



The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION | MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2020

Why is data on the virus so limited?

Elisabeth Rosenthal
Contributing Writer

OPINION

It has been nearly three months since the first cases of a new coronavirus pneumonia appeared in Wuhan, China, and it is now a global outbreak. And yet, despite nearly 87,000 infections worldwide (most of them in China), the world still doesn't have a clear picture of some of the most basic information about this outbreak.

In recent weeks, a smattering of scientific papers and government statements have begun to sketch the outlines of the epidemic. The Chinese national health commission has reported that more than 1,700 medical workers in the country had contracted the virus as of Feb. 14. (That's alarming.) The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that some 80 percent of those infected have a mild illness. (That's comforting.)

This is an era of mass information, yet we don't really know how many people have the new coronavirus.

data on infections in health care workers. Earlier this month, the editors of the journal Nature called on researchers to "ensure that their work on this outbreak is shared rapidly and openly."

Much more could be known and, in all likelihood, some scientists out there have good, if not definitive, answers. And yet, the lack of consistent, reliable and regularly updated information on the key measures of this outbreak is startling. In an era when Americans get flash-flood warnings on phones and weekly influenza statistics from every state, why is data on the new coronavirus so limited?

Science, politics and pride have all, in various ways, conspired to keep potentially vital, lifesaving knowledge under wraps. That is problematic at a time when more information is needed to be strategic about preparedness.

It began early in the course of the epidemic. On Dec. 30, a Chinese doctor, Li Wenliang, posted about a small number of people with an unusual pneumonia on social media. Though scientists in labs were already sequencing the virus, he was "warned and reprimanded" by local officials for ROSENTHAL, PAGE 11

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.



Afghan soldiers evacuated a wounded police officer in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, in 2010. Some experts believe the Taliban could capture Kabul if American troops leave.

An expedient truce

NEWS ANALYSIS

Trump sees political gain in an Afghan treaty that might not include peace

BY DAVID E. SANGER

President Trump has left no doubt that his first priority in Afghanistan is a peace treaty that would enable him to claim that he is fulfilling his vow to withdraw American troops.

A parade of his former national security aides say he is far less interested in an actual Afghan peace.

And that creates an enormous risk for Mr. Trump and for Afghanistan: that, like President Richard M. Nixon's peace deal with North Vietnam in January 1973, the accord signed Saturday will speed an American exit and do little to stabilize an allied government. In the case of Vietnam, it took two years for the "decent interval," in Henry A. Kissinger's famous phrase, to expire and for the South Vietnamese government to be overrun.

"Trump would not be the first president to exaggerate the meaning of a truce in an election year," said Joseph Nye, an emeritus professor at Harvard whose newest book, "Do Morals Mat-

ter? Presidents and Foreign Policy From F.D.R. to Trump," examines the Vietnam precedent.

In the heat of the 1972 election, Mr. Nye notes, "Nixon made great claims about an imminent peace in Vietnam," and it was only after his re-election — and his resignation — that the image of a frantic helicopter evacuation from Saigon came to mark the failure of a long, costly American experiment.

Afghanistan in 2020, of course, is driven by a different dynamic than Vietnam a half-century ago. But there are haunting echoes.

Three successive American presidents have promised victory in Afghanistan, even if each defined it differently. Each experienced failures of political will and on the battlefield.

President George W. Bush began the Afghan war to hunt down Osama bin Laden in the months after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Yet he soon turned his attention to Iraq and, despite denials by the White House at the time, bled resources from the Afghan effort to fuel his next war.

President Barack Obama called Iraq a strategic mistake, but pledged that America would not lose the "good war" in Afghanistan. Yet his brief "surge" failed to strike a decisive blow. Strategy was soon turned over to a group inside his White House that was nicknamed the "Afghan Good Enough" committee.



President Trump with President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan. The Afghan government, whose survival is at stake, was excluded from the long negotiations with the Taliban.

Mr. Trump has long lamented the cost of "endless wars," and by the time he took up direct negotiations with the Taliban, he knew American voters were interested mostly in one thing: ending participation in a war that has now dragged on for more than 18 years, its objectives always shifting.

When historians look back at the moment, they may well conclude that

Washington ended up much like other great powers that entered Afghanistan's rugged mountains and punishing deserts: frustrated, immobilized, no longer willing to bear the huge costs. The British retreated in 1842 after suffering 4,500 killed, amid massacres that preceded the invention of the roadside bomb. They gave up their sovereignty AFGHANISTAN, PAGE 5

Outbreak a tough foe for central bankers

Investors are looking to the Federal Reserve and its peers as markets plunge

BY JEANNA SMIALEK
AND JACK EWING

Federal Reserve officials and their global counterparts are staring down an economic threat unlike any they have ever faced, as markets look to them to contain the fallout from a rapidly spreading virus with limited ammunition and tools ill-suited to deal with broken supply chains and quarantined consumers.

No playbook exists for dealing with the economic threat posed by the coronavirus, which has already closed factories and impaired companies across the globe.

The outbreak has sickened more than 86,000 people and has been spreading rapidly outside of China, where it first surfaced. Japan, South Korea, Iran and Italy are all battling major outbreaks, in many cases imposing quarantines to contain the spread of the virus. Those lockdowns have disrupted supply chains, forcing companies like Apple and Toyota to idle factories in China and grounding airlines as consumers stayed home, sending stock prices plunging.

In the best-case scenario, the virus is quickly contained and the global economy suffers a hiccup. The American economy is in its 11th year of an expansion, and many economists believe that the underlying fundamentals remain strong and that growth will continue, helping to insulate the United States from a big shock.

Investors are not so sanguine. Stock markets bled through their worst week since 2008, with the S&P 500 index falling 11.5 percent amid worries that the outbreak could become a worldwide pandemic. Should that happen, the Fed and other central bankers are poised to respond. The Fed chair, Jerome H. Powell, issued a rare statement on Friday saying that policymakers would "act as appropriate" to support the economy, which investors and analysts took as a sign that officials would cut rates at their March meeting, if not earlier.

President Trump said on Saturday that the Fed needed to move swiftly.

"I think the Fed has a very important CENTRAL BANKS, PAGE 15

A WUHAN SUBURB BESIEGED BY FEAR

The authorities in an isolated community were particularly ill-prepared for the virus during crucial weeks. PAGE 6

PRESIDENT FACES TEST IN PUBLIC TRUST

Experts fear Mr. Trump has squandered his credibility. With the coronavirus, he faces a reckoning. PAGE 6

A PARTICULARLY TOUGH CHALLENGE

A supply shock is not a problem our usual economic tools are good at solving. But it's the one we face. PAGE 15

Putting her own dent in the universe

CORNER OFFICE

Laurene Powell Jobs exerts her influence over social change

BY DAVID GELLES

Before I could interview Laurene Powell Jobs, she wanted to interview me.

It was an unusual request, but not a particularly surprising one coming from Ms. Powell Jobs. Nearly a decade after the death of her husband, the Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, she remains an intensely private person.

When Mr. Jobs was alive, Ms. Powell Jobs stayed out of the public eye. She ran a natural food company, worked on education and immigration reform, and cared for their family. And while Ms. Powell Jobs has in recent years become increasingly ambitious with her business and philanthropy, she keeps a



Laurene Powell Jobs, whose husband, Steve Jobs, was a co-founder of Apple.

low profile, granting relatively few interviews and eschewing the spotlight. If she were going to agree to a sit-down, she wanted some sense of who would be asking the questions.

So on a cold morning late last year,

we settled onto plush couches in the dimly lit drawing room of the Greenwich Hotel in New York, warmed by a raging fireplace. As she sipped green juice, we spoke about climate change, a shared interest in Buddhism and more. That conversation wasn't on the record. But two months later we settled onto the same couches, by the same fire, and this time my recorder was on.

