams, but individual events have caused heartbreak. At 18, a year out of high school, Felix ran in her first Olympics, the 2004 Athens Games. She finished second in the 200 m, and sobbed afterward. After another disappointing silver in Beijing in 2008, she finally earned her individual gold in 2012 in London. Rio was set up as a career capstone: Felix would attempt to win golds in both the 200 m and 400 m. But a freak accident before the Olympic trials—she injured her ankle after landing on a medicine ball—derailed those plans. She didn’t qualify in the 200, and in the 400 m in Rio, Shaunae Miller-Uibo of the Bahamas eked a win over Felix by diving across the finish line. While Felix acknowledges Miller-Uibo didn’t violate the rules, she insists she’d never dive. “I wouldn’t want to win that way,” Felix says. “In my opinion, it’s not respectable.”

It was not the note on which Felix wanted to end her Olympic career, so she decided to push on to Tokyo. That’s when life got complicated. Wes Felix—Allyson’s older brother and agent—and Nike began contract renegotiations in September 2017. Nike, says Wes, proposed a 70% pay cut. In June 2018, Allyson told Wes she was pregnant. Fearing that Nike could rescind the offer if it found she was starting a family, Allyson and Wes decided to hide her pregnancy.

The fear was not unfounded. Olympic runner Kara Goucher left Nike in 2014, and has said the company stopped paying her when she got pregnant with her son in 2010. Another former Nike runner, Alysia Montano, claimed the company also told her it would stop paying her when she was pregnant. Nike has said it fulfilled its contractual obligations, which until late 2019 included the right to cut athlete pay for any reason.

As she started to show, Felix would train before dawn so no one could see her working out. She wore baggy clothes. She limited her baby

## ALLYSON FELIX

### SPORT

Track and field

### AGE

35

### COUNTRY

U.S.

### TROPHY CASE

Nine-time Olympic medalist (most-decorated female U.S. track-and-field athlete); 13 career world-championship gold medals

### OLYMPIC APPEARANCES

5

(includes Tokyo)



shower to about 15 people, and told guests not to bring phones. Felix sacrificed all the rituals of a first-time pregnancy out of fear for the financial security of the family she was about to have. “It was super isolating and very lonely,” she says. “I think about that a lot. All of those things that you look forward to, those experiences of embracing that time, I didn’t get to do any of that. I don’t feel like I ever really was pregnant.”

About 10 days after the baby shower, at a routine checkup, Felix told her doctor that her feet had been swelling—unbeknownst to her, a sign of preeclampsia. Felix acknowledges her privileged position, with health insurance and access to excellent care. Still, she says no one told her about the increased risks Black women face during pregnancy. She’s determined to see this changed. “My main focus is on awareness,” says Felix. The U.S., she notes, “is a very dangerous place for a woman of color to give birth. And that shouldn’t be the case.”

The doctor sent Felix to the hospital; she’d have to deliver her baby immediately. On oxygen and being prepped for an emergency C-section, she called Wes in Los Angeles and suggested



he fly out to Michigan, where she was living at the time with her husband Kenneth Ferguson. “Me getting on the plane was not, ‘Oh my gosh, I want to be there for the birth of my niece,’” says Wes. “It was, ‘No, I think we might be going for the death of my sister.’” Wes and his mom rushed to LAX. They held hands the entire flight.

**CAMRYN WAS BORN**, seven weeks premature, on Nov. 28, 2018. She weighed 3 lb. 8 oz., and spent about a month in the NICU before Felix and Ferguson took her home.

Within six weeks, Felix got to work training to qualify for the 2019 world-championship team. She didn’t bounce back as quickly as she had hoped. Because of the C-section, even simple exercises like bringing her knees up to her chest caused pain. Meanwhile, the negotiations with

**‘IT WAS SUPER ISOLATING AND VERY LONELY.’**

—ALLYSON FELIX, DESCRIBING HER PREGNANCY

▲  
FELIX WITH  
DAUGHTER CAMRYN  
AT THE U.S. TRACK-  
AND-FIELD TRIALS

Nike were growing more tense. The company agreed that it would not apply any performance reductions to her pay for a year after her child-birth, but declined her request to add contract language that these protections were tied to maternity. To Felix, the message was clear: Nike did not want to set a precedent of supporting future female athletes who wanted to start families.

“We’re always learning and growing in how to best support our female athletes,” Nike told TIME in a statement. “For example, in 2018 we standardized our approach across all sports to support our female athletes during pregnancy. While the specifics of each situation are unique, the policy waived performance reductions for 12 months.”

Felix felt sickened when, not long after, Wes relayed a Nike request for her to participate in an ad campaign celebrating female empowerment. “My stomach dropped,” says Felix. She couldn’t comprehend the inconsistency: the company wanted to send a public message that women could achieve their dreams in sports, while privately resisting language that could help future female athletes start families during their careers. “I was like, this is just beyond disrespectful and tone-deaf,” she says. That’s when she decided to speak out.

“We regularly have conversations with our athletes regarding the many initiatives we run around the world,” Nike says now. “Nike has supported thousands of female athletes for decades. We have learned and grown in how to best support our female athletes.”)

For Felix, the thought of leaving the company that had sponsored her for nearly a decade was scary. Nike reported revenues of \$44.5 billion in the most recent fiscal year, and the company looms large over track and field. The past four U.S. Olympic trials have been held at the University of Oregon, alma mater of Nike founder and track benefactor Phil Knight. The company also sponsors several major global track meets, so Felix would be risking her income from appearance fees.

“Nike sometimes, they feel like you don’t have another option. So they can get away with stuff like that because, where are you going to go?” Felix says now. “And I think that’s how I was always perceived: ‘She’s never going to say anything. She’s never going to speak out.’” Nike had preached that she was part of a family there. “I was fooled by it,” she says.

Three months after Felix’s op-ed, Nike announced that the company would guarantee athlete pay and bonuses for 18 months around pregnancy. But Felix *had* found another op-

tion: in July 2019, she signed with Athleta, the women-focused apparel brand, which offered full maternity benefits should she decide to have another child. Athleta had never signed an athlete, and the partnership felt like a statement. That September, at the track-and-field world championships in Doha, Qatar, Felix won her 12th and 13th career gold medals—her first as a mother—breaking Usain Bolt’s record for championship golds.

Despite her accomplishments, at times Felix still feels overlooked. At a May workout, a woman spotted Felix holding an Athleta water bottle and approached her. “Do you know who Simone Biles is?” she asked. Um, yeah. “It’s incredible how she left Nike to go to Athleta,” said the woman, having no idea she was talking to the person who had helped make it happen.

Saysh, Felix’s new brand, could help eliminate such confusion. The company, which has raised \$3 million in seed money from investors, sees an opening in the women’s footwear market, which Felix says has been underserved by a “shrink it and pink it” mentality. Too often, Felix says, women’s sneakers are not designed for women’s feet. Saysh is also selling community: at the launch, \$150 gets you a pair of Saysh sneakers and access to content like workout videos and conversations with athletes and advocates.

Few Olympians have struck out on their own to this degree. Felix is now her own footwear sponsor: she will run in a Saysh track spike in Tokyo.

**AS THE PANDEMIC** shut down athletic facilities, Felix resorted to running pretty much anywhere: grassy medians by the beach, the cement around UCLA’s Pauley Pavilion, trails, neighborhood streets. “It was guerrilla-style training,” she says. Her coach, Bobby Kersee, set distances with his measuring wheel. When she could finally access a proper track, she’d quickly get kicked out. During one workout, someone patched up the fence around the track. So Felix—and a group of elderly locals going for their morning walk—was locked in. “That’s when I found out Bobby travels with wire cutters,” says Felix.

**‘THERE ARE REAL-WORLD ISSUES GOING ON, AND IT DOESN’T FEEL IN THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT TO BE CENSORED.’**

—ALLYSON FELIX



▲  
FELIX WON RELAY GOLD IN RIO BUT IS CHASING INDIVIDUAL GOLD IN TOKYO

Balancing unconventional training with starting a company and raising a 2-year-old proved difficult. But Felix made it back to the Games through dark times, with a voice stronger than ever. In years past, for example, she would have been too wary of repercussions to criticize the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for its policy prohibiting acts of protest at the Games. In July, the IOC announced it would allow athletes to demonstrate before competitions, but still not on the medal stand; Felix is not ruling out her own form of protest—and IOC defiance—in Tokyo. “There are real-world issues going on, and it doesn’t feel in the Olympic spirit to be censored,” she says. “I don’t feel like it’s off the table.”

Running can be a solitary pursuit. And Felix has arrived at this moment by standing alone in the biggest fights of her career. But what some see as loneliness can be liberation. “I sat back for too long,” says Felix, reclining on her couch after putting Camryn to bed. “I almost started to believe that maybe I don’t have anything else to offer. I never really showed too much of who I am because people could dissect you, and then they might find this out or that out and not like you. But when you speak your truth, on the other side of that fear is freedom.” —*With reporting* by MARIAH ESPADA/WASHINGTON

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# Food Myths, **DEBUNKED**

When Does  
Food Really  
Expire?

The Wine  
Versus  
Beer Debate

Are Eggs  
Bad for You?



**THE MYTH**

Veggie chips are healthier  
than potato chips

**THE TRUTH**

Only if you crunch the right ones



Trusted wellness advice.

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## Yuto Horigome

SKATEBOARDING, JAPAN

Yuto Horigome wrote in his elementary-school yearbook that his dream was “to become the best skateboarder in the world.” The Tokyo native picked up skateboarding at the age of 6 by accompanying his father to skate parks. Now 22 and ranked second in the world for men’s street skating, he could achieve that goal in spectacular fashion when the sport makes its Olympic debut in his home country.

To get to this point, Horigome had to leave home. He began traveling to the U.S., the hub of competitive skating, for competitions as a teenager in 2014. Just four years later, Horigome became the first Japanese skater to claim a world title, at the Street League Skateboarding tour in London. After graduating high school, Horigome moved to the U.S. and is now based in Los Angeles, where he bought a home with its own skate park.

Horigome’s move across the ocean was driven by both ambition and necessity. Skaters in Japan have long been considered

troublemakers. NO SKATEBOARDING signs are common across city streets, and skaters say they get hassled by security guards or the police for even carrying skateboards around. But the growing popularity of the sport has helped ease the stigma, paving the way for more skate parks and spaces that help nurture the nation’s skating culture. And with the sport on the cusp of Olympic validation, Japanese media has ramped up coverage of competitions, and top skaters now appear on magazine covers and on TV interviews.

Horigome—an innovative skater known for coming up with tricks that no one else has done (a switch backside 180 nose grind fakeie, for instance) and landing difficult spins and slides in competitions—is Japan’s best hope for men’s skating gold. To do it, he’ll have to get by Nyjah Huston, the world’s top-ranked street skater. But Horigome has done it before; in June, he beat Huston for the world championship, denying the American a fourth consecutive title.

Horigome told reporters that the win gave him the confidence to believe he can take skating’s first gold in Tokyo: “I want to achieve something that no one has ever done before.” —*Aria Chen*



## Wilfredo León

VOLLEYBALL, POLAND

Poland was never a volleyball hotbed. But that was before Wilfredo León, the man known as the Cristiano Ronaldo of the sport, arrived in the country and single-handedly turned it into a contender. The 6-ft. 8-in. outside hitter made his debut for the national team of his native Cuba at just 14, and by 17 was its captain—the youngest ever. After fleeing Cuba, León gained Polish citizenship in 2015. He played for Russian and Italian pro teams, becoming one of the world’s highest-paid volleyball players, but he didn’t become eligible to compete for Poland’s national team until 2019. Cuba “will always have a place in my heart,” León said, but “everything I do in this moment” is for Poland. With León on the roster, Poland has been transformed into a medal contender with a shot to win its first Olympic gold in the sport since 1976. —*Madeline Roache*



## Ariarne Titmus

SWIMMING, AUSTRALIA

When Ariarne Titmus swam the second fastest women’s 400-m freestyle in history at the Australian swimming trials in June, observers called it a “warning shot” to U.S. powerhouse Katie Ledecky, who set the world record at the Rio Olympics. Titmus has already shown that she’s capable of beating Ledecky; she won in a stunning upset against the U.S. swimmer in the 400-m freestyle at the 2019 world championships, though Ledecky dropped out of two races at that event because of illness. The rivalry between the Australian and U.S. swim teams, a highlight of the Summer Olympics for decades, will be showcased once again in Tokyo. At the trials, 20-year-old Titmus, nicknamed the Terminator, predicted, “I think the Olympics are not going to be all America’s way.” —*Amy Gunia*



## Alex Morgan

SOCCER, U.S.

If the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team has one last goal to accomplish, it's this: becoming the first women's team to ever win a World Cup and an Olympics, back to back. Alex Morgan, the fifth leading goal scorer in the team's history, will be key to preventing another letdown: past U.S. World Cup victories, in 1999 and 2015, were followed by Olympic disappointment. Morgan's original plan for Tokyo was to play just months after giving birth to her first child, daughter Charlie, in May 2020. With the postponement of the Games, Morgan was able to gradually round into top form for her third Olympics; she scored a goal in a tune-up against France, and was named National Women's Soccer League player of the month in May, after scoring a goal in each of the first four games with the Orlando Pride this season. —Sean Gregory

## Sydney McLaughlin

TRACK AND FIELD, U.S.

The future of U.S. track and field should arrive in Tokyo. In Rio, Sydney McLaughlin, then 16, became the youngest U.S. track-and-field athlete to qualify for the Olympics since 1980. Though she didn't make the finals in her first Olympics, she's been catching up to the 2016 400-m hurdles gold medalist, Dalilah Muhammad, ever since.

At the 2019 world championships in Doha, Qatar, McLaughlin finished a close second to fellow American Muhammad, who set a world-record time, 52.16 sec., to win. At the U.S. track-and-field trials this June, McLaughlin shattered that record, running a scorching 51.9 sec. Expect more records to fall when McLaughlin and Muhammad meet in Tokyo. The showdown should be appointment viewing: the final is on Aug. 4. —S.G.



## Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo

BADMINTON, INDONESIA

Badminton is the only sport in which Indonesia has won an Olympic gold, and the game is as popular there as soccer or basketball is in other parts of the world. Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo, the world's top-ranked doubles player with his partner, Marcus Fernaldi Gideon, is the latest star to carry the hopes of his badminton-mad nation. The pair, affectionately known as "the minions" because of their shorter statures and hyperactive playing style, have maintained their top ranking despite setbacks this year. In January, they were forced to withdraw from three international tournaments after Sukamuljo contracted COVID-19. In March, the team had to pull out of the All England Open after a passenger on their flight tested positive for the virus. That should be a distant memory in Tokyo, where the minions are poised to add to Indonesia's badminton glory. —M.R.



## Sunisa Lee

GYMNASTICS, U.S.

No female gymnast has a more difficult uneven-bars routine, but you wouldn't know it from the way Sunisa Lee swings through it. The calm, elegant flow of the 18-year-old from St. Paul, Minn., comes from an inner strength that makes the most dangerous skills look easy. Lee's fortitude was tested in a different way in 2019, when days before she left for the U.S. national championships, her father fell while helping a friend trim a tree; he remains partially paralyzed. He underwent surgery while Lee competed, but she still managed to earn silver behind Simone Biles. That strength will be tested again as she competes in her first Olympic Games—as the first Hmong American to make the U.S. team—separated again from her close-knit family, this time by the pandemic. —Alice Park

### NEW SPORTS



## SURFING

With the inaugural class of Olympic surfers set to catch swells at Tsurigasaki Beach on Japan's Pacific coast, competitors will be at the mercy of the elements. In an effort to maximize wave quality, four days of competition will be held over a 16-day window. A total of 20 male and 20 female shortboarders will attempt daring flips and spins over multiple rounds of heats; they'll be individually judged on their top two waves.



## SPORT CLIMBING

The first climbing gold will go to the male and female climber with the lowest combined score in three different disciplines. The decision to combine speed climbing, bouldering and lead climbing—which require distinct skills and are often competed separately—has been a source of controversy in the sport. Five-time Czech world champion Adam Ondra said "anything would be better" than this format. —Megan McCluskey





## Masahiro Tanaka

BASEBALL, JAPAN

The host country's baseball dreams may hinge on ace pitcher Masahiro Tanaka, who returned to Japan's Pacific League this season after a seven-year stint with the New York Yankees. Tanaka will be among the top stars in Tokyo since Major League Baseball would not let active players compete. The last time baseball was in the Olympics, in 2008, Tanaka also represented Japan; that team lost to the U.S. in the bronze-medal game. "I had a bitter feeling when I played in the Beijing Olympics," Tanaka said. "This time I want to win a gold medal." These Games will be particularly meaningful to the home team, which has a rich baseball history. On July 28, Japan will play in Fukushima, site of the 2011 nuclear accident that followed the earthquake and tsunami that killed some 20,000 people. —S.G.



## Katie Ledecky

SWIMMING, U.S.

Few swimmers will be busier in the Tokyo pool than Katie Ledecky, who is scheduled to swim four freestyle events, including the 1,500 m, which is new to the women's Olympic program and, even at Ledecky's breakneck pace, takes around 15 minutes to complete. On day five of the swimming competition in Tokyo, the 24-year-old will swim both the 200-m and 1,500-m freestyle finals in the same two-and-a-half-hour session. "I would point out that men do not have that double," she has said. Will it faze her? Probably not. Ledecky—who missed her graduation from Stanford University because she was competing at the Olympic trials in June, holds three world records and has won five Olympic golds since her debut in London in 2012—has a habit of putting herself half a body length or more ahead of her nearest rivals. —Alice Park



## Carissa Moore

SURFING, U.S.

These are heady times in competitive surfing. Long considered an outsider's sport, it requires intense athleticism and highly technical skills that will be on display for the whole world when surfing makes its Olympic debut in Tokyo. Carissa Moore, a native Hawaiian and four-time World Surf League (WSL) champion, is the favorite to take home that first gold.

That's because Moore's arsenal of highlight-reel aerials—twists, grabs, turns and other maneuvers performed above the cresting wave—is unparalleled. During an event in Australia in April, Moore completed the biggest one of her dominant career: her board rose over the wave as she twisted it and grabbed it with her left hand before landing cleanly in the water. The air reverse earned her a score of 9.9 out of 10. She clutched her head, with both hands, in disbelief. "It was so rad because I didn't think about it," Moore says. "It just happened."

"She's someone who's broken the barriers of what is possible to do on a wave," says Jessi Miley-Dyer, a former pro surfer who now oversees competition for the WSL. "That's the benchmark right now for modern surfing. It's so important."

The sport has also been a leader in equal pay for women and men, an elusive goal for so many Olympic athletes. In September 2018, the WSL announced it would offer the same prize money to women and men on tour. That's a big jump from Moore's rookie year, in 2010, when the men's world champion earned a \$100,000 bonus and the women's champ took home \$30,000. Both the men's and women's winners of the 2021 WSL finals will receive \$200,000. "For me, the fight was in the water," Moore tells TIME. "I was trying to prove that we deserved to be on that level."

After the WSL canceled its 2020 season because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Moore, 28, has returned to the top of the rankings this year, thanks to four strong performances at events in Australia in April and May. "The best way to warm up for the Olympics," she says, "is to make sure all the competitive juices are flowing."

In Tokyo, rivals like Australia's Stephanie Gilmore, a seven-time WSL champ, and 19-year-old American upstart Caroline Marks will challenge Moore for the sport's first gold in Chiba, Japan, site of the Olympic surfing beach.

"I know we're going to bring our best and really put on a good show," says Moore. "I hope for all those little girls that are watching and dreaming, it really inspires them to go big."

—Sean Gregory



MOORE: CALI MIERS—WORLD SURF LEAGUE/GETTY IMAGES; RINER: XAVIER LAINE—GETTY IMAGES; NAGORNY: MATTHIAS HANGST—GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOTS: GETTY IMAGES (5)

## Teddy Riner

JUDO, FRANCE

“Give Teddy Riner—One of Sport’s Most Dominant Athletes—the Global Olympic Stardom He Deserves,” screams a recent headline in Eurosport. Indeed, Riner has ruled judo in a way few athletes have in any sport. Before losing a match in February 2020, right before the pandemic shutdown, Riner hadn’t lost in nearly a decade—winning 154 straight bouts—while picking up two Olympic gold medals and six world championships along the way. The 6-ft. 8-in., 300-plus-lb. judoka known as Big Ted returned to the top of the podium at the World Masters in Doha, Qatar, in January. An Olympic gold in Tokyo would be his third straight. —S.G.



## Laurel Hubbard

WEIGHT LIFTING, NEW ZEALAND

Laurel Hubbard is set to make history in Tokyo. The 43-year-old weight lifter, who will compete for New Zealand in the women’s over-87-kg category, will be the first openly transgender athlete in the modern Olympics—a milestone that has thrust the private athlete into a spotlight she did not seek. Hubbard meets all the criteria the IOC has put in place for trans athletes since 2015, including testosterone limits for trans women. Although she suffered a potentially career-ending injury in 2018, she returned to competition and currently ranks 15th in the world in her division. “I was advised that my sporting career had likely reached its end,” Hubbard said in a statement when she was named to the team. “But your support, your encouragement, and your *aroha* carried me through the darkness.” —*Madeleine Carlisle*



## Nikita Nagornyy

GYMNASTICS, RUSSIAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

While the Japanese and Chinese men have dominated gymnastics in recent Olympic cycles, Nikita Nagornyy is at the fore of a resurgent Russia eager to reclaim bragging rights. At the 2021 European Artistic Gymnastics Championships in April, Nagornyy became the first gymnast to perform a triple back pike somersault, in his floor exercise routine, setting a bar for the men’s all-around competition that few are likely to reach. Popular on social media, where he chronicles his training and daily exploits, in Tokyo the 24-year-old is not just eyeing the individual all-around title, but hoping that he and his neutral Russian Olympic Committee teammates will be able to clinch the first team gold for Russian athletes since 1996. —A.P.



## Helen Glover

ROWING, BRITAIN

Had the Olympics happened in 2020 as planned, Helen Glover would not have been there. Her twins were born in January of that year, and the idea of adding a third gold medal to the ones she won in London 2012 and Rio 2016 seemed impossible. One of the most decorated athletes in the history of women’s rowing assumed she’d be watching the Tokyo Games on TV. But during lockdown, Glover began working out on a rowing machine and watched her numbers improve, even as she parented three children under the age of 3. She resumed training in earnest and in April won the European women’s pair title alongside her racing partner Polly Swann. (Glover’s two previous gold medals were won with the since retired Heather Stanning.) Now Glover, 35, will be the first British rower to compete at the Games after having children. And a third gold is well within reach. —*Dan Stewart*



## Hend Zaza

TABLE TENNIS, SYRIA

Just 12 years old, Hend Zaza is set to be the youngest athlete to compete in Tokyo—and one of the youngest to ever qualify for the Games—a feat that’s possible because table tennis, unlike some Olympic sports, has no age restrictions. The young Syrian bested a 42-year-old opponent in last year’s Western Asia Olympic Qualification tournament to make it to the the Games from a 155th-place ranking. Her appearance in Tokyo will also mark a milestone for her country: Syria has never entered a table-tennis player in the Games through qualification. Zaza is little-known at the sport’s elite level, which is dominated by players from China, South Korea, Japan and Germany. Her coach has said that because of the civil war that has ravaged the country for more than a decade, Zaza has been unable to enter many tournaments. While her odds of advancing in Tokyo are slim, her presence alone is a triumph. —*Raisa Bruner*

# On Point For America

**LEADING BY EXAMPLE, SUE BIRD  
CHASES A HISTORIC FIFTH GOLD**

**BY SEAN GREGORY**

**PHOTOGRAPH BY PAOLA KUDACKI FOR TIME**

**F**OR SUE BIRD'S FIRST OLYMPICS, IN 2004 in Athens, the team stayed on the *Queen Mary 2* cruise ship. Early WNBA stars like Dawn Staley, Sheryl Swoopes and Lisa Leslie led the squad, and a few of the younger players, including Bird, were quite fond of a nightclub on the ship, G32. "They partied every single night," says Staley. "It should have been called the 'Sue Bird Nightclub.'"

Once the quarterfinals hit, Staley told the players to cool it. "It would have been the easiest thing to say, 'Oh, old lady, you don't know what you're talking about,'" says Staley. Instead, Bird took the request as a leadership lesson: speak up when it matters. After the U.S. won the gold, the players started chanting "G32" on the podium. The whole team partied hard that night.

Seventeen years later, Bird, 40, has assumed the role of wizened veteran, both on and off the court. Now the WNBA's all-time assists leader, Bird will bring her extraordinary floor vision to the Tokyo Olympics, where she and teammate Diana Taurasi hope to become the first basketball players to win five Olympic gold medals. Former teammate Staley is now their coach.

The (likely) last Olympics of Bird's storied career comes as the larger world has finally begun to appreciate her greatness. Days after

the Seattle Storm clinched its fourth title last October, for example, Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson wore a Bird jersey before a prime-time game. "I feel like Sue Bird in the clutch," he said after leading his team to a comeback victory. He wasn't the only one paying tribute. In 2020, Bird led the WNBA in jersey sales for the first time in her career.

**BIRD, WHO GREW UP** on New York's Long Island and won two NCAA titles at the University of Connecticut, loves to geek out on her craft, but she knows as well as anyone that women's basketball and the WNBA have always had to fight for more than wins: acceptance from fans predisposed to dismiss women's sports, better pay and benefits, and equity for the league's many players of color and those who identify as LGBTQ. "We never got the chance to shut up and dribble," Bird says of the WNBA. "So that's when we kind of developed this backbone about us."

Their commitment to social change deepened last summer amid a national reckoning about race and as part of a broader wave of athlete advocacy. Despite warnings that fans would be turned off by the activism, ratings for ESPN's first five games of the current WNBA season were up 74% over the 2020 season average. The Olympics have consistently raised the profile of women's basketball in the U.S., and Bird's record-breaking quest in Tokyo should help build even more momentum.

Bird considers herself naturally shy. She credits her fiancée, soccer icon Megan Rapinoe, with helping amplify her voice. (The pair first hit it off at the 2016 Rio Olympics.) Though Bird never hid her sexuality from family and friends, Rapinoe persuaded her, in 2017, to publicly reveal that she was gay. "What Megan helped me understand was that, yes, what I was already doing was great, living authentically," says Bird. "But it was important to say it, because the more people that come out, that's where you get to the point where nobody has to come out. Where you can just live. And it's not a story."

The experience helped Bird get comfortable shining her spotlight off the court. In 2020, Bird was a vocal ally for the league's players—80% of whom are people of color—but she also led by listening. "The biggest thing that she did was, she just took a backseat and learned a lot of stuff about African Americans and what we go through and our history and things she wasn't necessarily educated in," says Jewell Loyd, Bird's Storm teammate, who will make her Olympic debut in Tokyo. "A lot of people don't want to always do that. But she did."

After Kelly Loeffler, then a U.S. Senator and

▶  
**AT 40, BIRD—STILL  
ONE OF THE WNBA'S  
BEST PASSERS AND  
SHOOTERS—SHOWS  
FEW SIGNS OF SLOWING**



**BIRD AND OTHER WNBA PLAYERS HAVE BEEN LEADERS IN THE SPORTS ACTIVISM MOVEMENT**

co-owner of the Atlanta Dream, criticized the WNBA for supporting Black Lives Matter, Bird suggested that players wear VOTE WARNOCK T-shirts in support of Loeffler's opponent Raphael Warnock, who ultimately won the Georgia election and helped flip the Senate to the Democrats. The WNBA players also took a stand when Jacob Blake was shot in Kenosha, Wis., and the Milwaukee Bucks refused to take the court. In a scene in the recent ESPN documentary *144*, a WNBA player asks union leaders what the league would do if the NBA canceled its season. Bird raises her hand to respond. "It is important to understand that we are not them; they are not us," she said. "If we had canceled our season, do you think they would have?" The WNBA held a vigil in Blake's honor and took a two-day pause. "I just wanted to challenge, especially younger players, to really view themselves as their own entity. And their own league," Bird says now.

Not that she doesn't see the double standards. Bird is quick to note that while men have been head coaches in the WNBA, the NBA has never hired a woman to lead a team. Former WNBA star Becky Hammon, who has spent seven seasons as an assistant coach for the San Antonio Spurs, has again been passed over so far this hiring cycle. "If you took away her name and you took somebody else's résumé, and you put them next to each other, you would see how qualified she is," Bird says. "You would be shocked she hasn't gotten a job already."

**THESE ARE BOOM TIMES** for older athletes—especially those at the top of their sport: Tom Brady won a seventh Super Bowl at 43; Phil Mickelson became the oldest golfer to win a major championship, at 50. At 35, Allyson Felix made a fifth U.S. Olympic team; at 39, Serena Williams is still a threat to win majors. Is it rare talent, smarter training, insatiable drive? Yes, yes and yes. "Maybe 50 will be the new 40," Bird says, not wholly implausibly. But she's realistic about how many more seasons she can race up and down a 94-ft. court against people half her age. "Where I am now, I don't know that I'm going to want to do this for 10 more years," she says.

Sometimes it hits her just how long she's been playing. Bird recently learned that she's the same age as a teammate's mom. "I knew, with this draft class, I'm approaching 'I could be their mom,'" Bird jokes. "And not in like an 'Oops,



**SUE BIRD**

**SPORT**  
Basketball

**AGE**  
40

**COUNTRY**  
U.S.

**TROPHY CASE**  
All-time WNBA assists leader; four-time WNBA champion; 11-time WNBA All-Star; four-time Olympic gold medalist; four-time FIBA World Cup winner

**OLYMPIC APPEARANCES**  
5  
(includes Tokyo)

I got pregnant when I was super young' way, but in an 'I got married and planned my family' way."

Bird is not ready to think about what's next, but others have begun talking about her place in history. "She's a life point guard," says Staley, the Olympic teammate turned coach. "She gives assists to justice causes; she gives a voice to women who are underpaid and underappreciated. She's unapologetic and unafraid. Once a point guard, always a point guard. That's her legacy."

Bird will look to build on that in Tokyo. The U.S. women carry a 49-game winning streak into the Olympics; the team has won the last six gold medals and hasn't lost since 1992. But the rest of the world is getting better—and the bull's-eye on the back of Team USA is getting bigger. Over the past two decades, Spain, now ranked third in the world, has emerged as a legitimate challenger; second-ranked Australia has medaled in five of the past six Games. And because of the demands of the WNBA season, the U.S. team—whose roster is pulled entirely from the league—has less time to practice together than other nations.

"We're going to have to put it together quick, and it's not comfortable," says Bird. "And yet you're never going to know by the way we play. We're going to make it look easy. And it's not easy."

—With reporting by ALEJANDRO DE LA GARZA

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NEW SPORTS



## SKATEBOARDING

Some worry skateboarding's Olympic arrival, like snowboarding's before it, marks a break from its counterculture roots. But that won't stop 80 of the world's best skaters from vying for gold in two disciplines: street and park. Gravity-defying tricks will rule the hollowed-out bowl design of the park, while street riders will navigate a circuit resembling a city roadway, with rails, steps and benches to grind and slide on.



## KARATE

The Japanese martial art was approved for Tokyo, thanks to a rule change that allows host nations to propose additional sports for inclusion in their Games. For the kata, or form, portion of the competition, 20 competitors will demonstrate movements against a virtual enemy. Another 60 karatekas will go head to head in kumite, three-minute sparring bouts in which athletes attempt to land a series of precise blows on their opponent's body. —Megan McCluskey



## Shaunae Miller-Uibo

TRACK AND FIELD, BAHAMAS

Shaunae Miller-Uibo is the defending Olympic champion in the 400 m, winning gold in Rio in controversial fashion by diving across the finish line to edge out Allyson Felix. The dramatic moment became something of a Rorschach test: Did Miller-Uibo violate unwritten codes of sportsmanship or simply do whatever it took to win legally? The 27-year-old sprinter, who carried her country's flag in 2016, not surprisingly takes the latter view. "I had a lot of people who came to me and they said, 'After we saw what you did ... it made me dive into my dreams and go after them even harder,'" Miller-Uibo recently told the Olympic Channel. Miller-Uibo could run both the 200 m and 400 m in Tokyo, but she's said she'll focus on the 200 m, in which she holds the Bahamian record, as the schedule makes pursuing the double difficult. "Yes, it would have been great to defend my title," says Miller-Uibo. "But at the same time, I wanted a new title as well." —Sean Gregory



## Gwen Berry

TRACK AND FIELD, U.S.

Gwen Berry refuses to shut up and throw the hammer. When Berry raised a fist on the medal podium during "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the 2019 Pan Am Games, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee put her on a 12-month probation. It later apologized, but she's said she lost sponsors, and 80% of her income, in the aftermath. At the trials on June 26, where she qualified for her second consecutive Olympics, Berry turned away from the U.S. flag during the national anthem. The anthem had been played only once a night, and on that night it was while Berry was on the podium for placing third in the hammer throw. "I feel like it was a setup, and they did it on purpose," Berry said. "I was pissed, to be honest." The IOC has said that athletes can protest at the Games before events but not on the medals stand. Berry isn't backing down. "When I get there," she says, "I'll figure out something to do." —S.G.