It soon became clear why Ms. Powell Jobs is careful with her public appearances. In an era of tweets, she speaks in long, discursive paragraphs that weave together personal narrative, politics and her views on social change.

She invokes Dante, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Ross Perot without irony. Her ideas are nuanced, and she doesn't pretend to have easy solutions to complex problems.

Ms. Powell Jobs also believes that, at least in some ways, her husband was misunderstood. The popular interpretation of one of his most popular quotes — "We're here to put a dent in

the universe" — is, she contends, all wrong.

They met in 1989 when Mr. Jobs gave a lecture at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, where Ms. Powell Jobs was studying after a stint at Goldman Sachs. They married two years later in Yosemite National Park, hiking in the snow after the ceremony. Mr. Jobs was running NeXT at the time, having resigned from Apple years earlier. Over the next two decades, he returned to Apple, introducing the iMac, iPod, iPhone and iPad.

As Mr. Jobs was busy upending the personal technology industry, Ms. Powell Jobs founded College Track, which helps underprivileged youths get into college, and Emerson Collective, an umbrella organization for her philanthropic and business interests.

After Mr. Jobs died from cancer, in 2011, she spent several years out of public view. But more recently, Ms. Powell Jobs — the 35th-richest person in the world, worth some \$27.5 billion CORNER OFFICE, PAGE 2

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Issue Number

No. 42,599

Putting her own dent in the universe

CORNER OFFICE, FROM PAGE 1
— has begun to exert her influence.
She acquired Pop-Up Magazine and major stakes in The Atlantic magazine and in Monumental Sports, which owns the Washington Wizards and Mystics basketball teams and the Washington Capitals hockey team. She is working with the former education secretary Arne Duncan to reduce gun violence in Chicago. At the Sundance Film Festival this year, a new documentary studio backed by Ms. Powell Jobs made a splash. It's a diverse set of concerns, and reflects her belief that issues like poverty, education, personal health and environmental justice are all interconnected.

"When you pull one thread, you get the whole tapestry," she said. "When you're working in the social sector, you actually cannot make any lasting forward movement if you're only focused on one thing."
Ms. Powell Jobs, 56, is acting with a sense of urgency these days. She believes that President Trump's statements and policies have unleashed dark forces that are tearing apart the very fabric of society.
"There's been a significant breakdown in Americans' ability to speak to one another and to hear one another," she said. "That's become much worse in the last three years, where there's been full license given to the otherization of our neighbor."

Her conviction has brought Ms. Powell Jobs off the sidelines and into some of the most contentious political fights of the day. A longtime supporter of people brought into the United States as children, known as Dreamers, she bought television ads opposing Mr. Trump's decision to end a program that gave the group temporary protection from deportation. Last year, she said Mr. Trump's attacks on the media were "right out of a dictator's playbook," and went on to give a speech defending independent journalism.

As someone attuned to society's structural inequalities, Ms. Powell Jobs grasps the immensity of her privilege. She is a Silicon Valley billionaire, pushing back against the wealthy occupant of the White House. The very fact that such fortunes exist while others struggle to get by strikes her as unjust.

"It's not right for individuals to accumulate a massive amount of wealth that's equivalent to millions and millions of other people combined," she said. "There's nothing fair about that."

And yet Ms. Powell Jobs is hardly apologetic. "I inherited my wealth from my husband, who didn't care about the accumulation of wealth," she said. "I am doing this in honor of his work, and I've dedicated my life to doing the very best I can to distribute it effectively, in ways that lift up individuals and communities in a sustainable way."

"I'm not interested in legacy wealth buildings, and my children know that," she added. "Steve wasn't interested in that. If I live long enough, it ends with me."

This interview was condensed and edited for clarity.

What was your childhood like?

I grew up in northwestern New Jersey, on a small lake. Behind my house were five miles of watershed property, all wooded with some large boulders. The lake was frozen in the winter, when we ice-skated, and was swimmable and navigable by boat. We had a canoe and this little Sunfish, so I learned the basics of sailing.

The physical environment was a huge influence for me. My mother felt very strongly that kids needed to be outside in the fresh air. If I would try to sneak inside and read a book, she would catch me and lock away my books and force me outside. Just being outside and being surrounded by na-



Laurene Powell Jobs in 2013 surrounded by students from College Track, an organization she founded to help underprivileged youths get into college.

ture was a big, formative part of me.

How did you spend your time when you weren't outside?

I was an early reader. In the first grade, my teacher brought me to the library, and that was my key to the wonderment of the written word.

I took adventures everywhere outside of my little town in New Jersey through books, and it gave me a whole sense of the world and what was going on, and also what was possible for me.

I know your father was a military pilot and died in a plane collision. How did losing him so early affect the family?

My father died the day before his 31st birthday, when I was 3. My mom remarried, so we had a blended family growing up. My stepfather was a high school guidance counselor, and my mother was a substitute teacher for a long time.

It's quite a world-shaping event when you lose a parent in a tragic accident. All of us, my siblings and I, grew up knowing the impermanence of this existence. And while that's very difficult for a child to make sense of, it's the greatest blessing of my life, that I understand the temporal nature of our existence deeply, and the fragility of everything that we witness. To have the gift of the day is a very real and profound thing.

What was your first job?

If we wanted money for anything, we had to earn it. My brothers all had paper routes, and I inherited one of them when I was really young. And then I tried everything that a child can do and get paid for it. On snow days, we'd shovel people's driveways. I was a babysitter. I was a lifeguard. I was a swim instructor. When I turned 16, I first was a bus girl and then a waitress.

How did you first get involved with



Steve Jobs and Ms. Powell Jobs at an Apple conference in San Francisco in 2011. "To pull out any one way in which he affected my worldview is impossible," she said.

social welfare issues?

When I moved to California from New York, I lived in Palo Alto, which is right next door to East Palo Alto. It was a situation where there was one side of the community that was low income, and it has entirely different human outcomes than the other side of the town that might as well be hundreds of miles away. We know about this kind of dichotomy that exists in American cities, and Palo Alto and East Palo Alto are as divided and separated as any of these.

The air quality in East Palo Alto is worse than anywhere around. The land is poisoned. A lot of the Silicon Valley fabricators have used it as their dumping ground over the years. There's arsenic in the water table.

I was completely taken with this notion that there were communities two miles away from my house that, by bad design and bad information flows,

had no chance. It was a structural deficit, and structural deficits actually need to be restructured. Ross Perot had a saying that went something like "Never forget there is a child on the streets in Calcutta today who's dying and who was way smarter than you."

This is your story, but how did Steve influence your thinking on these issues?

I can talk about him for hours. I met Steve when I was 25 years old. And from the day we met, we were together for 22 years. So he influenced everything. I grew up with him. Just like anyone that you share your life with, there's an exchange and a robustness. We had a very, very beautiful and rich connection. We talked a lot, for hours every day. To pull out any one way in which he affected my worldview is impossible, because I have integrated so much of him.

One profound learning I took from him was that we don't have to accept the world that we're born into as something that is fixed and impermeable. When you zoom in, it's just atoms just like us. And they move all the time. And through energy and force of will and intention and focus, we can actually change it. Move it.

People love to quote him saying, "Put a dent in the universe." But that's too flippant. It's too cavalier. He was thinking of it as "We are able, each of us, to manipulate the circumstances." I think about it as looking at the design of the structures and systems that govern our society, and changing those structures. Because those structures, when they're elegantly designed, should be frictionless for people. They shouldn't require you to make huge course corrections that impede your ability to live a productive and fulfilling life. It took me awhile to understand that was truly possible. But that's at the core of everything we do at Emerson Collective. We all believe that it's truly possible.

How did College Track, which was very narrowly focused on education, lead to Emerson Collective, which is working on a much broader set of issues?