## Janja Garnbret

SPORT CLIMBING, SLOVENIA

Janja Garnbret grew up scrambling over furniture and up trees and hasn't stopped since. The 22-year-old is widely recognized as the top woman in climbing and her country's best hope for a gold medal in Tokyo. She's racked up a whopping 46 World Cup podium finishes as well as world championship titles in bouldering and lead climbing—two of the three disciplines that will make up the competition in the sport's Olympic debut. The third, speed climbing, is her weakest event but one she's worked to improve over the past year. With its daring jumps and superhero-like moves, climbing is poised to be a breakout hit of these Games—and Garnbret an emerging star. It's a burden she happily shoulders. "I have a responsibility to show the sport to the world and to set a good example," Garnbret told TIME earlier this year. "I'm going there to enjoy it, because I know if I enjoy it, everything will be O.K." —Raisa Bruner





## Simone Biles

GYMNASTICS, U.S.

When the greatest gymnast of all time got the notice in March that every aspiring Olympian was dreading—that the Games were postponed by a year—it hit hard.

“I was angry, I was annoyed, I was sad,” says Simone Biles, the reigning Olympic all-around gymnastics champion. “I had to let myself feel all the emotions. I 100% felt like I didn’t plan this—now we have to go back to the drawing board and deal with a lot of variables. But at the end of the day, this is bigger than me. We have to make sure that everybody in the world is safe.”

Still, she adds, “it did suck.”

Zoom workouts with her coaches and teammates, walks with her dogs, and alternating fits of housecleaning with Netflix binges got her through the two months her gym was under lockdown. When she was allowed back in for modified workouts, her new coaches, Cecile and Laurent Landi, focused on the fundamentals to make the already unrivaled Biles even better.

Undefeated in the all-around competition in women’s gymnastics since 2013, Biles will essentially be competing against herself in Tokyo. Her signature skills, which test the limits of

human ability—and gravity—collect enough difficulty points that she’s often far ahead of her closest competitor. Indeed, for all but a handful of rivals, the competition is essentially over before it begins.

Biles is planning to make history in Tokyo as the first female gymnast to perform a dangerously difficult vault that only men have pulled off at the Games so far. That’s on top of the beam dismount named after her that’s so risky, the International Gymnastics Federation didn’t reward it with a high difficulty value to discourage other gymnasts from trying it and potentially injuring themselves, along with two gravity-defying tumbling skills that have become hallmarks of her floor routine. The Landis say Biles is not chasing medals, only testing herself to see how far she—and gymnastics—can go.

While Biles’ close-knit family won’t be in Tokyo to cheer her on because of COVID-19 restrictions, they and the dozens of young gymnasts who train with her at the gym her parents own in Spring, Texas, are planning a sleepover and watch party like none other on her competition days. Several hundred people will gather at the gym for food, festivities and a livestream of the action in Tokyo. “We’ll have a huge screen and have a live feed; it’s going to be awesome,” says her mom Nellie. The show should be amazing to watch—even without much suspense. —Alice Park



## Hannah Roberts

BMX, U.S.

BMX racing has been a part of the Summer Olympics since 2008, but the sport’s freestyle competition will debut in Tokyo. The current reigning women’s champion in the event, Hannah Roberts is the first woman to land a 360 tailwhip in competition, and won all three World Cup events in 2019 and 2020. She began biking as a 9-year-old in Michigan—and early into her training, she fractured a vertebra. After recovering, she entered her first competition. Now 19, Roberts is just as confident as an advocate for pay equity in the sport, calling out disparities in prize money and sponsorship opportunities. It’s an issue she’s hopeful the Olympics—where Roberts is the favorite for gold—will help remedy. —R.B.



## Caeleb Dressel

SWIMMING, U.S.

There’s no missing Caeleb Dressel on the pool deck. Blanketing his left arm is a sleeve of ink that captures the qualities that make the 24-year-old Floridian the swimmer to watch in multiple events in Tokyo. Beginning on his shoulder, an eagle with outstretched wings floats atop a growling bear, which sits above a tooth-baring gator (an homage to his alma mater, the University of Florida). Dressel calls them his “spirit animals,” from which he channels the power, ferocity and speed that drove him to a history-making eight medals at the 2019 world championships (that’s one more than Phelps’ record at the event). The world-record holder in the 100-m butterfly has a shot at seven medals in Tokyo. —A.P.

## April Ross

BEACH VOLLEYBALL, U.S.

All that's left for April Ross is gold. Ross won a silver medal at the London Olympics, playing with Jennifer Kessy, and in Rio she won bronze with Kerri Walsh Jennings, the three-time gold medalist. This cycle, Ross and Walsh Jennings split up; Ross, now 39, teamed with Alix Klineman, a convert from indoor volleyball. (Walsh Jennings failed to qualify for her sixth Olympics.) The pair spent the pandemic training together and won their first tournament of 2021, in Doha, Qatar. Ross, who also played indoor volleyball in college—at USC, where she won two national titles—and professionally before swapping sneakers for sand, says she's inspired to keep going by her mother Margie, who died of breast cancer when Ross was 19; she visualizes herself, daily, at the top of the podium in Tokyo, her mom looking down on her smiling. "It makes me emotional," says Ross. "So hopefully that's the driving force."

—Sean Gregory



## Yukiko Ueno

SOFTBALL, JAPAN

After softball was dropped from the 2012 and 2016 Games, Japan insisted it return for Tokyo. Little wonder why, with a pitcher like Yukiko Ueno waiting in the wings. The veteran right-hander throws one of the fastest pitches in the world—up to 80 m.p.h.—and has a history of big wins in the Olympics. At Athens in 2004, Ueno pitched a perfect game over seven innings—the only one in Olympic history. At the 2008 Beijing Games, she threw 413 pitches in two days while leading Japan to gold. Her performance was such a sensation that *Ueno's 413 pitches* was named one of Japan's top buzzwords of the year. At 38, she has one more chance to exhibit her extraordinary dominance on the world stage again—this time on home ground. —Aria Chen



## Katinka Hosszu

SWIMMING, HUNGARY

A veteran racer at 32, Katinka Hosszu holds the world records in the 200-m and 400-m individual medley events, which require swimmers to master all four strokes—butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle—and dominated her competition in those events at the 2019 world championships. Tokyo will be her fifth Olympics—and her first since splitting with two different coaches, one of whom is her ex-husband. This time, Hosszu decided to train herself. "As a woman, it is sometimes a bit different than [it is] for male athletes," she told *Sports Illustrated*. "Sometimes the coaches get more credit than the athletes." That's not a surprise coming from the outspoken Hungarian, who earned the nickname Iron Lady for her notorious stamina racing in a seemingly inhuman number of events. —Alice Park



## Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce

TRACK AND FIELD, JAMAICA

Until further notice, 34-year-old Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce is the fastest woman alive. On June 5, the two-time Olympic gold medalist in the 100 m ran the second quickest time in history, 10.63 sec. Only Florence Griffith Joyner, who set the world record with a 10.49 in 1988, has run faster. In 2017, after Fraser-Pryce won bronze in the 100 m in Rio, she gave birth to her son Zyon (which earned her a fitting nickname: Mommy Rocket). She returned to the track to win gold at the world championships in 2019 and is now the woman to beat in the marquee sprint event in Tokyo. A win would make her the first woman to win three 100-m golds and the oldest woman to pull off the feat.

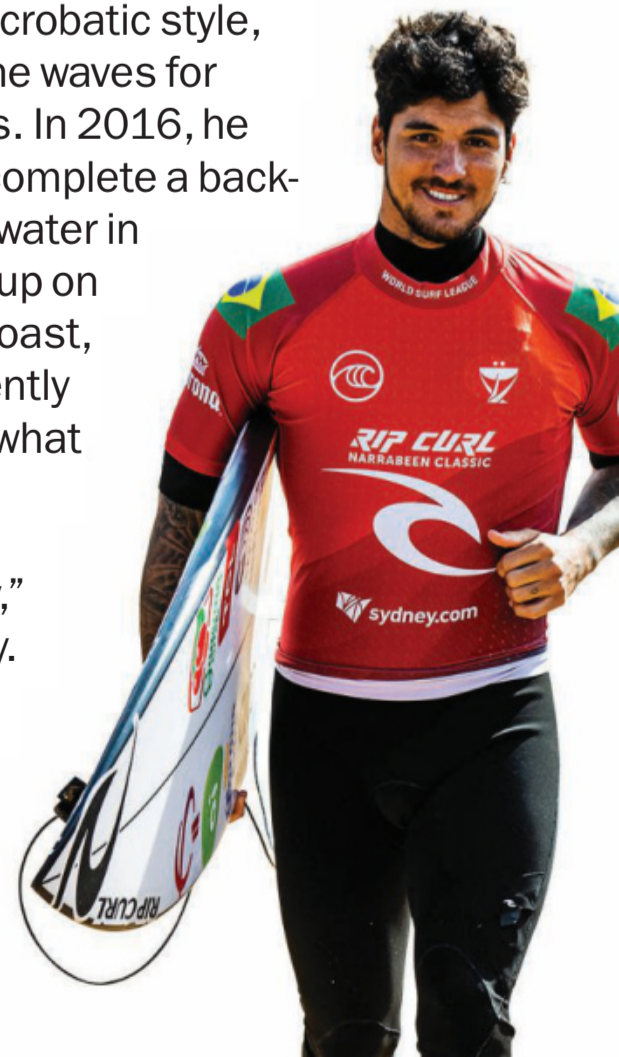
Heading into her fourth Olympics, Fraser-Pryce is the biggest star of a Jamaican team that always has high expectations on the track. In a sport that tends not to reward longevity, Mommy Rocket remains a solid bet to deliver. —S.G.

## Gabriel Medina

SURFING, BRAZIL

There may be no one better suited to making the sporting masses fall in love with surfing in its Olympic debut than this 27-year-old Brazilian. The world's top-ranked surfer, Gabriel Medina is known for an exhilarating acrobatic style, frequently soaring above the waves for highly technical maneuvers. In 2016, he became the first surfer to complete a backflip with his board over the water in competition. Medina grew up on Brazil's southern Atlantic coast, where the swell is consistently large. That's a far cry from what he'll encounter at Japan's Tsurigasaki Beach. "[The waves] are small and funky," he told the *Guardian* in May. "But if you want to be the best, you gotta do everything in any conditions."

—Ciara Nugent





## Andre De Grasse

TRACK AND FIELD, CANADA

He's the last man standing. With Usain Bolt retired and other once elite sprinters failing to qualify, Andre De Grasse, 26, will be the only 100-m and 200-m men's medalist from the Rio Games to race in Tokyo. In 2016 he won 100-m bronze and 200-m silver, as well as 4 x 100-m relay bronze, to become the first Canadian sprinter to earn three medals at a single Olympics. De Grasse has stayed busy since Rio, graduating from the University of Southern California and having two children with his partner Nia Ali, the world champion American hurdler. In both 2017 and 2018, De Grasse's seasons were cut short because of hamstring injuries. He's healthy now, and with 2019 100-m world champion Christian Coleman out of the Games for missing drug tests, it may finally be De Grasse's time on top of the podium. —S.G.



## Simone Manuel

SWIMMING, U.S.

When Simone Manuel glanced at her time in the 100-m freestyle semi-final at the Olympic trials on June 17, she wasn't entirely surprised—even if much of the swimming world was. She finished ninth, missing the cut for the finals and ensuring that the reigning gold medalist in the 100-m freestyle wouldn't be defending her Olympic title.

Manuel revealed after the disappointing swim that she was diagnosed with overtraining syndrome in March. "It was really hard to [swim] specific times that had come easier weeks or months before," she tells TIME. "As I continued to compete and train hard, it got worse and worse." Her first symptom was a fast heartbeat, even when she was resting or doing simple sets in practice. That snowballed into anxiety, insomnia and depression when things in the pool didn't improve.

Her doctor recommended complete rest, so Manuel returned home to Texas for about 12 days in March. "My job when I got home was to literally recover," she says. Long massages, ice baths and time out of the water helped restore her body, but her mind was another matter. Forced to take so much time off so close to the Olympic trials didn't help her anxiety. "Being out of the water,

watching time pass me by, was hard mentally," she says.

It was the latest disruption in a grueling year that saw the Olympics postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected people of color, and a widespread reckoning over racism. "What the Black community had to deal with this year was very hard," says Manuel, who became the first African-American woman to earn an individual Olympic gold in swimming at Rio in 2016. "The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and the incident with the man in Central Park happening right after each other really made me have to sit down and I guess grieve some of the experiences I've had in the sport, or experiences I've had as a Black woman that I had just brushed off before." It was, she says, "like a mirror I couldn't look away from."

The time to reflect proved well spent, however. Three days after missing the 100-m final, Manuel won the 50-m freestyle final at the trials, giving her the chance to swim for an individual medal in Tokyo.

"There were moments I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to get on the team," she says. "But I learned that I have a lot of perseverance, a lot of fight in me. I willed myself to that wall. More than anything, [the trials experience] taught me there really is nothing I can't do. And I think that's pretty cool." —A.P.



## Maria Lasitskene

TRACK AND FIELD, RUSSIAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

Having dominated high jumping for years—winning gold at the 2015, 2017 and 2019 world championships—Maria Lasitskene, 28, is vying for her first Olympic gold in Tokyo. She'll be one of 335 Russians competing in Tokyo under a neutral flag after an investigation revealed a widespread, state-sponsored athlete-doping program. As punishment, Russian athletes are barred from competing under their flag and anthem until 2022. In a country where top athletes rarely speak out against officials, Lasitskene has been a leading voice for reform, calling on top athletics officials and coaches to be replaced. "I'm just an athlete," she wrote in a 2019 open letter. "But I have a lot of questions."

—Madeline Roache



NEW SPORTS



BASEBALL

Ballgames are back for the first time since 2008. After being dropped by the International Olympic Committee, baseball will make its return at the host country's insistence. Baseball-mad Japan will be joined by the U.S., Mexico, Israel, South Korea and the Dominican Republic in the six-team field. But with active MLB players sidelined because of scheduling conflicts, the world's best won't be in attendance.



SOFTBALL

The revived Olympic softball tournament will see six qualifying teams—rather than the eight of previous Games—face off against each other in a preliminary round-robin series. This format guarantees a rematch of the 2008 gold-medal game between Japan and the U.S., which Japan won. Italy, Mexico, Canada and Australia round out the field—but don't be surprised if the deep U.S. and Japan teams meet again for gold. —*Megan McCluskey*



**Kristof Milak**

SWIMMING, HUNGARY

Kristof Milak broke Michael Phelps' 200-m butterfly world record at the 2019 world championships, making the 21-year-old from Hungary the man to beat in that event in Tokyo. Milak continued that momentum in the "lost" year after the Tokyo Games were postponed—until the fall of 2020, when he contracted COVID-19. Milak battled the aftereffects for months. But he recovered to prove at the European championships in May that he has a chance to win the first Olympic gold in the 200-m butterfly of the post-Phelps era. Milak could also qualify for the 100-m butterfly, where he could challenge current world-record holder Caeleb Dressel. —*Alice Park*



**Emily Seebohm**

SWIMMING, AUSTRALIA

The five-time Olympic medalist heads to her fourth Games with a newfound purpose outside the pool. In January, Emily Seebohm, 29, revealed she had battled an eating disorder for two years, saying on social media that bingeing, purging and continually weighing herself resulted in part from pressure she felt that "the only way I can swim faster is by losing weight." Seebohm vowed in her post to "give my body the love it deserves," and in June she snagged the second spot in the 100-m backstroke at Australia's Olympic trials. Seebohm wasn't specific about what was behind her own eating disorder, but ahead of those national trials, Swimming Australia was hit by allegations of a toxic culture, particularly for women. Butterfly specialist Madeline Groves pulled out of the event, citing "misogynistic perverts" who "body shame or medically gaslight [young women and girls]." Australian swimming officials said they were investigating Groves' claims. —*A.P.*



**Kevin Durant**

BASKETBALL, U.S.

Despite his heroic effort in the second round of this year's NBA playoffs—he scored 48 points and played all 53 minutes in a Game 7 overtime loss to the Milwaukee Bucks—Kevin Durant couldn't carry his star-studded Brooklyn Nets to a championship. But he should still collect some hardware this summer. Durant chose to play in Tokyo despite missing 37 games last season because of injuries and COVID-19 issues, and the entire 2019–20 season with an Achilles injury. But the allure of a third straight gold—Durant was Team USA's leading scorer in both London and Rio—is strong. He'll also reunite with his former Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr, who will serve as assistant coach at the Olympics, and former teammate Draymond Green. Many of the NBA's biggest names are sitting out Tokyo, but Durant will anchor a U.S. squad that's still the heavy favorite to win it all. —*Sean Gregory*



**Lisa Carrington**

CANOEING, NEW ZEALAND

Lisa Carrington is so dominant in sprint kayaking that she draws comparisons to Simone Biles. She has won gold in two successive Games (her 2012 win was the first for a Maori) and hasn't lost in the 200-m sprint in more than a decade. But she's taking on her greatest challenge yet in Tokyo by competing in four different events. There's evidence her gambit may pay off. At the 2019 world championships, Carrington blew away the competition in her individual races, and the last time she contested all four events, in 2018, she only narrowly lost her team races. If successful, Carrington will make yet more history: three more gold medals would make her New Zealand's most decorated Olympian ever. —*Michael Zennie*

SEEBOHM: QUINN ROONEY—GETTY IMAGES; BROWN: JONNY WEEKS—THE GUARDIAN/EYEVINE/REDX; KIPCHOGE: BOB MARTIN—GETTY IMAGES; SHI: AFP/GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOTS: GETTY IMAGES (5)



## Sky Brown

SKATEBOARDING, BRITAIN

Sky Brown has already earned a Nike contract, appeared on *Dancing With the Stars: Juniors*, recorded a pop song and has a Barbie doll in her likeness—and she only turned 13 on July 7. Brown, whose father is from the U.K. and whose mother is from Japan, will compete for Team Britain in park skateboarding in Tokyo, thanks to a precocious arsenal of moves including a 720—two full rotations in the air. Her skills have inspired female skaters of all ages. “She’s hella cool,” says Jocelyn Writer, 18, who skates in Venice, Calif., where Brown sometimes trains. “To see a little girl be better than, like, half the guy skaters out there, it’s very empowering.” The Games come just over a year since Brown suffered skull fractures and broke her left wrist and hand in a horrifying fall while skating. “It’s O.K. to fall sometimes,” she said in a YouTube message from her hospital bed. “I’m just going to get back up and push even harder.” —S.G.

## Eliud Kipchoge

MARATHON, KENYA

“Personally, I don’t believe in limits,” Eliud Kipchoge, the Kenyan marathoner, once said. As the only person in history to run the marathon’s 26.2 miles in under two hours, why should he? That 2019 feat in Vienna might not count as an official world record, as Kipchoge did not run in race conditions. The event was engineered for maximum speed: the course was flat, and a team of pacesetters surrounded Kipchoge to reduce drag. But Kipchoge does hold the world record: he ran it in 2 hr. 1 min. 39 sec. in Berlin in 2018. In April, he won his final marathon—in a Netherlands airport—before the Olympics, where Kipchoge will defend the gold he won in Rio. The smart money is on him to do it. —S.G.



## Noah Lyles

TRACK AND FIELD, U.S.

Noah Lyles has run the four fastest 200-m times in the world since 2016, but you wouldn’t have known it at the start of the Olympic trials in June. After the 23-year-old from Florida failed to win his heat or the semifinals, some wondered about his form—and whether the hype that he could be the next Usain Bolt was overblown. But in the final, he roared to the head of the pack to make his first Olympic team and establish himself as the favorite to win gold in the 200 m—something no U.S. man has done since 2004. Lyles has been open about his struggles with mental health and the pressures of competition. Last summer, he shared that he had started antidepressant medication and called it “one of the best decisions I have made in a while.” Going into Tokyo, he says he’s found clarity. “I don’t have anything to prove,” Lyles says. “When I put the race together, y’all are going to be in trouble.” —S.G.



## Saurabh Chaudhary

SHOOTING, INDIA

Marksman Saurabh Chaudhary, 19, is one of India’s best shots at gold in Tokyo. Having only taken up shooting in 2015, he has accumulated an impressive haul of medals: 14 gold and six silver in international competitions. In 2018, he became India’s youngest gold medalist at the Asian Games. A year later, Chaudhary set a new junior and senior world record in the 10-m air-pistol category at the International Shooting Sport Federation World Cup, securing his spot on India’s 15-member shooting team in Tokyo. There, he’ll also pair with Manu Bhaker to form a top contender in the mixed team competition. “He’s extremely focused,” teammate Apurvi Chandela said. “I see great things happening for him in the future.” —Madeline Roache



## Shi Tingmao

DIVING, CHINA

Shi Tingmao has won so often in springboard diving that Chinese state media has nicknamed her “the ever victorious general.” Indeed, she’s won all but five major international competitions in the event since 2015, including two gold medals at the 2016 Rio Games. Shi started in gymnastics as a young girl and didn’t join China’s national diving team until she was 21. Tokyo will be Shi’s second Olympics but likely her last, and she is determined to end on a high note. “Persevere, self-discipline, focus, final sprint, come on!” Shi wrote on the Twitter-like social media platform Weibo ahead of the Games. Those are words in line with her name, Tingmao, which translates to “working hard for the country.” Shi looks likely to continue her domination and help maintain China’s Olympic winning streak in individual women’s springboard diving, which stretches back to 1988.

—Aria Chen



# Athletes On the Front Line

**SPANISH TRIATHLETE SUSANA RODRÍGUEZ SPLIT HER TIME DURING THE PANDEMIC CARING FOR COVID-19 PATIENTS AND TRAINING FOR TOKYO**

**BY CIARA NUGENT**

**PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANFRANCO TRIPODO FOR TIME**

**A**S A KID, SUSANA RODRÍGUEZ wanted to do whatever her sister, Patricia, two years older, could do. Susana was born with a severe visual impairment due to albinism, while Patricia could see perfectly. But on playgrounds in the girls' hometown of Vigo, northern Spain, when Patricia reached the highest, most complicated point of the jungle gym, it beckoned to Susana too, she says. "I would always try until I could do it too, without any help. I think that's what created in me this eagerness to fight."

That determination has powered the 33-year-old through twin careers in triathlons—long-distance races that combine swimming, cycling and running—and medicine, a field with major barriers to entry for visually impaired people. Even her resolve, though, might have been tested by the pandemic. When COVID-19 hit Spain early and hard, hospitals were driven to a state of collapse, and lockdowns made it impossible to train outside. The 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the latter of which Rodríguez had been training for over the previous four years, were postponed and plunged into uncertainty. After a year's delay, Rodríguez is finally preparing to head to Tokyo, speaking to TIME a few weeks before leaving for training camp with the rest of the Spanish Paralympic team. She has stayed at the top of

her game, winning two gold medals in June, adding to a long list of 27 wins in international competition, including three world championships.

**LIKE EVERYONE ELSE**, Rodríguez spent the first months of the pandemic in a state of mounting fear and anxiety. Every morning began with a meeting on how many COVID-19 patients the hospital had and how many beds and ventilators were left. She worked phone lines to help people figure out if they needed a test for the virus, and rehabilitated COVID-19 patients who were weakened by the virus and long ICU stays. Meanwhile, she kept training every afternoon after her hospital shift. "I think sports helped me to be able to recover and go back in and face the next day at work," she says.

Barred from even walking or running outside by Spain's strict lockdown, she stayed in the apartment she shared with two other health workers. She spent three hours each day on a rowing machine, an exercise bike and a treadmill, hastily delivered by Spain's Paralympic Committee. That discipline started in childhood. Rodríguez decided at the age of 10 that she wanted to become an athlete. She began spending a fixed two hours on schoolwork every day to make sure she didn't fall behind on her education while training. "Every day meant every day," she says. "Consistency is the key." Her strict schedules proved useful when, at 18, she decided to work in health care; again when she was 22 and started training for triathlons; and, of course, in preparing for Tokyo during a pandemic.

As in all her triathlon competitions, she will work with a guide who tells her what's happening on the circuit, cycling on a tandem bike and running and swimming, joined to them by a cord. Pending confirmation from the national committee in mid-July, she is also set to compete in the 1,500-m race, which would make her the first Spaniard to compete in two separate event categories at the same Games.

The event will be very different from her first Paralympics in 2016: there will be no foreign spectators, no spending time with other teams, and a strict regimen of PCR tests. Because the entire team needs to quarantine in Spain for two weeks before the Games, she will arrive in Tokyo less than 10 days before her events begin, leaving little time to acclimate to the city's high humidity. Nevertheless, Rodríguez says the past year has reaffirmed her faith in both sports and medicine: "What we've been through has made me realize even more: health is the most important thing, both for the individual and for the collective. If you don't have health, everything else is in the air." □

PHYSICIAN AND  
PARALYMPIAN  
RODRÍGUEZ IN HER  
HOMETOWN OF VIGO



▶  
**PARAMEDIC BRIGDEN-JONES, PHOTOGRAPHED DURING THE PANDEMIC**

**Jo Brigden-Jones**

Being both a world-class kayaker and a paramedic can be hectic. “Sometimes I would do three training sessions and then go to do my night shift,” says Jo Brigden-Jones, who will represent Australia in this year’s Olympics. But the 33-year-old, who has worked for New South Wales Ambulance since 2016, says her career takes some of the pressure off when she’s at the starting line getting ready to paddle. “I might have saved someone’s life in my last shift,” she says. Although Australia has handled the pandemic well, with just 120 cases

per 100,000 residents to date, the Olympian has come face-to-face with the virus. She says she helped transport one of the first confirmed patients from their home to a hospital. “Then it was still quite scary and confronting because we didn’t know much about the virus, and everything was evolving every day,” she says. Brigden-Jones, who will fly to Japan on July 24, says her health care experience has helped her accept the strict social-distancing measures and mask mandates that athletes will face in Japan. It’s worth it, she says: “I recognize how special it is to be able to still compete at the Olympics in a pandemic.” —*Amy Gunia*



BRIGDEN-JONES: MATTHEW ABBOTT; PARETO: VALERY SHARIFULIN—TASS/GETTY IMAGES; LYNCH: PAUL KANE—GETTY IMAGES; GALABOVITOH: DAN PELED—EPA-EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK; THOMAS: STEPH CHAMBERS—GETTY IMAGES



**Paula Pareto**

Paula Pareto is known as La Peque, or the Small One—and not without some justification. What else are they going to call you when you’re barely 4 ft. 10 in. tall and tip the scales at under 105 lb.? But based on her accomplishments, Pareto is anything but *peque*. Entering her fourth Olympics, the Argentine judoka is already

◀  
**PARETO IS RANKED SIXTH IN THE UNDER-48-KG CLASS BY THE INTERNATIONAL JUDO FEDERATION**

in possession of a silver medal won at the 2008 Beijing Games and a gold won at Rio de Janeiro in 2016. But it’s her efforts off the mat that truly distinguish her. A physician working as a trauma specialist in a hospital in San Isidro, she spent 2020 and much of 2021 on the front lines of the COVID-19 battle, both caring for her own patients—some of whom were suffering from the disease in addition to the injuries that landed them on Pareto’s ward—and assisting the rest of the medical staff that was working full time against the pandemic. Throughout the past months, Pareto continued to work her shifts at her hospital, with the attendant risk of contracting COVID-19 herself, while also training for the Olympics. But that challenging path is one she apparently enjoys traveling. As Pareto wrote on her Facebook page, “The degree of courage you live with determines the degree of satisfaction you receive.” —*Jeffrey Kluger*



## Rachael Lynch

Western Australia, where field-hockey goalkeeper Rachael Lynch is based, has handled COVID-19 better than much of the rest of the world. Still, it's been a busy year for the athlete, who is also a registered nurse. For the past 12 months, she's been working for a mining company, testing staff before they traveled to mining sites to ensure the company could safely continue its operations during the pandemic. The 35-year-old says her colleagues identified several COVID-19 cases in time to reduce the risk of outbreaks. Although it's been hard work, she says it makes her a stronger competitor in the sports arena. "I honestly feel like it makes me a better athlete, having that time away

and doing things to help other people that aren't about me," she says. "All the disappointments that come from elite-level sport, they're not as harsh and not as bad if you've got other things in your life, and I think that's important." Lynch, who competed at the Rio Games in 2016, knows that Tokyo won't be like any past Olympics, but she hopes that the world still gets to enjoy it, even if they can only tune in via television. "Hopefully we can still make it a really exciting spectacle for everyone because we're very grateful that we get the opportunity," says Lynch, "and there's lots of people that are putting in a lot of hours to make this happen." —A.G.

▼  
**LYNCH ADMINISTERS  
A COVID-19 TEST  
IN MAY OF LAST YEAR**



## Elena Galiabovitch

This spring, when other athletes were preparing to fly to Tokyo, Australian shooter Elena Galiabovitch was standing in a drive-through clinic, waiting to swab expectant noses for COVID-19. Galiabovitch, a doctor in training to become a urological surgeon, worked shifts in Melbourne's COVID-19 wards earlier in the pandemic and decided to pitch in at testing sites as well. The 31-year-old picked up shooting seriously in 2014—originally to spend more time with her father-coach Vladimir—and went on to qualify for the 2016 Olympics in Rio. After working on the front lines of the pandemic, Galiabovitch says she's just happy for the chance to gather with international athletes: "I hope it brings hope to the world." —Jamie Ducharme

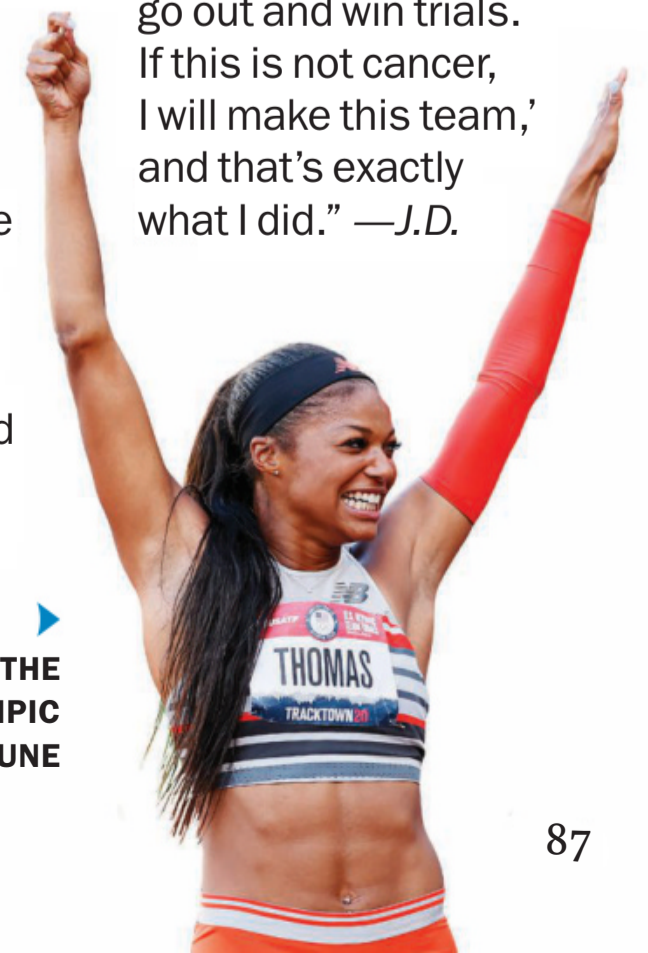


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**GALIABOVITCH  
AFTER WINNING  
SILVER AT THE 2018  
COMMONWEALTH  
GAMES**

## Gabby Thomas

There's a reason the press has crowned Gabby Thomas the fastest epidemiologist in the world. The 24-year-old American came in first in the 200-m sprint at June's Olympic trials with a time of 21.61 sec., only narrowly missing track-and-field legend Florence Griffith Joyner's 1988 world record of 21.34 sec. Thomas is also at home in a very different environment: the classroom. She studied global health and health policy as an undergrad, and is now working toward a master's degree in epidemiology. She hopes to

help reduce disparities in health care access and outcomes. Health is also personal for Thomas, who qualified for the Tokyo Games about a month after doctors found what turned out to be a benign liver tumor. Thomas told *Runner's World*, "I remember telling God, 'If I am healthy, I am going to go out and win trials. If this is not cancer, I will make this team,' and that's exactly what I did." —J.D.



▶  
**THOMAS WON THE  
200-M OLYMPIC  
TRIALS IN JUNE**

# Off Track

**THE REFUGEE OLYMPIC TEAM WAS CREATED TO OFFER HOPE. SOME ATHLETES ARE RUNNING AWAY FROM IT**

**BY VIVIENNE WALT**



ONE DAY IN SPRING 2019, MORE THAN 2,880 runners competed in a 10-km race in Geneva. It was a regular event on the athletic calendar, but this

time with a striking result. The winner was an orphaned refugee from South Sudan, exiled in Kenya, who had laced up his first pair of running shoes only a few years earlier. Atop the podium, clutching a bouquet of flowers and a trophy, Dominic Lokinyomo Lobalu grinned with delight. “I am very happy to have won today,” he said. “I am going back to even more intense training when I return to Kenya.”