I came in through the education door, looking at equity and access of quality education. And of course that was connected to immigration and health and well-being, and clean air, water and soil, and access to opportunity, and also other obstacles that are thrown in the way of impoverished communities, like lack of access to financial services and health services. All of that has to be addressed in a holistic way, and that's why we started building a matrix organization. I wanted our organization to be just as connected as all the issues that we're working on.

Our very first graduating class of seniors at College Track included

students who were undocumented. They only found out when they were applying to college that they didn't have a Social Security number. They had come when they were toddlers. And then we all realized that means that they had to apply as international students. They couldn't access any state or federal funding for education, even though they had grown up here. I thought, this is an obvious glitch in our immigration system. It was obviously a federal law that needed to be changed.

It's been almost 20 years that you've been working on legislation for Dreamers, and yet not much has changed.
Students and I collected signatures and wrote a whole petition in 2002. We brought it to Washington, and Jon Corzine in the Senate and Anna Eshoo in the House brought the petition to the nascent Dream Act legislation. I thought that it would shortly pass and that this wouldn't be an issue that our amazingly talented, promising students would have to be dealing with, and they still are, 18 painful years later. We have, as a country, failed every single time. We have failed to be generous and generative and smart about including all people in America as active citizens or even active residents. It's maddening. Really, it hurts to contemplate. But I am resolved to never give up as long as I live.

Sometimes it seems like Americans with different political views can barely talk to one another these days. How do you think about repairing that?

One conversation at a time. And it often starts with our own families. In my own family, there are Trump supporters. I knew I was going to be with them over Christmas, and I actually want to engage, and want to understand and I want to be able to disagree without being disagreeable. I want to be able to find the areas where we can agree.

How did that go?

We're finding lots of areas of agreement. We can agree on core American values of liberty and dignity and freedom and justice. We can talk about what it means when we're demonizing people who immigrated from their dysfunctional countries, just like everyone we're related to did. What does it mean that we want to shut the door on them? Can we examine that in ourselves, that desire to shut the door? It's not the first time that the demonization of others has been used as a political tactic. And once people remember that, then you can start looking at what Trump is saying a little bit differently.

Something that I find really deeply disturbing is the level of hate speech and hate crimes that are happening in elementary and middle school. And it started three years ago, right away. It's so painful. Children are listening to things that adults are saying, and it's given them permission to repeat. We have this in our own nature. We know this. This is no mystery. So giving airtime to the dark side of our nature is a painful, painful moment.

To what extent does the growing backlash against big philanthropy and billionaires inform your work?

I think about it a lot. It's not right for individuals to accumulate a massive amount of wealth that's equivalent to millions and millions of other people combined. There's nothing fair about that. We saw that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries with the Rockefellers and Carnegies and Mellons and Fords of the world. That kind of accumulation of wealth is dangerous for a society. It shouldn't be this way.

Pulitzer-winning poet had fled Nazi Germany

LISEL MUELLER
1924-2020

BY NEIL GENZLINGER

Lisel Mueller, a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet whose elegant work drew on nature, her experiences as a parent, folklore and history, including her flight from Nazi Germany as a teenager, died on Feb. 21 in Chicago, where she lived in a retirement community. She was 96.

Her daughter Jenny Mueller, who confirmed the death, said Ms. Mueller had been dealing with the aftereffects of pneumonia.

Ms. Mueller won the 1997 Pulitzer for "Alive Together: New and Selected Poems," which appeared some three decades after her first collection, "Dependencies," in 1965.

"Her book is a testament to the miraculous power of language to interpret and transform our world," the Pulitzer citation read. "It is a testament that invites readers to share her vision of experiences we all have in common: sorrow, tenderness, desire, the revelations of art, and mortality — 'the hard, dry smack of death against the glass.'"

The quoted line is from a poem in the collection, "The Power of Music to Disturb." Another in that volume, "On Reading an Anthology of Postwar German Poetry," spoke to how Ms. Mueller's



The poet Lisel Mueller in an undated photo. Many of her poems drew inspiration from the bucolic life she found in Lake County, Ill., north of Chicago.

childhood — she escaped Nazi Germany in 1939 with her mother and sister — had influenced her life and thinking:

*America saved me
and history played me false:
I was not crushed
under rubble, nor was I beaten
along a frozen highway;
my children are not dead
of postwar hunger;*

*my love is back, with his brain
intact; his toes accounted for;
I have forced no one
into the chamber of death.*

In other poems, she drew inspiration from the bucolic life she found in Lake County, Ill., north of Chicago, where she lived for many years with her husband, Paul Edward Mueller, whom she married in 1943.

Language, too, was a favorite subject. "In the new language everyone spoke too fast," she wrote in "Curriculum Vitae," the autobiographical opening poem in "Alive Together." "Eventually I caught up with them."

She did indeed, as she showed in the wordplay poem "Things," from the same volume, here in its entirety:

*What happened is, we grew lonely
living among the things,
so we gave the clock a face,
the chair a back,
the table four stout legs
which will never suffer fatigue.
We fitted our shoes with tongues
as smooth as our own
and hung tongues inside bells
so we could listen
to their emotional language,
and because we loved graceful profiles
the pitcher received a lip,
the bottle a long, slender neck.
Even what was beyond us
was recast in our image;
we gave the country a heart,
the storm an eye,
the cave a mouth
so we could pass into safety.*

Elisabeth Annelore Neumann was born on Feb. 8, 1924, in Hamburg, Germany, to Fritz and Ilse (Burmeister) Neumann. Her father was an educator whose antifascist views earned him scrutiny by the Gestapo, which at one point picked him up for questioning. He

left Germany in 1933, and after stays in several countries he secured a teaching post at Evansville College, now the University of Evansville, in Indiana. In 1939, he was joined by his wife, who was also a teacher, and their two daughters.

Ms. Mueller had to pick up the English language, with all its nuances and metaphors.

"For a long time, I did not make the connection between 'a blanket of blue' and the sky," she wrote in "Learning to Play by Ear," a 1990 collection of poems and essays, "nor did I realize that the 'deep purple' which falls (over sleepy garden walls) was the shadows of early evening."

That, she wrote, "caused me to be left unimpressed by the poets we studied in high school," but then she was introduced to Carl Sandburg's poetry.

"Sandburg's unadorned, muscular, straightforward diction lured me as the painted women under street lamps lured the farm boys in a city named Chicago," she wrote.

But it would be years before she made a serious effort to become a poet herself. First came a bachelor's degree in sociology at her father's university, where she also met Mr. Mueller. Though she had written some amateurish poetry when younger, it was the death of her mother in 1953 that spurred her to get serious about the craft, Ms. Mueller said.

"The great grief made me want to ex-

press myself in a poem," she told The Chicago Tribune in 1993, "and having done that I needed to continue to do so."

She was 41 when her first volume of poetry was published. Among those that followed were "The Need to Hold Still," which won the 1981 National Book Award for poetry.

Mr. Mueller died in 2001. In addition to her daughter Jenny, Ms. Mueller is survived by another daughter, Lucy Mueller, and a granddaughter.

One of Ms. Mueller's most intriguing poems, "Palindrome," from her Pulitzer-winning collection, was inspired by one of her daughter's list of school supplies.

"My daughter was about 6 or 7 and was not sure of the difference between past and future," Ms. Mueller told The Baltimore Sun in 1997. The girl headlined the list, "Things I Will Need in the Past," giving her mother a vision of time moving both forward and backward, a person in one version of reality passing someone — perhaps her double — in the other.

"Somewhere now she takes off the dress I am putting on," it begins. "It is evening in the antiworld where she lives." The poem ends with this image:
*By now our lives should
have crossed. Somewhere sometime we
must have
passed one another like going and
coming trains,
with both of us looking the other way.*

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Turkey and Russia try to ease tensions

ISTANBUL

The 2 nations are battling over which will become the main regional power

BY CARLOTTA GALL AND ANDREW HIGGINS

Russia and Turkey were trying to step back from the brink of a war that neither side wants, after 33 Turkish soldiers were killed in northwest Syria last week by forces backing the government in Damascus.

But tensions between the two nations — one a nuclear power, the other a NATO member — remained high, not just because of the fight in Syria, but more broadly as a contest over who will be the pre-eminent regional power as the United States scales back its global role.

Turkey wants to protect its border with Syria, while Russia wants to show that its military intervention has preserved Syria as a client state. Both sides have said they want to de-escalate, but neither side has been willing to back down, leading to fears of sliding into war. Emotions are running high and the source of their antagonism — the fate of Idlib, the last rebel stronghold in Syria — festers dangerously.

Ivan Kononov, a Russian military analyst in Moscow, predicted that, with Washington out of the game in Syria, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, would, once again, pull back from open conflict and try to settle Syria's future on their own.

Russia and Turkey, he said, "came to a critical point," but "we retain a relationship on the Syrian problem because we don't have any other option, not for Russia, not for Syria."

Russia and Turkey have been here before — teetering on the edge of all-out war, only to make up — but not with so much of their own blood spilled. Can the

Both sides have said they want to de-escalate, but neither side has been willing to back down, leading to fears of war.

Kremlin and NATO's easternmost member once again pull back from the brink?

That is the unsettling question after the deadly attacks last week on Turkish troops near Idlib. That is where the forces of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, aided by Russian warplanes and troops, are battling to crush the only surviving remnant of an antigovernment uprising that started nine years ago with backing from the West.

Mr. Putin and Mr. Erdogan support opposite sides in a Syrian war that has killed up to 400,000 people, and also in the conflict in Libya. Similar in their leadership styles and tough-guy personalities, they have endured nine years of wary cooperation interrupted by venomous breakups over the war in Syria.

Now tensions are high following air and artillery strikes last week on Turkish forces that have plunged relations between Moscow, the Syrian government's main backer, and Ankara into a crisis even deeper than a 2015 rupture precipitated by Turkey's shooting down of a Russian warplane near the Turkish-Syrian border.

Turkey, desperate to keep Mr. Assad's last foes alive and slow the tide of Syrian refugees flooding across its border, is determined to prevent Idlib from falling. But Mr. Putin is just as determined to see it conquered by Mr. Assad so that Moscow can declare victory and end, or at least scale back, an expensive and increasingly risky military operation that is now in its fifth year.

That the dynamic between the two leaders has become so decisive in determining the fate of Idlib, and Syria as a whole, is a measure of how far the United States under President Trump has pulled back not only from messy foreign entanglements but also from its former role as a pre-eminent world power.

With the United States on the sidelines, Russia and Turkey have been haggling over Idlib since September 2018.



A Turkish military convoy in Idlib, Syria. The dynamic between Russia and Turkey has become decisive in determining the fate of Idlib, and Syria as a whole.

when Mr. Putin met Mr. Erdogan in Sochi, Russia, and reluctantly agreed that Mr. Assad's forces, which are also supported by Iran, would hold off on a long-anticipated final assault.

But Moscow's impatience for an end to the conflict has grown steadily as the domestic political gains Mr. Putin enjoyed when he first sent warplanes and tanks to Syria in August 2015 have worn thin.

Reluctant to put Russian soldiers, many of them conscripts, in the line of fire in Syria, Russia has increasingly relied on mercenaries, scores of whom were killed by U.S. forces in February 2018, before President Trump ordered American troops out.

As NATO ambassadors met on Friday in Brussels in an emergency session and European leaders called for calm, Mr. Putin spoke by telephone with Mr. Erdogan in an effort to calm tensions. Mr. Trump also spoke by telephone with Mr. Erdogan and the leaders promised "additional steps to prevent the great humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the Idlib region," according to the Turkish government.

Asli Aydintasbas, a senior fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations, said that NATO would offer "plenty of moral support" to Turkey but that "no one wants to get militarily entangled with Russia." This, she added, meant that "Erdogan will have to fix this with Putin."

Russia said on Friday that it was sending two warships equipped with Kalibr cruise missiles toward Syria's coast in the eastern Mediterranean, but insisted that its forces had played no role in the attack on Turkish troops. That statement contradicted reports from the scene that described a Russian jet striking an Turkish convoy, and then artillery strikes pounding Turkish troops in several buildings.

Mr. Putin's spokesman, Dmitri Peskov, sought to calm tempers in his daily briefing on Friday, insisting that Russia had honored a pledge to safeguard Turkish observation posts near Idlib. He said no Turkish military personnel had been hurt in these outposts, while suggesting that it was Turkey's fault that some of its troops strayed beyond these designated areas into territory controlled by rebels.

Turkish planes, artillery and drones retaliated after the attack, pounding Syrian government positions. "Our operations will continue until the bloody hands laid on our soldiers are broken," said Hulusi Akar, Turkey's defense minister.

While he avoided placing direct blame on Russia, Mr. Akar noted that Thursday's attack had been carried out even though Turkey had coordinated the location of its troops with Russian forces on the ground. He also said there were no rebel groups near the scene of the attack, as the Kremlin asserted.

Moscow denied that Turkey had shared coordinates of its troops with Russian forces, and said that it had tried to stop attacks by Syrian government forces as soon as it was told about them. While Russia appeared eager to dial town tensions, Turkey bristled with fury at the killing of its troops. But no matter how intense its anger, Turkey has limited options. Its NATO allies, with which Turkey has had increasingly strained relations, particularly with the United States, have no appetite for a wider war.

"Turkey cannot fight Russia on its own," said Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He said Mr. Putin, fed up with a grinding war that has only weighed on his popularity at home, "was trying to intimidate Erdogan into submission with this attack."

The two countries, rival empires since the 16th century and adversaries in multiple wars in the 19th century, have in recent years shown a capacity for brinkmanship followed by de-escalation.

Andrew E. Kramer contributed reporting from Moscow.



Iman Khatib Yasin, right, an Arab social worker running for a Parliament seat, campaigning in southern Israel. She is part of the predominantly Arab slate known as the Joint List.

Heading to the polls, hopeful

ABU QUEIDER, ISRAEL

Arab leaders are aiming to improve political clout as Israel votes yet again

BY DAVID M. HALBFINGER AND ALLISON MCCANN

This was no ordinary Israeli politician's campaign stop.

Some 40 Bedouin women sat on plastic chairs in an open-air living room, a muddy desert village of flimsy shacks, tin roofs, wandering chickens and pitted dirt roads providing the backdrop.

Before them, as modestly dressed as her audience, stood Iman Khatib Yasin, a social worker running for a seat in Israel's Parliament on the predominantly Arab slate known as the Joint List.

Voter turnout among Arab women has always been poor, she reminded them, before describing how things could change if they made their voices heard — and if they helped her make history as Israel's first hijab-wearing lawmaker. "If we're a big number," she said, "we're a strength that cannot be ignored."

Israeli Jews generally seem dispirited about having to vote for a third straight time in a year, but for Arab voters and their candidates, Monday's three-peat election is full of hope and promise. Buoyed by a strong showing in September, leaders of the combined Joint List slate are hoping to improve on the 13 seats they won in the 120-seat Parliament, when they helped to nearly topple Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This time, they are hoping to finish the job — and also to apply their growing clout in Parliament to practical concerns like crime, housing shortages and getting dozens of unauthorized Arab villages in the Negev Desert like Abu Queider added to the government's map.

Sensing they have momentum, Arab activists are leaving no stone unturned, no ramshackle community ignored, in a bid to play a decisive role in determining Israel's next government.