But Lobalu did not go back. Later that day, he would ask about the prize money he assumed he had won. His questions were directed to the managers who had traveled with him to Switzerland. In fact, the race came with no prize money, but that did not explain the evasiveness of the replies Lobalu recalls getting from his managers. They would all discuss the matter once they returned to Kenya, he was told. “I thought, These people, there was something they were hiding,” he says.

Nothing is straightforward in the life of a refugee, but for at least a moment five years ago, it seemed as though sports might be. At the opening ceremony of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the first IOC Refugee Olympic Team marched behind the flag not of a nation but of the Olympics themselves. A joint effort of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the



team won even before its 10 members competed, lifting the Games out of the realms of self-dealing, cost overruns and doping scandals, and into the realm of ideals, a place the Olympic officials like to be.

There will be another IOC Refugee Olympic Team at the opening ceremony in Tokyo’s Olympic Stadium on July 23. With 29 members, it has nearly three times as the number of athletes who competed in Rio, representing a population of 20.7 million, the current estimate of people who have fled their home nation. The most glittering sporting event on the planet will be elevated once again by epic personal histories involving bloodshed, poverty and a level of endurance other Olympians could scarcely imagine.

But things are no longer so simple. As Lobalu’s experience shows, even refugee Olympians grapple with the same questions—about money, power, control and personal agency—that dominate elite sports as much as athletic ability does.

The training camp to which Lobalu did not return is outside the Kenyan capital, Nairobi.



Known as the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation Training Center, the camp was founded by Loroupe, a legendary Kenyan runner—and a two-time winner of the New York City Marathon. Her organization was the inspiration for, and the core of, the first Refugee Olympic Team, half of whose members lived and trained at the Kenya site.

The camp will send four runners to Tokyo, all of them, like Lobalu, exiled from war-ravaged South Sudan. But absent from the Tokyo Olympics refugee team are six of its strongest runners, who spent years training for the Games at the camp in Kenya—and who then absconded from the program, effectively fleeing the team with little warning and against all the rules, from 2017 to 2019. In interviews with TIME, two of those six men say their decisions were driven in part by rising tensions over their training and dissatisfaction with a system that, to them, appeared to deny them opportunities to create lives outside the program.

Lobalu, who had dreamed of being the first Olympic refugee medalist, became on that spring day in 2019 the most recent of the six

▲  
REFUGEE ATHLETES  
RUN LAPS AT THE  
TRAINING CAMP IN  
NGONG, KENYA

defectors. Within hours of winning the race in Geneva, he made a decision that would change his life and doom his prospects of running in Tokyo this month.

The conversations after the Geneva race had been the final straw, Lobalu says. Implicit in the manner of his managers was the belief that as refugees the athletes should accept whatever they had, whether there was prize money or not—an attitude he steadily began to reject. “We cannot talk about money. We were supposed to go, and come back to the camp,” Lobalu, now 22, tells TIME. “They took us to Geneva, so we cannot complain ... We are not supposed to talk, because we are just a refugee.”

Before dawn the next morning, he slipped out of the team’s Geneva hotel with a fellow South Sudanese refugee, Gatkuoth Puok Thiep. They left no note. The two friends wandered for hours, with no money or contacts, and only one plan: they would not return to Kenya with their teammates; somehow they would find a way to stay in Switzerland.

The break was clean, but the feelings remain complex. The decision to quit the program left each athlete TIME spoke to highly conflicted. The two former athletes from the Loroupe program said they felt they were being denied opportunities and prize money, and they spoke of an atmosphere in the training camp of overbearing control. At the same time, even athletes who left the team spoke of how the training in Kenya had transformed their lives, giving them passion and purpose they otherwise might never have found.

They singled out for special gratitude Loroupe, who remains in charge of the camp and who fielded TIME’s questions about the controversies. Loroupe created her organization in 2003 to organize “Peace Runs” comprising warring tribes, and she is now the IOC’s “chief of mission” for the refugee team at the Tokyo Olympics. “She is not just the coach; she is the mother of everyone,” says Gai John Nyang, who fled the team in 2017 amid an angry dispute and who now lives in Mainz, Germany. “Everyone respects her, even me, right up to today.”

This month, the emotions of the athletes are particularly raw as they watch their four close friends from the training camp head to the Tokyo Olympics. Those who left the camp also forfeited their chance to compete. The IOC and UNHCR ruled that Lobalu, Nyang and the other four runners who defected could not even try out for the Olympics team.

The athletes call that arbitrary punishment for having dared to walk away from the team. But the U.N. and the IOC say the men are no

longer officially refugees, a protected status intended for those caught between countries, and forfeited upon settlement in one. Lorupe adds that allowing them to compete in Tokyo would encourage those still in her training camp to try to leave too. Indeed, Lorupe met with Lobalu in Switzerland seven months after he quit the team and tried to coax him to return to Kenya so he could run in the Tokyo Olympics, according to Lobalu. “She said, ‘You will get all the chance you are looking for,’” he says. He turned her down, and now will watch his friends in Tokyo from 7,000 miles away.

**THE VERY FACT** that 29 refugees representing 13 nationalities are competing in Tokyo upends a fundamental feature of the Olympics, which for more than a century has been organized around national patriotism. “Most of the refugees lacked the right to compete,” Olivier Niamkey, the IOC’s deputy chief of mission for the refugee program, tells *TIME*, describing the organization’s negotiations with various athletics federations, which finally cracked open the door to refugees in 2015 after long discussions. “It is not just about money,” he says. “They have no flag to compete under.”

Indeed, to assemble the refugee team, the IOC asked nations to do the sorting. The original group of 43 candidates for the 2016 Games was identified. In Kenya, Lorupe knew where to look for runners. She traveled to the country’s northern border and the Kakuma refugee camp, a sprawling, sun-baked settlement operated by the UNHCR and home to at least 170,000 refugees from nearby countries. To identify potential talent, Lorupe staged a 10-km race.

From those who showed up—some barefoot, some with barely any footwear, none having run an organized race—she picked the fastest and flew them 450 miles south to her training camp in the lush Ngong hills just outside Nairobi. “I didn’t even know what is the Olympics,” says Rose Nathike Lokonyen, 28, who is on the IOC Refugee Olympic Team again in Tokyo for the second time, after the Rio Games. In Ngong, 93 miles south of the equator and 1.2 miles above sea level, they began rigorous, high-altitude training for the Rio Olympics. Raised in the Kakuma refugee camp, Lokonyen ran barefoot in Lorupe’s 10-km race in 2015 and finished second. “We didn’t know about time,” she tells me, recalling that race. “We just ran.”

The point of the Refugee Olympic Team, in fact, is not to clock the fastest time. That would be a daunting task, given that elite runners train for years on state-of-the-art tracks before reaching the Olympics. The point, rather, is to be there. “We

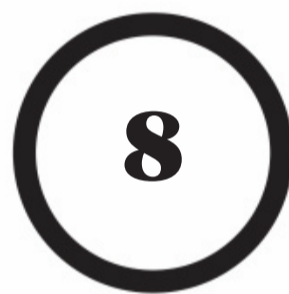
BY THE NUMBERS



Number of refugee athletes competing in Tokyo, representing 13 nationalities



Number of sports in which refugee athletes will compete at the Tokyo Games



Number of countries where the Olympic Refugee Foundation has supported sports programs



Number who left the Tegla Lorupe training camp from 2017 to 2019



The budget set aside for scholarships for the refugee-athlete program

SOURCE: IOC



want to send a message of hope for all refugees in our world,” IOC president Thomas Bach said before the Rio Games. For the refugees who, like the South Sudanese runners, have witnessed intense brutality, the program has also helped heal painful traumas. Running, says Nyang, “is like medicine to me. When I run, I calm down.”

From being touted as a one-off event for the 2016 Games amid a swelling of refugees emerging from the Middle East and nations including Eritrea and Somalia, the program now appears increasingly permanent. For this year’s pandemic-postponed Olympic Games, the IOC expanded the program to include other parts of the world, and more sports. Niamkey says the IOC’s Olympic Solidarity fund set aside \$3 million between 2016 and 2021 for scholarships for 56 refugee athletes worldwide, out of a total budget of about \$100 million to fund thousands of athletes. Disbursements, he says, are in the form of monthly \$1,500 payments.

There is an exception to that: the athletes at the Tegla Lorupe camp in Kenya. Niamkey estimated the payments to the refugees there were “between \$100 and \$200” a month. But both Nyang and Lobalu independently said they received a monthly stipend of 5,000



Kenyan shillings (about \$46 at current exchange rates). After TIME asked the IOC to check, the organization confirmed that the payments were indeed 5,000 Kenyan shillings.

An IOC spokesperson said the money was meant as “pocket money” for the athletes in Lorupe’s camp, whose living expenses were covered; the athletes live in four-bed dormitory rooms and cook communally. When TIME asked Lorupe about the payments, her reply was: “Our athletes are not there just to be paid. They are there for a reason.”

Nyang says that before leaving the training program in 2017, he regularly borrowed money from locals to cover expenses. “What can you do with \$50?” he says. Complaining was fruitless, according to Lobalu, the athlete who absconded in Geneva. “They would say, ‘If you don’t like the place, pack your bag and go back to Kakuma,’”

**‘NO ONE WANTS TO LIVE SOMEWHERE WHERE NOTHING CHANGES.’**

—GAI JOHN NYANG

ROSE NATHIKE  
LOKONYEN CARRIES  
THE OLYMPIC FLAG  
IN RIO IN 2016

the refugee camp, he says. “You get food and bed and a room for free.”

Between the quadrennial Olympics, the athletes participate in competitive races around the world to give them the experience of competing at a high level. But Lobalu and Nyang each claimed in separate interviews that they did not receive prize money for their achievements at such events, even those with prize money.

An executive at On, the Swiss athletic-footwear company that helps finance the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation and that supplies running shoes to the team, confirms they were made aware of money not reaching athletes—including bonuses for participation in events like the 2017 World Athletics Championships in London, where two of the runners fled the team, absconding from the Kenya training program and staying in the U.K. “There were bonuses, and those were paid out to the foundation, and it was the foundation’s responsibility to hand them to the athletes,” says Feliciano Robayna, On’s head of sports marketing, who handles the partnership with the refugee team and who has twice visited the Kenya camp. “We went out of our way [to ensure that was happening], after hearing that some bonuses did not reach the athletes’ hands,” he says.

In response to the athletes’ allegations, Lorupe told TIME that athletes received prize money for competing in races. “It is their money,” she says. Told of her response, Lobalu laughed. “O.K.,” he says skeptically. “Maybe after I left.”

For Nyang, it was less the absent prize money that drove him away and more the sense of missed opportunity. He described mounting tensions in the camp, with managers who appeared to favor some athletes over others, and rising fears of retribution if anyone complained. What Nyang most feared, he says, was being sent back to the Kakuma refugee camp, “which is horrible.” He says he also increasingly feared for his personal safety in Kenya, as a South Sudanese refugee. More than anything else, he says, he felt like he was stuck. “Of course no one wants to live somewhere where nothing changes,” Nyang said, referring to the training camp. He says he recalled thinking, “There is no other future, only to say, ‘O.K., I have to go my own way.’”

He and another South Sudanese refugee, Wiyual Puok Deng, did so in dramatic fashion—refusing to board a flight back to Kenya from Frankfurt after competing at the Asian Games in Turkmenistan in 2017. Both Nyang and Lobalu said they felt as if refugee athletes were discouraged from moving on or offered little help to do so. One other person agreed. “They [the refugee training camp] want to keep them for

themselves,” said one source who had tracked the athletes for five years, spent time at Loroupe’s training camp and kept in close touch with them. “It [the training program in Kenya] was more for the UNHCR than for the athletes.”

Asked about these accusations, Stephen Pattison, the UNHCR’s deputy chief of mission, said the defections from the Kenya training camp prompted the commission and the IOC to try to secure scholarships for runners picked for the Tokyo Olympics team—all of whom competed in the Rio Olympics five years ago. Speaking to TIME by telephone in a conversation that the IOC insisted it monitor, Pattison said the thinking was that athletes badly needed the prospect of real opportunities after the Olympics—something the IOC and UNHCR had failed to offer after Rio and, according to the two defector athletes Lobalu and Nyang, a reason the Kenya program lost six talented runners. “We understood that there was a concern about what happens next,” Pattison said.

Loroupe told TIME in an interview from Kenya (also with an IOC representative in attendance) that she bore no responsibility for the six men who have fled her camp. “I would not be happy to take such a blame there,” she said, when asked whether she might have discouraged athletes from leaving. For those who want to leave, she said, “they have to go the right way.”

**FOR DOMINIC LOKINYOMO LOBALU**—the star runner—there was no “right way” to leave, as Loroupe says. Within hours of winning the race in Geneva, he had broken ranks from the refugee team and fled his hotel. Like Nyang’s, Lobalu’s family had scattered while fleeing their war-torn village in South Sudan, a country that came into being in 2011 after a decades-long civil war with Sudan, and where fighting has remained common in independence. He spent some of his childhood in an orphanage, playing soccer as a way to dull the intense pain of loss, eventually taking up running at a school near Nairobi, where he was discovered by Loroupe.

Three months after Lobalu went AWOL from

**‘OUR ATHLETES ARE NOT THERE JUST TO BE PAID. THEY ARE THERE FOR A REASON.’**

—TEGLA LOROUPE



CAMP FOUNDER TEGLA LOROUPE, LEFT, AND DOMINIC LOKINYOMO LOBALU, WHO NOW LIVES AND COMPETES IN SWITZERLAND

Loroupe’s team, a Swiss refugee center contacted Markus Hagmann, an athletics coach in Saint-Gallen, Switzerland, saying there were two South Sudanese men who wanted to run. Hagmann invited them to his club and instantly spotted major star potential in Lobalu. He brought him to the first race he could find in Switzerland.

Lobalu won the race—and has continued winning in Switzerland. In addition to On, he also now has endorsement funding from the Italian insurance giant Generali. In late June, he ran a 5,000-m Swiss race in 14 min. 1 sec., one-thousandth of a second behind the winner—who is competing for Switzerland at the Tokyo Olympics. Unable to compete at Tokyo (he too has no official refugee status), Lobalu will instead spend July and August training at an athletic center high in the Swiss Alps.

Meanwhile, On’s marketing chief, Robayna, says the company has hired a lawyer to secure residence status in Switzerland for Lobalu, whose renown has grown among the country’s runners. Hagmann estimates that it could take up to 10 years for Lobalu to become a citizen, making it uncertain whether Lobalu will be able to compete as a Swiss national in the 2024 Olympics in Paris.

As for the question of money, after winning his first Swiss race back in 2019, Lobalu climbed into Hagmann’s car. There, Hagmann showed Lobalu the 200 Swiss francs (about \$218) he had won, then deadpanned, “Oh, this is mine now,” Hagmann recalls. “He went white, and I said, It’s a joke. It was the first time he realized, ‘No one is going to take my money away from me.’”

—With reporting by NIK POPLI and SIMMONE SHAH/WASHINGTON

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Heroes

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**AWKWAFINA**  
BY SANDRA OH



FAMILY



**CHINA WATCH**

PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中國日報

**HIGH-TECH  
MONITORING  
KEEPS TRACK OF ELEPHANTS**

App allows users to identify and locate animals



**BY LI YINGQING,  
ZHANG YANGFEI  
and ZHANG XIAOMIN**

At 7:26 p.m. on June 12, Li Zhongyun received a message via an app on his phone just after he finished work and arrived home in Yunnan province.

The message said: "A herd of wild elephants is hanging around Chengzi-I community in Mengwang village, Menghai county. Please inform villagers who are working outside to be careful."

As the herd was 168 miles away, Li, who lives in Longmen village, Mengla, Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture, let out a sigh of relief.

During the day, Li, a forest ranger and Asian elephant observer, patrols 21 miles through dense forests along the border of China and Laos.

Xishuangbanna, which borders Laos and Myanmar, has a population of more than 1.3 million and offers protection to 756 types of wild animals and more than 5,000 kinds of higher plants.

The prefecture is also home to 300 wild Asian elephants, the largest such population in China.

In 1958 a national nature reserve was established in Xishuangbanna. The area under protection at state, prefecture and county level has expanded from about 927 square miles in the 1980s to 1,602 square miles, accounting for more than one-fifth of the prefecture's area.