Arab voters have no shortage of grievances against Mr. Netanyahu: his support for settlement and annexation of West Bank land, after years of opposing the Oslo peace process; his enactment of a 2018 law that demoted the status of the Arabic language and said only Jews had national self-determination rights in Israel; and his race-baiting over the past year, including claiming that Arabs wanted to "annihilate us all — women, children and men."

A well-financed door-to-door canvassing operation has more than quadrupled in size, with 600 workers visiting 140,000 homes, or about 40 percent of the voting Arab population, according to its director, Samer Swaid.

Mr. Swaid would not disclose the campaign's funders beyond saying that they included wealthy American philanthropists.

Arab turnout had generally been on the decline since Israel's early days, under martial law, when historians say Arab citizens felt pressured to vote. But in September, it reached nearly 60 percent. This time, Mr. Swaid says he is confident it will top 65 percent. "That's potentially 18 or 19 seats," he said.

The canvassers are not affiliated with any party, and Mr. Swaid said two or three new seats might go to non-Arab parties like Blue and White, whose leader, Benny Gantz, nearly defeated



Ayman Odeh, the leader of the Joint List, on the campaign trail. He recently told voters that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was running scared.



Israelis listening to Ahmad Tibi, of the Joint List, at an election event in Tel Aviv. Arab parties hope to improve on the 13 seats they recently won in the 120-seat Parliament.

Mr. Netanyahu in both previous elections. But parliamentary elections are a zero-sum game. Each additional seat the Joint List wins puts a 61-seat majority further out of Mr. Netanyahu's reach.

That mobilization has not gone unnoticed by Mr. Netanyahu, who has attempted a high-speed U-turn over the past week. He posted a verse from the Quran on his Facebook page. He granted an Arab website a video interview, in which he spoke of arranging direct flights to Saudi Arabia so Israeli citizens could save thousands on their pilgrimages to Mecca. He tried to mollify Arab voters outraged by his embrace of the Trump peace plan, which suggested redrawing the borders to give a proposed new Palestinian state sovereignty over the so-called Arab Triangle, a predominantly Arab part of Israel. No Arabs would be "uprooted," Mr. Netanyahu said, though some might find themselves in another country.

And he has started arguing to Arabs that he has made their lives better, while the Joint List's leaders, he says, do little more than drink coffee and express support for terrorists.

In one Triangle town, Qalansawa, the Joint List's leader, Ayman Odeh, told voters last week that Mr. Netanyahu was running scared. The premier's softened tone and empty promises, Mr. Odeh argued, amounted to nothing more than a more benign-sounding form of voter suppression. This was the same Mr. Netanyahu, after all, who tried to silence the nighttime Muslim call to pray-

er a few years ago because he could hear it from his beach house in Caesaria, Mr. Odeh reminded a mostly male crowd.

"He treats us like we're five years old," he said. "He's mocking us. And mockery is the worst form of racism."

Only when Arab protesters closed a major highway last fall did the government finally assign hundreds of police officers to crack down on violence and organized crime in Arab areas, Mr. Odeh said, adding: "On whom else can we depend?"

"They're normalizing themselves as part of the body politic in a way that makes Jews more accepting of them."

A moment later he asked for new volunteers to knock on doors. A dozen hands shot up.

The Joint List is not only courting Arab voters, however. With cheeky Yiddish-language appeals to the ultra-Orthodox and Amharic-language ads to Ethiopian-Israelis, the Arab parties ask for solidarity in fighting racism and discrimination.

And with house parties and town hall meetings catering to liberal Jews, the Joint List is offering itself up as a more vital alternative to the traditional left-wing Jewish parties, Labor and Meretz, which lost so much support over the past year that they had to merge to survive.

In Israeli elections, each party submits an ordered list of candidates, and the seats won by each party are allocated to the candidates in that order. Outside of the Joint List, it is unlikely that any Arab candidate — aside from members of the Druze religious sect, who are viewed more approvingly by Jewish Israelis — will win a seat in Parliament.

From Qalansawa, Mr. Odeh drove 25 minutes to Kfar Saba, a Jewish city of 110,000, where the crowd was bigger and the venue, an apartment living room, too small. There, he appealed to the consciences of Jewish liberals.

"We all need to feel a sense of belonging as citizens," he said. Arab schoolchildren were having to learn about the nation-state law, he noted.

"Imagine the teacher telling an Arab student, you're worth less in this country," he said.

"Jews around the world have stood behind just causes," he added, pointing to the antiapartheid and U.S. civil rights movements. Now, he said, it was time for that at home — for Israeli Jews to "stand by the minority, and strengthen it."

Merely reaching out to Jewish voters is a significant change for Arab politicians, said Shibley Telhami, an expert on Middle East public opinion at the University of Maryland.

"They're normalizing themselves as part of the body politic in a way that makes Jews more accepting of them, even if they don't vote for them," he said. "As you look down the road, could Jews accept them? A slight majority says no, but there are a lot of undecideds. They can help themselves move the needle in the right direction."

For Ms. Yasin, the social worker, it was tough enough to get her own Islamic party, known as Raam, to accept her as a serious candidate.

"They said no women wanted to be in leadership," she recalled in an interview. "I said, 'Have you asked them?'"

Raised in an observant farming family in the Galilee town of Arabba, where a cousin was killed in bloody protests in 1976 that Palestinians commemorate each year, Ms. Yasin said she was "always political." She just did not know it. Only after an Israeli leadership program sent her to Morocco, where she met women lawmakers who were also religious Muslims, did she think of entering politics herself.

She is number 15 on the Joint List, so she will only enter Parliament if the list wins at least that many seats. If elected, she said, she hopes above all to fix Israel's Arab schools. Rather than teaching critical-thinking skills, she said, "They're training children to be passive and oppressed."

But first, there's the matter of turning out the vote.

In Abu Queider, she invoked Islamic teaching to make her case. "Your voice is like a treasure, like a diamond around your neck," she told the women who gathered to see her. "God asks us to take care of our treasures."

Voting in Abu Queider is not easy: It requires as much as an hour's drive to the nearest ballot box, residents said. That's because the village is unrecognized: Along with polling places, it lacks electricity, running water and the possibility of obtaining building permits.

"They do not consider us citizens," she said of the Israeli government, as women nodded their heads. "They treat us like enemies."

David M. Halbfinger reported from Abu Queider, and Allison McCann from London.

Malaysia’s prime minister is replaced

Former leader’s successor has formed a coalition with a corruption-dogged party

BY HANNAH BEECH

Mahathir Mohamad, 94, has dominated Malaysian politics for decades.