In recent years, with increased forest coverage in the reserve and fewer herbs and lianas (climbing plants hanging from trees) for the elephants to eat, the creatures have been seen feeding on farmland more frequently.

To reduce encounters between humans and wild animals, the local authorities developed an



From top: Drones are used to keep track of the elephants.

HU CHAO / XINHUA

A forest ranger and elephant observer shows an app used to monitor the animals.

WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Yang Chengzhong, a former hunter who now safeguards wildlife, shows a list of protected species at his home in Mengla county, Yunnan province.

WANG JING / CHINA DAILY



Elephants eat food provided by locals as they pass through Jinning district of Kunming, Yunnan province, on June 3. PROVIDED BY YUNNAN FOREST FIRE BRIGADE

app that allows users to identify, locate and track wild elephants.

With one click on the app, users can view the location of nearby elephants and make preparations should the animals approach.

Work on the prefecture's wild elephant monitoring and early warning system began in November, 2019, said Tao Qing, deputy director of the administrative and protection bureau at Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve.

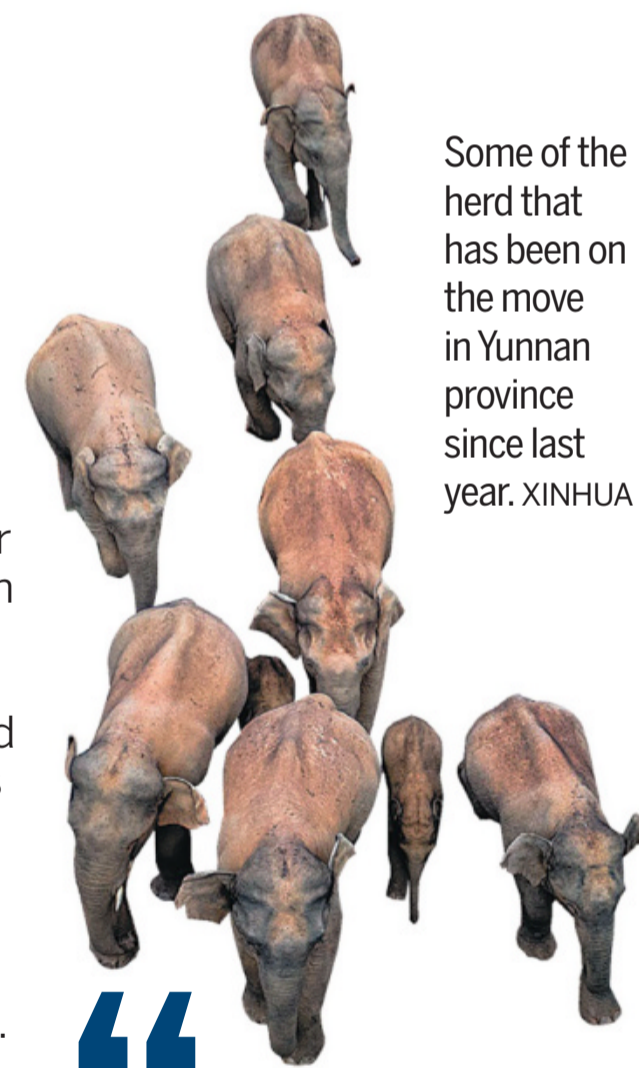
A total of 471 infrared cameras and 142 intelligent broadcasting systems have been installed in protected areas in Jinghong city and Mengla county, along with two sets of video surveillance systems at the Wild Elephant Valley scenic spot, Tao said.

"The system has greatly improved the capacity and efficiency of the local response to human-elephant conflicts."

In addition, it helps provide an effective scientific basis for better protection and management measures and supplies reliable, timely, accurate and complete information support for decision-makers, Tao said.

Warning signs have been placed in areas where elephants are active, and designated personnel are on duty to prevent people from entering such locations and ensure public safety.

Tao said the unmanned aerial vehicle monitoring and early warn-



Some of the herd that has been on the move in Yunnan province since last year. XINHUA

**“ WITH THIS APP,  
IT'S EASY TO  
TRACK THE  
MOVEMENTS OF  
THE ELEPHANTS  
DAILY. IN THIS  
WAY HUMANS  
AND ELEPHANT  
CONFLICTS CAN  
BASICALLY BE  
AVOIDED.”**

**LI CHAO**, A VILLAGER IN MENGLA



ing platform now has more than 200,000 users and more than 41,200 followers on the social media app WeChat.

Li Chao, 47, of Manzhuang village, Mengla, said: "With this app it's easy to track the movements of the elephants daily. In this way human and elephant conflicts can basically be avoided."

A herd of wild elephants roaming through Yunnan has recently been making headlines worldwide. The herd traveled about 310 miles from its forest home in Xishuangbanna before reaching Kunming, the provincial capital, on June 2. It was still roaming in the city of Yuxi as of June 24.

For more than a month, authorities sent police to escort the herd, cleared roads to facilitate their passage, and used food to distract them from entering densely populated areas.

Wang Qiaoyan, a senior engineer with the scientific research institute at Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, said there is no evidence that the elephants' habitat has been destroyed.

"Fragmentation is a factor that causes wild elephants to frequently enter villages for food. Nature reserves are scattered in different counties and cities and not connected with each other."

Wang, who has researched

Asian elephants for 23 years, said recent studies have shown that their numbers are rising in Xishuangbanna, thanks to the effective management of nature reserves, increased public awareness and a lack of poaching. The total number of Asian elephants has risen from about 170 in the 1980s to about 300 now.

Elephants are intelligent and have good memories. If they reach a location and are unable to pass through it, or there is no good feeding on the way, they may choose to return to their forest home in Xishuangbanna.

"This process may take a long time, and in the absence of human intervention the herd may continue to search until it finds a suitable habitat," Wang said.

Li Zhongyuan, head of the Xishuangbanna Wildlife Conservation Station, said the prefecture has done a lot to protect wild animals and plants. It has adopted local laws and regulations to protect them and strictly enforces state and provincial laws.

"Local residents have greatly raised their awareness of wildlife protection over the years," Li Zhongyuan said.

In August, 2015, Yangniu, one of the most popular elephants in the area, was found by villagers after being abandoned by its mother. Before being rescued by veterinarians, the animal was treated and fed by residents.

Yang Hua, deputy director of the flora and fauna department at the Yunnan forestry and grassland bureau, said wild elephants have ventured farther afield as conservation efforts have been stepped up.

In the 1990s the elephants were located in three counties and 14 towns, but by the end of last year they had been reported in 12 counties and 55 townships, he said.

In 2003 the Xishuangbanna Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center was established, and Yunnan set up a technical rescue team for elephants in the wild.

Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve has collaboration agreements with three provinces in northern Laos, forming five joint protection areas covering a total of nearly 51 square miles to ensure the safety of cross-border elephant habitats.

## Itinerant elephant bathes in shower of fatherly love

BY ZHANG YANGFEI and LI YINGQING

Xiong Chaoyong is a father not only to his 10-year-old daughter, but also to an 18-year-old Asian elephant called Ranran.

Xiong, 39, has been working as an elephant caretaker at the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province, for 13 years. He and other 25 people working at the center are known as *daxiang baba*, elephant dads, because of their years of dedication to rescuing and looking after wild Asian elephants that have been abandoned by their herds or injured.

The center, the only research institute in China that specializes in rescuing and breeding Asian elephants, has saved 24 elephants since it opened in 2008.

Every day starting at 8 a.m., these guardians check the elephants' urine and feces and measure their body temperature before guiding the animals into the forests for wilderness survival training.

In 2005 Xiong joined a rescue team of 80 and went to Xishuangbanna, where he met Ranran for the first time.

Ranran's left hind foot had a wound that was about 8 inches wide and had festered badly due to infection. She was also so skinny that her ribs were protruding, and she struggled violently when people tried to approach her.

The rescue team calmed her down with anesthesia.

However, for a long time Ranran refused to cooperate with the treatment, and her condition failed to improve.

Following the advice of traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, Xiong began using Yunnan Baiyao, a local TCM formula for healing wounds, and *pu'er* tea, which is believed to have an anti-inflammatory effect. After almost six months Ranran finally began to improve.

In the following months, Xiong accompanied Ranran all the time, feeding her, talking with her and singing to her. He even moved his bed to a makeshift shed and watched over her at night.

Over the years Xiong has treated Ranran as his own child. Their connection built up to a point where Ranran followed Xiong wherever he went. On a rainy day in 2010 Xiong and Ranran walked side by side on a mountain. Xiong accidentally slipped, and just as he was about to fall, Ranran extended her trunk to steady him.

After Ranran had fully recovered Xiong began to train her survival skills by taking her into the rainforest during the day, releasing her, and then finding her and bringing her home at night. The ultimate goal is to return the elephants to the wild.

"The rescue work of Asian elephants still has a long way to go," Xiong said. "We are constantly learning. We don't know what it will be like in the end, but we will do whatever we can to help."



Xiong Chaoyong checks the teeth of an elephant in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province, on June 12. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

**CHINA WATCH**

PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中國日報

**GREAT WALL'S SECRETS**

Conservation work  
produces rich rewards  
for archaeologists

**BY WANG KAIHAO**

Time has taken its toll on the Jiankou section of the Great Wall in Beijing, which was built after emperors in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) issued orders for their land to be defended against nomadic people to the north.

The structure once towered over cliffs in what is now the city's Huairou district, but over the centuries its fortified watchtowers were eroded by the weather. Water seepage and heavy vegetation also damaged the wall.



Workers clear the surface of the Jiankou section of the Great Wall to prepare for archaeological studies. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A statue excavated from the Qingpingbu site in Shaanxi province. XINHUA

Known for its rugged beauty, Jiankou, meaning arrow's notch, the end of an arrow that rests against the bowstring, has a reputation for being the toughest section of the Great Wall in Beijing to climb.

In 2018 a conservation project was launched in Jiankou to prevent loose parts of the wall from collapsing. For Zhang Jianwei, an archaeology professor at Peking University, this was a precious opportunity to view the structure at close quarters and delve into its history.

Over the past three years Zhang's team has carried out archaeological investigations on

a 2,624-ft.-long section of the wall in Jiankou, including four watchtowers.

The team divided this section into 269-square-ft. excavation units and conducted research in each one. Bricks and stones that have fallen from the wall are cleaned and scrutinized before being returned to the structure after restoration work.

"Cultural heritage has its own life," Zhang said. "Each renovation project over the years has been an intervention in the wall's life, providing crucial information.

"As we have had to intervene in its life again through this project, it's essential to first decode the

information through our work as archaeologists. We can then understand how the wall's original appearance has changed and gain an insight into its present condition. This will greatly help with conservation work.

"We've basically figured out how the watchtowers were built, used and became damaged. This has provided key clues for our architectural studies."

The conservation project has also been helped by a new digital survey platform that analyzes aerial photographs of the site.

"Through digitization, conservation can be managed and evaluated with a more scien-

**Subaquatic magic****BY CHEN NAN**

An ancient and legendary tale of romance is given a new setting and still provides enthralling viewing for a modern audience.

In a manner of speaking, it is not of this world. Fittingly for a legend, it is not constrained by the normal forces of gravity, nor will it be impeded by the weather.

The alluring tale is portrayed in what seems like slow motion.

*Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River*, a signature work by Cao Zhi, the son of Cao Cao, a warlord of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), tells of a son's enchantment with the goddess of the Luo River. She is believed to be the daughter of emperor Fuxi of prehistoric legend, who became a nymph after

drowning in the river, a tributary of the mighty Yellow River.

Her story has inspired countless contemporary artists, who have portrayed the goddess of peerless beauty through various art forms, such as movies and dance dramas.

On June 12 the Goddess of the Luo River came alive in a video distributed by Henan TV Station on the social media platform Sina Weibo. It has been viewed millions of times.



The Goddess of the Luo River in the video titled *Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY

tific approach. To a large extent, scattered bricks and stones that have been unearthed can be recycled for restoration work.”

The material used to build the wall has been retained as much as possible, and a principle of minimum intervention was adopted for the project, Zhang said.

Shang Heng, a researcher at the Beijing Archaeological Research Institute, said the 323-mile section of the Great Wall in Beijing passes through six districts along the Yan mountains. A small part of the structure dates back to the 6th century, but most of it was built during the Ming Dynasty.

The watchtowers and lower stones were put in place in the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly during the reign of Emperor Yongle, who moved the national capital from Nanjing, in what is now Jiangsu province, to Beijing.

Reinforced brick walls were not erected on a large scale until the mid-16th century, during the reign of Emperor Jiajing. The structure's defenses were further strengthened during the reign of Emperor Wanli (1573-1620), when the Jiankou section was built.

Zhang Zhonghua, deputy director of the Beijing institute, said: “Studying archaeology on the Great Wall is an interdisciplinary program that also involves studies of ancient architecture and the surrounding environment.

“These studies enable us to figure out the type of risks that threaten the stability and safety of the wall, helping us draft plans to



The remains of a tower erected on the Great Wall during the Ming Dynasty unearthed in Yanqing district, Beijing, in 2018. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“**CULTURAL HERITAGE HAS ITS OWN LIFE. EACH RENOVATION PROJECT OVER THE YEARS HAS BEEN AN INTERVENTION IN THE WALL'S LIFE, PROVIDING CRUCIAL INFORMATION.**”

**ZHANG JIANWEI**, ARCHAEOLOGY PROFESSOR AT PEKING UNIVERSITY



A roof decoration unearthed from the Qingpingbu site in Shaanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

prevent potential threats.”

Construction of the Great Wall took more than 2,000 years, from the Qin (221-206 B.C.) to Han (206 B.C. to A.D. 220) dynasties and in the Ming Dynasty.

The wall is 13,170 miles long and passes through 15 provinces, administrative regions and municipalities, the National Cultural Heritage Administration says. About 5,550 miles of the wall was built during the Ming Dynasty.

In January 2019 a master plan for the structure was published by the State Council. The aim is to comprehensively guide

protection, renovation, management and academic research related to the wall until 2035.

In July 2019 a national plan to establish Great Wall cultural parks was published. Since then the National Cultural Heritage Administration has listed 83 key sections of the structure as candidates for these parks, and about 20 projects for such venues have been approved this year.

Chai Xiaoming, director of the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, said: “Because the Great Wall is a cultural icon in China, most Chinese people think they're familiar with it. In fact, we aren't. Its specific cultural value still needs to be better explained and studied in depth.”

Archaeologists are particularly interested in a 6-mile section of the wall built during the Ming Dynasty in Jingbian county, northern Shaanxi province. The section is home to the Qingpingbu site, a castle ruin buried in sand.

Numerous porcelain pieces unearthed at the site are evidence that the castle was situated on a regular trade route.

Yu Chunlei, a researcher at the Shaanxi Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology, said: “As a result of booming trade, there was frequent communication among different cultures and ethnic groups in this area. The Great Wall thus became a crossroads where agrarian culture to the south and nomadic culture to the north mixed, forming a shared community of Chinese civilization.”

But the reason the video, which is titled *Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess*, created such an impression and has generated such a wave of publicity is that it was shot underwater. He Haohao plays the role of goddess. She masters not only her art but the technique of holding her breath as her lungs struggle to carry out their function. All this is done with the most serene expression.

The tale captures the en-

chanting appeal of that ancient Chinese goddess, whom Cao Zhi said was “as elegant as a startled swan goose and as supple as a swimming dragon”.

“The performance is amazing and almost dreamlike,” one viewer wrote on Sina Weibo. “It vividly brings a flying fairy alive.”

Another viewer wrote: “The combination of underwater cinematography and traditional Chinese dance is so beautiful, which enables viewers to appre-

ciate traditional Chinese culture in a fresh way.”

He Haohao said she read a number of books about ancient Chinese goddesses and was inspired by flying fairies portrayed in the mural paintings of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang city, Gansu province.

To control buoyancy she wears specially adapted weights of about 22 pounds to help her stay submerged. She also tied fishing lines to her costumes to

prevent the material from becoming entangled under water.

Without the use of breathing apparatus, she took a large gulp of air before entering the water.

“It took the team about 20 seconds to fix my long robes in the water, which are made of silky cloth. The longest piece of cloth is about 20 ft. Then I danced in the water and held my breath for another 20 to 40 seconds. We repeated that process many times.”

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# Time

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY WESLEY ALLSBROOK FOR TIME

## BOOKS

# How to write a romance novel in 2021

By Annabel Gutterman

**L**INGERING TOUCHES AND STOLEN GLANCES, JAW-dropping revelations and long-awaited reunions—the pleasures of romance novels abound. Yet for so long, one of the most popular (and lucrative) genres in publishing has centered stories by, for and about a homogeneous set of women, bolstering the stereotype of straight white women as the romantic ideal and cementing the economic power of writers who share that identity.