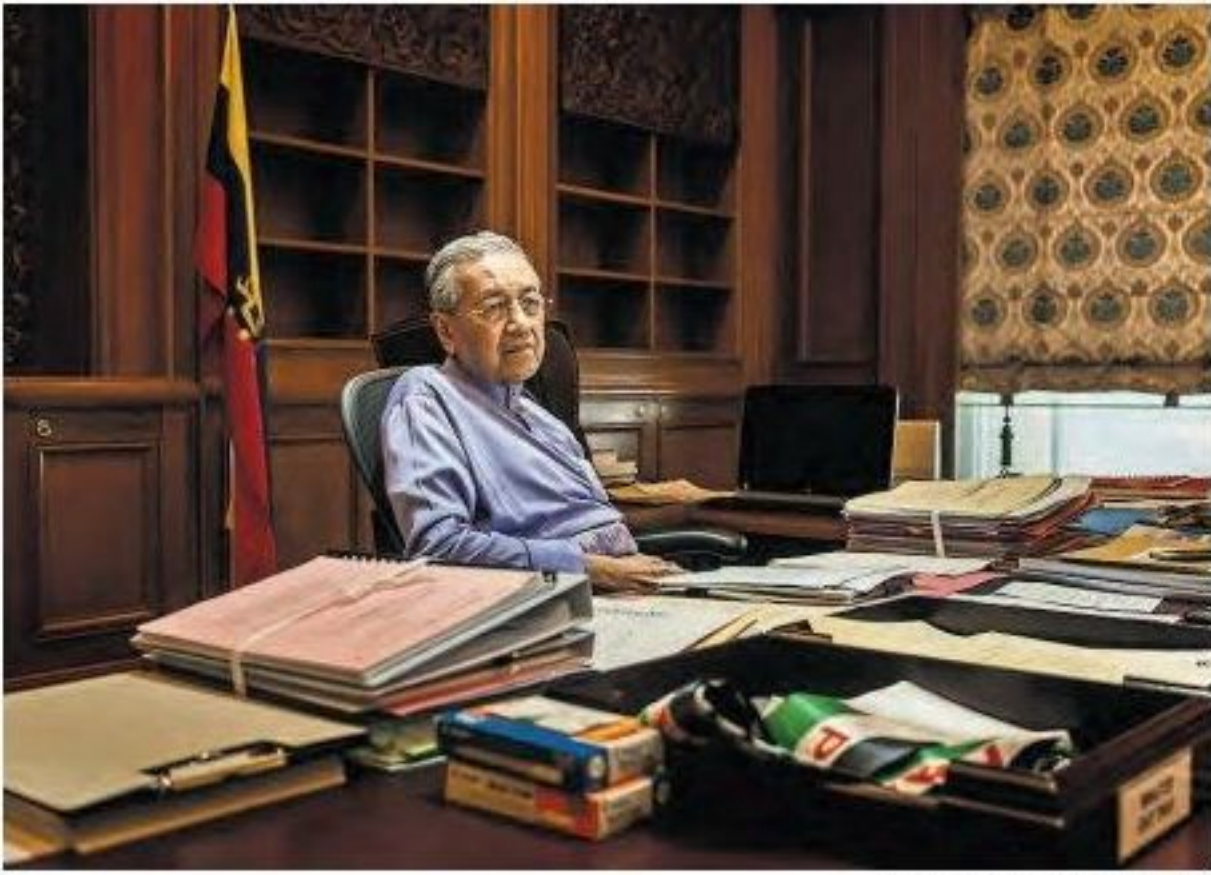
He was the country’s longest-serving prime minister, in office from 1981 to 2003. He was also its shortest-serving, having stepped out of retirement in 2018 to boot out a kleptocratic government, only to resign (briefly) in the past week.

Now Malaysians are contemplating a future without Mr. Mahathir, who was replaced as prime minister on Sunday, a day after the country’s constitutional monarch deemed that he lacked majority support from lawmakers.

Mr. Mahathir was replaced by Muhyiddin Yassin, a veteran nationalist politician aligned with the corruption-tainted alliance that Mr. Mahathir defeated just two years ago.

It was a dramatic cap to a week full of roller-coaster twists, hairpin turns and enough whiplash alliance reversals to leave political analysts dizzied.

On Feb. 24, after his governing coalition, called the Alliance of Hope, collapsed under the weight of internal rivalries and ideological contradictions, Mr. Mahathir resigned, but the king named him as interim prime minister.



ADAM DEAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mahathir Mohamad, 94, has been a towering force in Malaysian politics since 1981. He has threatened a vote of no confidence against the new prime minister.

Then followed a series of political alignments, realignments and yet more realignments, with every half-day seeming to bring a new political reality.

By Saturday morning, it appeared that the remains of the Alliance of Hope, which Mr. Mahathir had cobbled together out of disparate political forces — including Malay nationalists, Chinese re-

formists and liberal Islamists — had coalesced around the nonagenarian ruler yet again.

But with horse-trading still continuing, the king announced on Saturday afternoon that he had met with the nation’s lawmakers and determined that the majority supported Mr. Muhyiddin’s candidacy for prime minister.

“I would like to express my thanks, thanks to Allah, that I have been given the appointment,” said Mr. Muhyiddin, 72.

Mr. Muhyiddin, who has stated that he is “a Malay first” in multiethnic Malaysia, is a leader of the Malaysian United Indigenous Party, which Mr. Mahathir had helmed until less than a week ago.

As the Alliance of Hope fractured, the party stepped across the divide to partner with the United Malays National Organization, or U.M.N.O., the corruption-dogged party that had dominated Malaysian politics for decades.

Mr. Mahathir and Mr. Muhyiddin were both elders in U.M.N.O. but left the party as its leader, Najib Razak, then the prime minister, was accused of orchestrating the looting of billions of dollars from a state investment fund called 1MDB, short for 1Malaysia Development Berhad.

In elections in 2018, U.M.N.O. and its coalition, the National Front, were defeated by Mr. Mahathir’s Alliance of Hope.

Mr. Najib is being tried on various corruption-related charges. He stands accused of one of the most brazen lootings of national assets by a modern-day leader.

On his Facebook page on Saturday evening, Mr. Najib posted a message of congratulations to Mr. Muhyiddin. Mr. Najib had kicked Mr. Muhyiddin out of

his cabinet after he began raising pointed questions about the ballooning 1MDB scandal.

Mr. Mahathir accused Mr. Muhyiddin of betrayal on Sunday morning, criticizing the incoming prime minister for aligning, once again, with U.M.N.O. Mr. Mahathir said he would never partner with such a corrupt party, even if it meant losing power.

Now that forces aligned with Mr. Najib are returning to power, reformists and whistle-blowers are running scared. So, too, are members of minority

“A mono-ethnic, Malay-centric alliance ascending to power is a stark counternarrative” to events of just two years ago.

groups, such as the ethnic Chinese, who fear U.M.N.O.’s political partners, some of whom have publicly supported turning Malaysia into an Islamic state.

While Malaysia’s population is mostly Muslim Malay, the country also has sizable Chinese and Indian minorities.

The Alliance of Hope was the first in Malaysia’s history to provide wide representation for the country’s ethnic minorities.

“What this political crisis underscores is that race and religion remain dominant in Malaysian politics,” said Yvonne Tew, an associate professor of

law at the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington D.C.

“Malaysia’s 2018 democratic breakthrough to a multiethnic governing coalition appeared to be an outlier to the global rise of illiberal nationalism,” Ms. Tew added. “A mono-ethnic, Malay-centric alliance ascending to power is a stark counternarrative to that 2018 narrative.”

Also cast aside in the machinations is Anwar Ibrahim, who has, on and off, been Mr. Mahathir’s presumptive successor, as well as his occasional rival, for decades. Until Saturday morning, Mr. Anwar, 72, had been the Alliance of Hope’s nominee for prime minister.

But with Mr. Mahathir’s chances considered more promising, Mr. Anwar gave up, yet again, on his ambitions to lead Malaysia. “I will be taking a step back,” Mr. Anwar said in a statement on Saturday, “so that we can avoid the country being further dragged into this power struggle and into an old system which has been rejected by the people.”

Mr. Mahathir reiterated on Sunday morning that he believed his side had, in fact, rallied enough votes to support him in forming a government. But Mr. Muhyiddin’s swearing in at the national palace occurred barely an hour later.

Still, with Mr. Mahathir threatening a vote of no confidence against the new prime minister when Parliament meets on March 9, few are willing to totally count him out, even at 94, just yet.

An expedient truce in Afghanistan

AFGHANISTAN, FROM PAGE 1

over the country in 1919, in another retreat that heralded the beginning of the unwinding of an empire.

The Soviet Union abandoned its decade-long effort to control the country in 1989, months before the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the collapse of the Communist superpower. That led to the chaos and power vacuums that Bin Laden exploited and that the United States vowed it would never again allow to fester.