But despite long-standing systemic inequities, a growing set of authors has recently found success with swoony love stories featuring characters from backgrounds that reflect the diversity of the world we live in. Writers like Jasmine Guillory, who is about to publish her sixth novel in less than four years, and Tia Williams, whose latest novel was selected for Reese Witherspoon's book club, celebrate Black women as romantic leads. Helen Hoang populates her best-selling fiction with neurodiverse characters, while Casey McQuiston, whose debut novel is set to be adapted by Amazon, fills her slightly fantastical worlds with queer characters. And with the door to more inclusive storytelling cracked open in the industry, newcomers like debut authors and real-life wives Mikaella Clements and Onjuli Datta are preparing to enter the scene. TIME spoke to these six romance authors about the evolution of the genre, the craft of writing and the novels that changed their lives.

**We all have books that have shaped our perspectives. What was the first romance novel you ever read?**

**ONJULI DATTA:** I stole my mum's copy of Sophie Kinsella's *Can You Keep a Secret?* when I was way too young for it, and I was obsessed. There's this scene where the heroine steals a scallop from the hero's plate at dinner that I still think about when writing food—it was such a simple, sexy moment amidst the hijinks and drama.

**TIA WILLIAMS:** *A Rose in Winter* by Kathleen Woodiwiss. I was 8 years old, and way too young to be reading a sweeping bodice ripper. But the story definitely left its imprint on the fiction I'd grow up to write: high-stakes, ultra-dramatic, live-or-die, unreasonably romantic love stories.

**What are the biggest misconceptions people have about the genre—and about writing it?**

**HELEN HOANG:** Lots of people think romance is cheap, trivial and the literary equivalent of pornography. To me, it's an escape, catharsis, a bridge to build empathy, even a political or social statement, all while providing a full mind, heart and body experience.

**JASMINE GUILLORY:** There's this idea that all romances are the same. Just because they all have happy endings doesn't mean the books are the same. What *happy* means is different for everyone.

**What's the worst writing advice you've ever received?**

**HOANG:** "Write every day." As someone who struggles with mental-health issues, sometimes writing or working is the last thing I should be doing. Sometimes, in order to write better, I need to stop for a while and give my mind time to heal.

**CASEY MCQUISTON:** To write toward broad market appeal, even if your

heart's not in it. I don't think you can make good art when your main priority is selling it. Write what you want to write and what you want to read.

**WILLIAMS:** Stephen King is my absolute writing idol, but he feels that fiction writers should remove adverbs from their arsenal. How else do you explain that someone "groaned inwardly" or "sighed softly"?

**You all tell stories that combine the fun and levity of romance with social commentary. How do you find a balance between the two?**

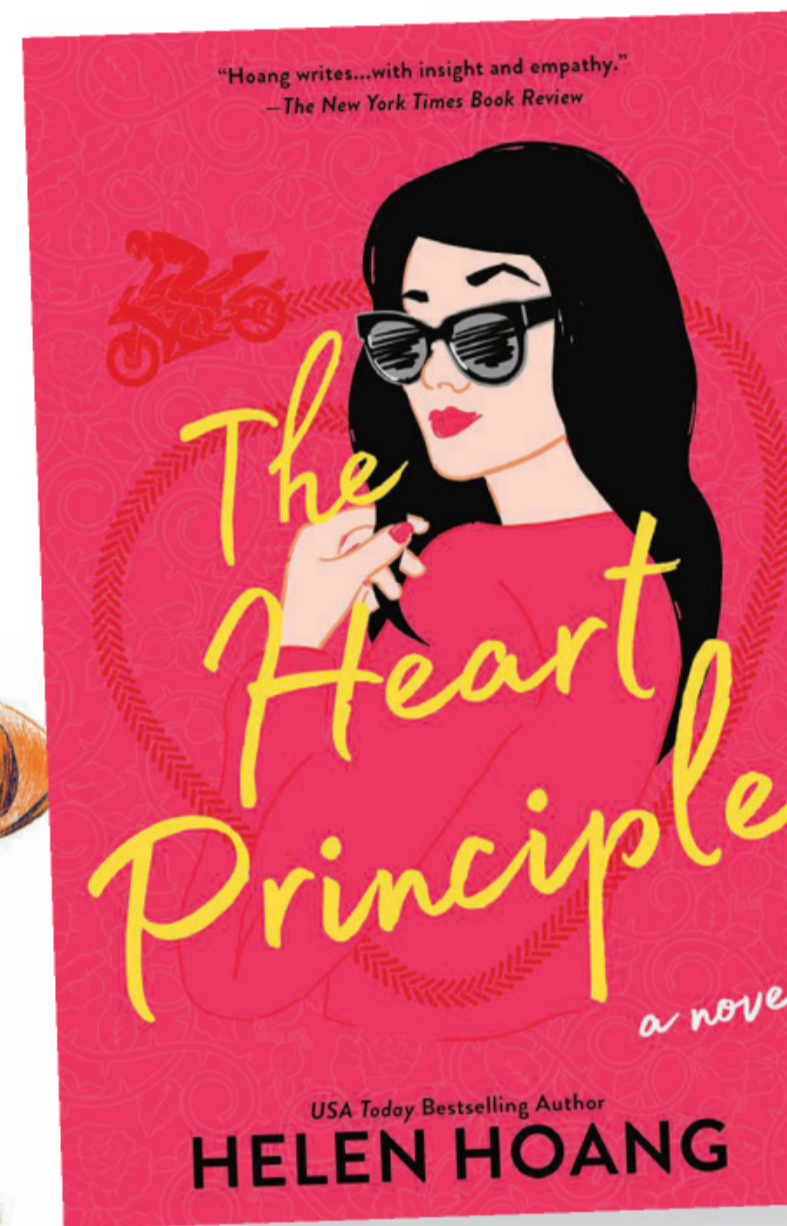
**WILLIAMS:** Honestly, it's tough to be a Black female writer in 2021 and not have a lot to say, social-commentary-wise, no matter the genre you're writing in. Black



Two hit authors reunite 15 years after a steamy affair, with just seven days to reconnect



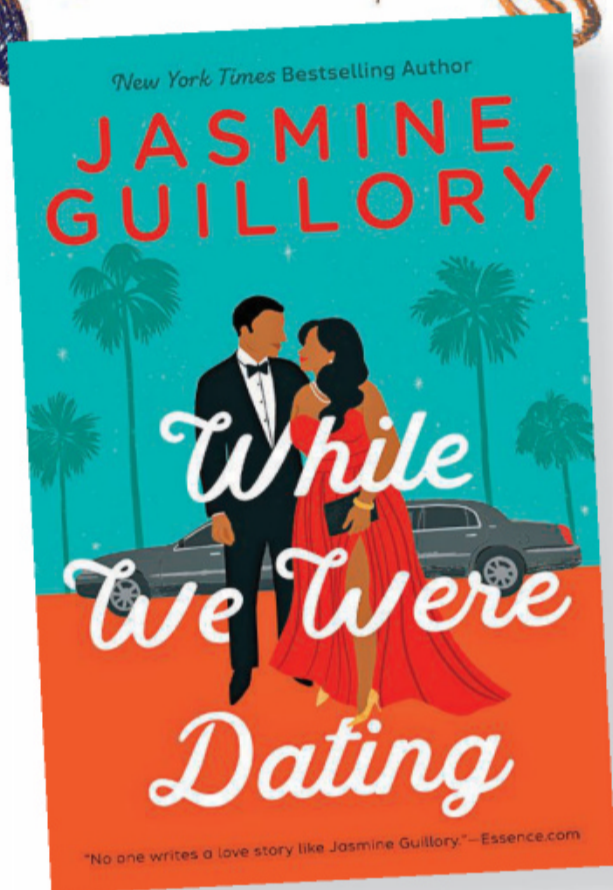
A years-long fake relationship between two celebrities approaches a breaking point



A burned-out violinist navigates a new romance with the most unexpected of suitors



Strangers on the subway fall hard for each other—only to discover one is stuck in time



Dating for the cameras has complicated consequences for an actor with a static career



**'It's an escape, catharsis, a bridge to build empathy.'**

**HELEN HOANG,**  
on the power of romance novels

**Helen, why is it important to you to portray neurodiverse characters in your work?**

**HOANG:** That is my life experience, and writing helps me to better understand myself and process what I've been through. At the same time, it's important to share this perspective with readers so they may either see themselves, if they're neurodiverse as well, or understand and develop empathy and lose the sense that autistic people are "other."

**A lot of your books describe sex in visceral and sometimes intense terms. Striking the right tone to avoid cheesiness and make readers invest in**

**these moments seems super difficult. How do you approach those scenes?**

**GUILLORY:** Sex scenes are part of the way I tell the story of this couple—who they are and how they relate to one another. I want sex scenes to feel fun and exciting, yes, but also to tell the reader something about these characters and their relationship. Is that character emotional? Uptight? Funny? How do these people feel about one another?

**Tia, the protagonist of your new book, Eva, is a famous erotica novelist. How does your approach to writing sex scenes compare with hers?**

**WILLIAMS:** I thought it'd be interesting and funny to write a character who invents ultra-steamy sex scenes for a living—and yet hasn't had sex in ages. At the time I was writing *Seven Days*, I was extremely single, like Eva. So our sex-scene strategy was pretty much the same: lots of imagination and wish-fulfillment fantasy.

**Mikaella and Onjuli, as a gay couple, what was it like writing about a straight relationship?**

**MIKAELLA CLEMENTS:** It was fascinating to navigate our characters through the many layers of power, desire and difference which exist in a straight relationship and examine the tensions that might arise. At the same time, there are many things about love which are universal.

**Does every romance novel need to have a happy ending?**

**GUILLORY:** Not every love story does, but every book called a romance does. When readers are specifically looking for a romance, they want a book with a happy ending.

**HOANG:** When readers trust that everything is going to be O.K. in the end, they open their hearts to experience a wider range of emotion, because they're not protecting themselves from pain. This is something special to the genre.

**DATTA:** The most important thing is to leave your characters in a place where the reader can say goodbye to them, even if they don't want to. □

Lives Matter and #MeToo and whatever the hell the last presidency was—you can't help but infuse reality into your story if it's at all contemporary. But love stories still need to be told.

**MCQUISTON:** For me, it's about finding the sweet spot between suspension of disbelief and punching up. A lot of romance stories take place in settings or under conditions that we may want to challenge in the real world—monarchies, for example—and I like committing to the bit while also subverting the tropes that come with it and inviting the reader to examine them with me.

**HOANG:** Some of my favorite romances are more serious in tone, but I love them for the intense emotions they evoke. Romance with social commentary flows and balances itself very naturally, as social issues create conflict, which in turn inspires emotion, which is the heart of romance. The tricky part for me is in making those emotions inspired by social issues relevant to a love story.



## MOVIES

### Three music docs for a new summer of love

By Stephanie Zacharek

**I**N AHMIR “QUESTLOVE” THOMPSON’S radiant documentary *Summer of Soul*, an account of a star-studded concert series that took place in a Harlem park during the summer of Woodstock but received far less attention, a 50ish gentleman who attended the shows as a kid, Musa Jackson, describes the experience as if it were a dream. Only when he saw footage of the performances, stored away for some 50 years, did he realize how overwhelming this event—a showcase of great Black performers, staged for a nearly all-Black audience—had been. “You put memories away,” he says, “and sometimes you don’t even know if they’re real.”

If part of a musician’s skill is knowing just where to put which notes, the other, more elusive gift is knowing how to spin a dream between performer and listener. This summer, as musicians and audiences alike reacquaint themselves with the pleasures of live music, three documentaries help connect us not just with what it means to be an artist, but also with the equally crucial act of being a listener, of becoming part of the crackling circuit between artist and audience. To be a fan is to be part of a community, and Questlove’s *Summer of Soul*, Edgar Wright’s *The Sparks Brothers* and the Hulu docuseries *McCartney 3,2,1* remind us of the ways music unites us, whether we’re nestled shoulder to shoulder with like-minded people or plugging in more intimately via headphones or AirPods.

In the six-episode *McCartney 3,2,1*, premiering July 16, superstar record producer Rick Rubin sits down with once-and-forever Beatle Paul McCartney to walk through some of the signposts of his career, as well as some songs that simply present the opportunity for an amusing anecdote or two. The series, directed by Zachary Heinzerling, is so relaxed that you almost forget you’re watching a

veritable rock-’n’-roll god in action. One minute he’s sitting at the piano, playing a trio of chords that can be mixed and matched into a nearly infinite garden of delights; the next he’s revealing the secrets of an isolated vocal track laid down practically a lifetime ago.

I know what you may be thinking: Who needs more Beatles stuff? Even people who love the Beatles don’t always love people who love the Beatles, as anyone who’s gone on a first (and last) date with an obsessive Fab Four mansplainer can attest.

But the intimacy of *McCartney 3,2,1* makes it hard not to feel some tenderness for this megastar, now 79, whose band shook something loose in the world. To hear McCartney reflect on the early days is to be reminded that he and his bandmates started out as kids, honing their chops by playing live shows in humble venues. They didn’t even have a tape recorder to help them work out their ideas. “We were writing songs that were memorable not because we wanted them to be remembered,” McCartney tells Rubin, “but because we had to remember them. A very practical reason, really.”

*In Summer of Soul, members of the 5th Dimension take flight, with fringe, at 1969’s Harlem Cultural Festival*



**YET FANDOM**, even at the level inspired by the Beatles, is never an end in itself. It’s also a beginning, an open door to rapture, to finding your place in the world—and, sometimes, to creating new work that builds on the old. Filmmaker Edgar Wright (*Shaun of the Dead*, *Baby Driver*) has long adored the art-pop act known as Sparks, and *The Sparks Brothers*, now in theaters, covers the duo’s 50-plus-year career in voluminous, affectionate detail.

Brothers Ron and Russell Mael are the performers behind Sparks: born and raised in Los Angeles, they started their first band there in 1968, though their career didn’t ignite until they decamped for London. Circa 1974, the time of the duo’s first big U.K. hit, “This Town Ain’t Big Enough for Both of Us,” Russell was a string-bean glam rocker with a curly mop of hair, a teenybopper idol spinning out semisurrealist lyrics. Ron, glowering behind the keyboard, favored a narrow smudge of a mustache that’s either Hitlerian or Chaplinesque, depending on your mood.

Although this sounds like an unlikely formula for success, Sparks has endured. The Mael brothers continue to make and release strange, innovative albums, and they’ve written a movie, *Annette*, directed by Leos Carax, which was chosen as this year’s opening film at Cannes. And while their brand of avant-garde weirdness has attracted loyal fans over the years, their influence may be best measured by the number of musicians and bands they’ve inspired. The movie’s trailer touts Sparks as “your favorite band’s favorite band,” and sure enough, one artist after another shows up in *The Sparks Brothers*—Beck, Thurston Moore, Flea—to pay homage. Over the years, clueless critics have at times accused Sparks of stealing musical styles they in fact originated. They were so ahead of their time that they were practically ahead of themselves.

Artists reach us by surprising us, even if that just means telling us old stories in new ways. But *Summer of Soul*, now in theaters and streaming on Hulu, shows us another side of that equation: the way an audience’s mere presence—its energy and love,



^  
*Rubin and McCartney illuminate Beatles magic in the Hulu docuseries McCartney 3,2,1*

manifested in a sea of faces and bodies—can reach an artist, perhaps moving him or her to tears.

*Summer of Soul*, which broke the sales record for documentary acquisitions out of Sundance after winning major awards there in January, is Questlove’s account of a series of concerts known as the Harlem Cultural Festival, held during a six-week span in the summer of 1969. The location was Harlem’s Mount Morris Park—now known as Marcus Garvey Park—and the turnout for these free shows was spectacular. A festival producer and filmmaker named Hal Tulchin filmed the performances, resulting in 40 hours’ worth of material. But Tulchin couldn’t interest anyone in releasing the footage commercially, and it languished until Questlove rescued it. He has artfully assembled that footage here, combining it with present-day accounts from people who were there, either performing or watching from the audience.

**IT’S HARD TO BELIEVE**—or maybe it isn’t—that a festival with so many showstoppers has eluded mass attention until now. A very young Gladys Knight, already possessed of a very big voice, storms the stage with her Pips. Stevie Wonder, at the time only 19 and

dressed in a killer apricot and chocolate suit-and-shirt combo, starts a number on the keyboards before wending his way over to the drums—because he can play those too, so why not? Sly and the Family Stone breeze onto the stage like a gust of psychedelic butterflies. Mahalia Jackson, dressed in a hot pink caftan like a heaven-sent cloud, soars high with Martin Luther King Jr.’s beloved “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” a young Mavis Staples, awestruck, singing at her side.