The American-led attack began on Oct. 7, 2001, with the name “Operation Enduring Freedom.” Mr. Bush, in an address to the nation from the Treaty Room of the White House, promised to “win this conflict by the patient accumulation of successes, by meeting a series of challenges with determination and will and purpose.”

After the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center, a plane that hit the Pentagon and another that crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, the country was behind him. While a few warned of the dangers of entering the “graveyard of empires,” it seemed more a war of retribution and justice seeking than an effort at nation building.

Yet inevitably, mission creep set in.

After Bin Laden was hunted down in Pakistan in May 2011, and with Al Qaeda a much-diminished threat, politicians struggled to explain what American troops were fighting to accomplish. More than 2,400 American service

The Afghan military remains, at best, a fractured, inconsistent fighting force after close to two decades of training.

members have died in combat since the invasion, according to the website icasualties.org. Neither Mr. Obama nor Mr. Trump could make a plausible case that after nearly two decades, the United States had much of a role to play, other than to prop up a weak democracy.

For a while, at least, that role seems likely to continue.

The accord signed on Saturday — with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo overseeing the moment but not actually signing it himself — will initially reduce American troop levels to about 8,600 from about 12,000 now. That is almost exactly where they were three years ago, at the end of Mr. Obama’s term. That is the minimum number of Special Operations forces, intelligence officers and support and security personnel that the Pentagon and C.I.A. believe are necessary to hold the capital, Kabul, battle militants of the Islamic State and advise an Afghan military that remains, at best, a fractured, inconsistent fighting force after close to two decades of training and billions of dollars in American and NATO investment.

If the Afghan government can reach its own accord with the Taliban — in a so-called intra-Afghan process that is now supposed to begin — the American troop levels may drop further, officials say. But just as the South Vietnamese were not part of the Paris peace talks a half-century ago, the Afghan government, whose survival is at stake, was excluded from the long negotiations with the Taliban.

That explains why President Ashraf Ghani was so suspicious, and often furious, with the negotiating process — and made clear during the Munich Security Conference this year that he had little confidence that the next step in the accord would come to pass.

It was telling that he was not at the signing ceremony in Doha, Qatar; instead, Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper was dispatched to Kabul for a separate ceremony with Mr. Ghani and the secre-

tary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to signal the allied support of the government. The only party missing was the Taliban, whose leaders on Friday refused to meet with an informal Afghan negotiating team.

The purpose of the Kabul ceremony was to reassure Mr. Ghani that the American and NATO troops would not go anywhere until the Afghan government and the Taliban reach their own accord. But the Afghans have reason to fear they will be abandoned.

“One risk here is that the president wakes up one morning and decides that he is just going to pull out the rest of the American troops,” said Douglas E. Lute, a former Army general who served first as Mr. Bush’s coordinator on Afghanistan for the National Security Council and then stayed on for several years in a similar role for Mr. Obama before becoming American ambassador to NATO.

“The odds of this breaking down or coming to gridlock are significant,” Mr. Lute said in an interview. “And if the Americans truly left, there’s reason to be concerned” that the Taliban could ultimately take Kabul, just as the North Vietnamese took Saigon.

It is exactly that concern that led more than 20 Republicans and Democrats to send a letter last week to Mr. Pompeo and Mr. Esper warning that “the Taliban is not a de facto counterterrorism partner, and pretending that they ignore their longtime jihadist mission and actions.” It added, “They have never publicly renounced Al Qaeda or turned over Al Qaeda leaders living in their safe havens,” or “apologized for harboring the terrorists who carried out the September 11 attacks.”

Of course, breaking the link between the Taliban and Al Qaeda was the first objective of the war, before many others were piled on. Those included assuring that Afghan girls could attend school, building a model democracy for the region and pledging that the new Afghan government could defend itself. For years, such ambitions were the subjects of regular speeches by American presidents and cabinet members before Congress and at West Point, the United States Military Academy.

Mr. Trump, in contrast, talks about only one objective: getting out. He senses, accurately, that most of the American public is with him.

“Trump is probably more interested in getting a deal that allows him to start drawing down before Election Day than he is in the parameters of this deal,” said Stephen Tankel, who worked on Afghan issues at both the Pentagon and the House of Representatives.

He added: “It’s unclear what the plan is for the 8,600 remaining U.S. troops if the Afghan peace process falters and conditions don’t improve. But this shouldn’t negate the opportunity the deal creates for an Afghan peace process.”

In fact, there has been little public discussion about the exact conditions the deal sets. There are reportedly a series of not-so-secret annexes to the agreement that allow both Special Operations forces and the C.I.A. to retain a presence in the country. But even Congress appears in the dark. The letter from lawmakers noted that Mr. Pompeo “rightfully fought for the disclosure of secret side deals with Iran” when Mr. Obama was president and insisted that the public deserves to know the details of this accord.

Mr. Trump, however, has made clear he is not particularly interested in those. Afghanistan has gone from being the urgent “good war” that America must win to the longstanding burden that like the British, the Soviets and a series of others, Washington now seeks to unload.

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Sickness and fear in a Wuhan suburb

WUHAN, CHINA

A community’s experience illustrates how local chaos impeded virus containment

BY AMY QIN
AND SUI-LEE WEE

When the coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, China, residents in a rising suburb on the city’s rural edge thought they were safe. Zuoling New Town, a bustling community of retired farmers, factory workers and young, white-collar professionals, was 22 miles from the market where the outbreak appeared to have arisen. The apartments had sprung from former farm fields, far beyond the alleys of old Wuhan.

But as the virus spread, Zuoling emerged as a stubborn hot spot of infections in Wuhan, and a somber lesson in how the state’s vast effort to contain the virus left some communities acutely vulnerable. The leadership’s top-down campaign relied on grass-roots mobilization, and the very newness and isolation of Zuoling proved to be a weakness, depriving residents of food supplies, medical care and labor during crucial weeks.

Residents crammed into the only large supermarket to stock up. Those worried about fevers crowded the local, government-run clinic, and many were sent back to their high-rise homes, sometimes spreading the virus. The nearest major public hospital assigned to take patients was 10 miles away, making it more difficult to get treatment, especially without a car.

“I never imagined that this would hit our home,” said Zhang Jin, a 47-year-old resident of Zuoling. His mother, Yan Yinzheng, who was living with him, contracted what doctors believed was the coronavirus, possibly from a neighbor. Mr. Zhang, his wife and father all later fell ill.

“We’ve lost confidence,” said Mr. Zhang, a school bus driver. “Nobody in the neighborhood took charge.”

The coronavirus has formed an insidious threat that the medical authorities worldwide have struggled to tame. Italy, Japan, South Korea, the United States and other wealthy societies have stumbled in their responses.

For China, the long-term repercussions may be greater, given the size of its outbreak and the bleak contrast with assurances from the national leader, Xi Jinping, that the Communist Party was a robust shield providing “holistic security.”

Officially, the virus has infected almost 80,000 people and killed about 2,870 across China, mostly in Hubei Province and its provincial capital, Wuhan.

While China’s efforts appear to have slowed infections, a reconstruction of the epidemic in Zuoling — based on over a dozen interviews as well as hundreds of pages of government documents, reports and online accounts — shows how the containment campaign suffered from confusion and discord at the local level, turning unlucky and ill-prepared communities into trouble zones.



A hotel holding people in medical isolation in Wuhan, China. Many such requisitioned sites strained initially to care for the crowds of weak, feverish patients.

There were not enough masks, supplies of disinfectant or sanitation workers. Patients suspected of having the virus were confined to their homes, allowing the pathogen to spread there. When people were eventually moved to isolation sites, residents initially found that promised care was missing.

On the first day of February, Zuoling New Town had 11 cases, according to community records. A week later there were 79. By Feb. 11, the number of confirmed infections was 116, including four deaths.