All of these acts are extraordinary. But the real miracle of *Summer of Soul* is the audience, vast and varied and nearly all Black: whole families had come to the park, picnics in tow. We see giddy toddlers wriggling and jiggling, taking to heart Sly Stone’s entreaty to dance to the music. Some young women wear neat shift dresses and straightened tresses; others splash out in African prints, their hair natural, a style that had only recently become popular, in parallel with the Black Power movement. This audience, standing together and filled with joy, was marking the creation of a new world, one that’s still coming into being half a century later.

One of the festival’s younger, groovier acts was the 5th Dimension, who’d

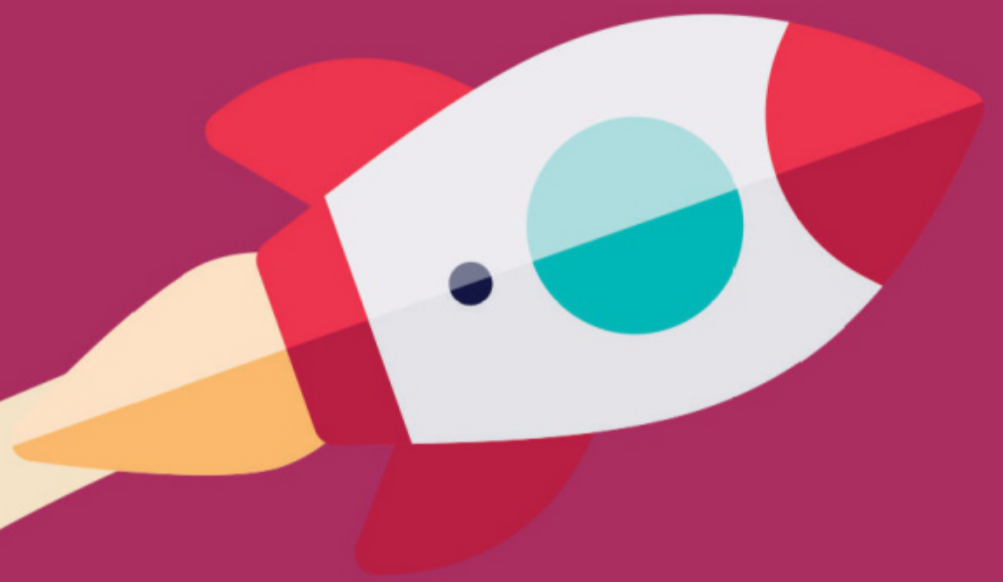
recently scored a No. 1 record with their floaty medley of “Aquarius” and “Let the Sunshine In” from *Hair*. A few years earlier, they’d released an album keyed to another huge hit, Jimmy Webb’s “Up, Up and Away.” The album’s cover featured the group huddled together—wonderfully, ridiculously—in the basket of a hot-air balloon.

In one of the most moving sequences of *Summer of Soul*, the 5th Dimension’s Marilyn McCoo, interviewed in the present day, explains why she and the other members of the group—including her husband, the thoroughly charming Billy Davis Jr., who also appears in the film—were so happy to be invited to perform at the festival. Among Black audiences, McCoo says, there was a sense that the 5th Dimension “weren’t Black enough.” It meant a great deal to her and her fellow musicians to play before, and feel embraced by, her own people.

As McCoo and Davis watch younger versions of themselves on a screen that we can’t see, McCoo says—betraying the shyest trace of a tear—“We were so happy to be there.” And so the dream circuit between audience and artist is complete, so cosmically whole, it’s impossible to tell where one begins and the other leaves off. □

**It’s hard to believe—or maybe it isn’t—that a festival with so many showstoppers has eluded mass attention until now**

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◀ *The long-suffering staff of the White Lotus (including Bartlett, far left, and Rothwell, center) greets the latest boatload of guests*

## TELEVISION

### Vacation, all they never wanted

By Judy Berman

VACATION IS NO PANACEA. IT'S A BREAK FROM WORK, SURE, for those who can log off. But our real troubles, the ones that infect our most intimate relationships, can't be checked at the front desk of any five-star hotel. They follow us, like human remains in the cargo hold of a plane packed with tourists.

This grim metaphor constitutes the opening scene of *The White Lotus*, a darkly funny, existentially terrifying HBO miniseries from writer, director and actor Mike White. In a Hawaii airport, a couple interrogates a somber-looking man (affable Jake Lacy in frat-boy mode) about his honeymoon at the White Lotus resort. "Our guide told us someone was killed there!" the woman exclaims. Yes, says the groom; the body is being loaded onto the plane. Then they ask where his bride is.

Though it's tempting to theorize, the show takes its time returning to who died and how. Flashing back to a week earlier, it follows a handful of VIPs—including Lacy's Shane and his wife, struggling journalist Rachel (Alexandra Daddario)—at the resort. If the newlyweds bring their incompatibility as baggage, then weepy Tanya (an astounding Jennifer Coolidge) has only her mother's ashes to declare. Trailing powerful executive Nicole (Connie Britton) are her emasculated husband Mark (Steve Zahn), their screen-addicted teen son Quinn (Fred Hechinger) and their snarky socialist daughter Olivia (*Euphoria*'s Sydney Sweeney), who's brought a college pal (Brittany O'Grady). The girls are as hypocritical (Olivia calls Hillary Clinton "a neoliberal and a neocon") as they are hilarious.

Coordinating their stay is resort manager Armond (Murray Bartlett). Smooth with guests and exacting but philosophical with staff, he starts to unravel when a new hire goes into labor.

Armond's idea of good service is aptly infantilizing. Guests, he says, "get everything they want, but they don't even know what they want." No one understands this better than spa director Belinda (Natasha Rothwell), whose compassion charms Tanya.

**YES, THIS IS** a hell-is-other-people story. What makes it thrilling is the way it filters that conceit through White's singular sensibility. Like his previous HBO show, cult classic *Enlightened*, *The White Lotus* is uniquely attuned to characters' internal conflicts, their varying levels of self-awareness and how that inner life shapes their interactions. Shane has no idea he's a jerk. Tanya knows she's a disaster and tries to warn others. Staffers don't have the freedom to blurt out their own private thoughts. It's when the appetites and resentments they've repressed come to the surface that the White Lotus spins out of control.

There are political elements at play. While the guests are mostly white and straight, the staff is Indigenous, Black and queer. The lofty principles characters espouse dovetail conveniently with their own self-interest; Olivia clearly bashes Hillary to rile her mom. But would she or any of the guests truly give up their privilege if given the chance?

For all its insight, *The White Lotus* is still a summer-vacation romp. It uses the Polynesian backdrop to its fullest; in a luau sequence, the drums and dancing heighten the intensity and absurdity of each dinner conversation. The finely tuned performances heighten the pleasure. Much of the humor comes from having characters so vivid, we can sense when they're struggling to maintain outward calm while raging internally.

It's an approach *Succession* fans will surely appreciate. If the butt of that show's jokes is corporate decadence, then White, who brings more empathy to his satire, has equally profound things to say about the politics of leisure. Even better: he never makes getting to those revelations feel like work.

**'Death is the end of life; ah, why/ Should life all labour be?'**

**ALFRED LORD TENNYSON,** in "The Lotos-Eaters," as quoted in *The White Lotus*

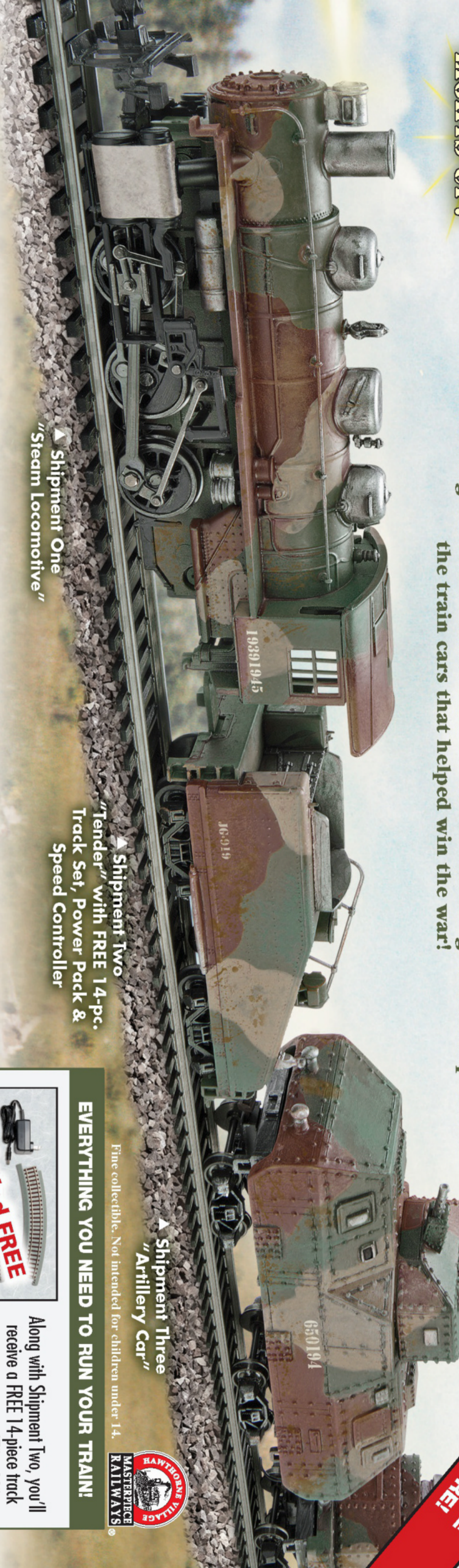
**THE WHITE LOTUS** premieres July 11 on HBO

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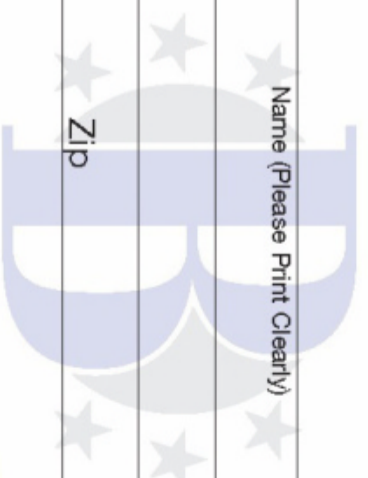
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Serena begat Julien, right

## TELEVISION

### XOXO, Gen Z

*Gossip Girl* was supposed to be gone forever. By the time its anonymous Upper East Side dirt disher issued a final XOXO, in 2012, ratings for the briefly generation-defining CW teen drama had nosedived—perhaps because the recession had made ostentatious wealth uncool. But just as younger millennials did with *Friends*, Gen Z embraced the show without any expectation of realism. Now, as part of its ongoing courtship of that cohort, HBO Max has revived the brand.

Tailored to today's teens, this GG is less “problematic” and more superficially diverse. In place of Serena and Blair, the central frenemies are girls of color: benevolent influencer Julien (Jordan Alexander) and her estranged scholarship-student half sister Zoya (Whitney Peak), late of Buffalo. The lothario is a bisexual party boy (Thomas Doherty). And with teachers driving Instagram drama, the series is less about feuding mean girls than it is about people who know better than to get lured into that fray.

Showrunner Joshua Safran, who wrote for the original, keeps the Whartonian camp flowing. But the toned-down boys are bland, and new love interests lack chemistry. Still, it's surprisingly fine for a show that shouldn't exist. —J.B.

**GOSSIP GIRL** is streaming on HBO Max

## MOVIES

### Street of nightmares

THE 1990S WERE A GOLDEN AGE FOR youth-oriented horror. Teens had flocked to drive-in creature features for decades, but the huge cohort growing up in the calm between the Cold War and 9/11 sought scares in every medium. *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* launched franchises. While teens got hooked on *Buffy*, their kid siblings devoured *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* Books by R.L. Stine and Christopher Pike got passed around schools like contraband.

Now, because the search for unmonetized intellectual property never ends, Netflix is revisiting that era with a movie trilogy based on Stine's *Fear Street*. Less iconic than the author's middle-grade *Goosebumps* books, this bloodier, more mature teen series (which Stine revived in 2014) is set in fictional Shadyside, a normal suburb except for one street afflicted by a centuries-old curse.

The moderately entertaining, nostalgia-soaked *Fear Street* trilogy of filmmaker Leigh Janiak (*Honeymoon*) shifts the premise slightly. In the first film, set in 1994, Shadyside is a hell-hole, scorned by its stuck-up sports rival Sunnyvale. Following a gory intro at a deserted mall that recalls Drew Barrymore's turn in *Scream*, a story coalesces around

an angsty Shadyside band geek (Kiana Madeira's Deena) whose ex-girlfriend (Olivia Scott Welch) has moved to Sunnyvale and started dating a football star. When a thoughtless act of revenge awakens an ancient evil, Deena and her friends must dig into the dark history of their hometown to save themselves.

This makes for well-paced, culturally literate, if generic, slasher fare. Set at a summer camp in 1978, the second and tighter of the two movies sent for review owes much to *Friday the 13th*. (The last installment will turn the clock back to 1666.) Along with references ranging from *Carrie* to *Castlevania*, no-brainer music syncs abound: Nine Inch Nails in '94; “Carry On Wayward Son” in '78. The presence of *Stranger Things*' Sadie Sink and Maya Hawke should ensure youth appeal. Although this formulaic approach is no surprise, I'd hoped for something less calculated. The *Fear Street* movies are nothing more, but also nothing less, than a competent streaming-algorithm copy of the forgettable flicks teens with fewer viewing options once rented on VHS. —J.B.

**FEAR STREET PART 1: 1994** is on Netflix; parts 2 and 3 debut on July 9 and 16



In *Fear Street Part 2: 1978*, campers dig for clues about an ancient evil

# 7 Questions

**Elie Honig** The former prosecutor on his new book, *Hatchet Man*, why Bill Barr went so wrong, and what it will take to clean up Justice

**Y**ou don't mince words here. In the introduction to your book, you call Bill Barr "a liar" and "a political partisan with an extremist dystopian worldview." At what point did you come to this conclusion? As to the part about having this dystopian worldview, that was something I only came to later when I was trying to piece together the question that so many people ask, which is "Why would Bill Barr have taken this job in the first place?" Bill Barr sees himself really as a culture warrior, as somebody whose ultimate mission was not so much to enforce the criminal laws of the United States fairly and impartially, but to impose his own extremist worldview where the only true way to govern societies is with religious belief at the forefront, and secularism is the root of all evil.

**You were in the same boat as a lot of us here in D.C. in that we overlooked what was incoming when Barr was nominated. How did we get that wrong?** I point the finger at myself there. I happened to be on CNN the day that his name was announced. I said something like "He's serious and he is respected and he should be a real upgrade from Jeff Sessions." I did not have knives out and ready for him from the start.

**Time and time again, we saw things that scholars and practitioners like yourself called wrong if not outright unconstitutional. Why did nothing matter?** We as a country vest enormous powers in our prosecutors. The Attorney General holds the most powers of any prosecutor, and so much of our system depends on trusting in prosecutorial judgment and discretion and goodwill. I was taught from a very early age at DOJ that a good prosecutor can do the most good of virtually anyone

“WHEN HE GOT IN OFFICE THIS TIME ... HE REALLY WENT OFF THE RAILS”



in public service and a bad prosecutor can do a huge amount of harm.

**Prosecutors' credibility is the cornerstone of the whole system. How does Attorney General Merrick Garland get us back to that place?** I've been critical of Merrick Garland thus far. I think Garland has not been strong enough, has not been aggressive enough, in correcting the abuses of Barr and the Trump Administration. Garland has made clear that he wants to avoid causing political turbulence at virtually all costs.

**Did Trump hire the absolute worst attorneys available to him?** You're entitled in your personal capacity to hire whoever you want. You suffer the consequences. But when it comes to picking the government's top lawyers, whether it's White House counsel or, most importantly, Attorney General, I think you run into real problems when you're searching for your Roy Cohn. And I think it's quite clear that Bill Barr's audition memo reached Donald Trump and he liked it. In Donald Trump's mind, he had his Roy Cohn.

**Did Bill Barr know better?** He had to have known better. This is a smart man. This is a deeply experienced man. This is a man who was Attorney General once before. He appeared to be an institutionalist. When he got in office this time, though, he really went off the rails.

**Talking about the Roger Stone case, this was the one time in the 80,000 cases that DOJ handles a year that the AG stepped in. Would a jury convict AG Barr for, say, misconduct on that circumstantial evidence?** I don't think Barr committed a crime in intervening in the Stone case. The Attorney General technically has the right to ask for a lower sentence. It's just outrageous that he did that. It's an abuse of his power. —PHILIP ELLIOTT



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