“A LITTLE FLU”

Zuo Jinjin learned that the virus had reached Zuoling on Jan. 19, when he and other community workers were ordered to guard the home of a woman suspected of being infected. The 69-year-old woman had been taken to a hospital, while her husband waited in quarantine in the apartment.

A Communist Party official in charge of the area gave the team another mandate: Don’t tell residents much about the case for fear of sowing panic ahead of the Lunar New Year; a general warning would suffice.

“There was discussion about what if this was publicized everywhere, when the New Year was arriving,” said Mr.

Zuo, a 31-year-old employee of the Zuoling community office, the government’s grass-roots administration. “There was publicity asking residents to wear masks, but many people didn’t take notice of that.”

Mr. Zuo said his wife, a nurse, told him as early as December about a mysterious virus striking people in Wuhan. But city leaders had encouraged confidence that the virus was not highly contagious and that the outbreak was likely to peter out. In Zuoling, officials did little to initially warn residents.

“Back then, there weren’t enough reports about it, and it hadn’t grabbed the attention of all Wuhan residents,” Mr. Zuo said. “We believed, me included, that it was a little flu and would be OK — until people were dying.”

The alarm level jumped on Jan. 20, when officials disclosed a burst of 136 infections across Wuhan in two previous days. News reports noted that many victims were linked to the market.

“At that time, we heard that it came from eating wild game, and we didn’t eat that,” said Li Wangjiao, a resident of Zuoling who is also a housing manager there. “I never expected it would come to the edge of Wuhan.”

Three days later, Ms. Li’s daughter developed a fever. On that same day,

Wuhan barred people from leaving, in a bid to stifle the outbreak.

A TEMPERATURE “CHARADE”

As infections multiplied, Mr. Xi mobilized the party to lead a “people’s war” against the epidemic. In Zuoling and many other areas, a front-line force was the party’s neighborhood offices.

These local bodies in China are much more powerful than voluntary neighborhood associations in many Western countries — and in the crisis, they took on more authority. They were assigned to monitor residents for signs of illness, screen them for treatment and quarantine, and bolster residential checkpoints to guard against outsiders who might bring in the virus.

Zuoling seemed ill prepared. Often, new suburban areas have not accumulated the same labor force, experience and resources from the state as older neighborhoods, said Benjamin Read, a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz who studies local politics in China.

“With a mission like maintaining quarantine, they are dealing with a complicated set of ongoing tasks,” he said. “Any lapse at any time could undermine the containment of the epidemic.”

Many maintenance workers and

guards for housing management companies in Zuoling quit as worry about the virus grew, leaving them short of employees to disinfect and clean, said residents and security guards. These poorly paid employees typically received little protection or training for the risky work.

“Some property management quit, as it’s too dangerous. It was just a few people without any protection to go around the compound,” said Yan Yanbin, an apartment guard in Zuoling who developed a fever and other signs of coronavirus infection. “Checking temperatures became a charade; the thermometers didn’t work.”

“THEY JUST HAD TO GO HOME”

As hospitals across Wuhan were swamped by patients, the government said on Jan. 23 that neighborhood health centers would be the first defense against the coronavirus.

Community health workers are usually not well paid and have fewer qualifications than hospital doctors. Now they stepped forward as triage workers, screening people for fevers and dispatching patients who might have coronavirus to the bigger hospitals.

The Zuoling community medical center, opened in 2017, was clean and mod-

ern and had 99 beds — enough for normal times but too few for the surge of hundreds of patients every day.

“Beds were extremely tight, and the community tried to do what it could to find spots,” said Mr. Zuo, a worker for the Zuoling neighborhood administration. “We did everything we possibly could, but because there weren’t the beds, they just had to go home.”

“THE ORGANIZATION WAS CHAOTIC”

New orders had gone out across Wuhan: Patients who were sick or suspected of having the virus would be moved from their homes to makeshift quarantine sites opened in hotels, dormitories and even a convention center.

Many residents of the city, like Yuan Jiaxiang, a 41-year old engineer suffering from a high fever, felt relief that they could end waiting in their homes. But many of the requisitioned hotels strained initially to care for the masses of weak, feverish patients.

“There was no treatment at all, simply locking down the patients,” Mr. Yuan said of the hotel where he spent five days. “I felt kind of disappointed at that point, and this constant fever didn’t get proper treatment.”

Officials had seen early on that sending patients home, or holding them in crowded local fever clinics, increased the risks of the coronavirus lingering in communities.

In early February, the government had created a plan to take potentially infected people from their homes, but the policy faltered for lack of spaces for patients.

After a renewed push from the following week, growing numbers of mild cases were sent to cavernous sports and convention centers crammed with rows of beds. Patients who had not been tested but showed symptoms were sent to dormitories or hotels turned into makeshift wards.

The transfers happened with such urgency that safety was sometimes ignored. Patients who had waited many days at home for a hospital bed were rounded up at night by community workers and put aboard buses.

“The organization was chaotic,” a report from Xinhua, the official news agency, said of one transfer.

Patients sent to hotels sometimes found that their families could not send them medicine or food. And hotel workers, often scarce and scared during the crisis, could not keep their rooms clean.

“The beds were clearly not enough, and disinfection of the isolation sites was not timely,” said a report by Wuhan city inspectors who visited Zuoling.

Conditions have improved as more aid has poured into Wuhan and the number of infections has fallen. Despite concerns about the risk of infection in quarantine sites, many patients said they felt safer there.

“It’s not as depressing here,” said Mr. Yuan, the engineer, who was moved from the hotel to a large quarantine site — a commandeered exhibition center — after he was diagnosed with the coronavirus. “There are people to talk to, so I think it’ll be easier to pass the time.”

Amy Qin reported from Wuhan, and Sui-Lee Wee from Singapore. Amber Wang and Zoe Mou contributed research.

For the U.S. president, an issue of trust

NEWS ANALYSIS
WASHINGTON

Even allies worry that he has undermined his ability to reassure the public

BY ANNIE KARNI,
MICHAEL CROWLEY
AND MAGGIE HABERMAN

When Hurricane Dorian crashed into the Atlantic Coast of the United States in September, President Trump assumed a take-charge role in response. But he undermined his own effectiveness after it became apparent that before displaying a map in front of the television cameras in the Oval Office, he had altered it with a Sharpie pen to match his inaccurate forecast of where the storm was headed.

For years, experts have warned that Mr. Trump has been squandering the credibility he could need in a moment of national emergency, like a terrorist attack or a public health crisis.

Now, as the coronavirus races across the globe and has begun to threaten the United States, Mr. Trump could face a moment of reckoning. Maintaining a calm and orderly response during an epidemic, in which countless lives could be at stake, requires that the president be a reliable public messenger.

“I think the president has a unique opportunity to dispel fears and calm the situation — if people believe he is telling the truth,” said Kathleen Sebelius, who served as secretary of health and human services in the Obama administration. “And I think that’s really where a great disconnect occurs.”

Last Wednesday, Mr. Trump delivered an almost casual account of the administration’s response to the coronavirus, leaving it to the experts appearing with him to relay the real information and assure a jittery public. Still, he kept trying to suggest the risk was low.

“We will see what happens,” the presi-

dent said as he addressed the nation. “But we are very, very ready for this, for anything.”

Mr. Trump said that Johns Hopkins University rated the United States “No. 1 for being prepared,” holding up a chart printed on an 8½ by 11 sheet of paper.

“This will end,” he said, comparing the coronavirus to the everyday flu. “We really have done a very good job.”

During a crisis, presidents are looked to for direct and honest assessments of threats and for reassurance to the public about their impact.

During the swine flu outbreak of 1976, President Gerald R. Ford announced at a news conference that the government planned to vaccinate “every man, woman and child in the United States.” Mr. Ford himself was photographed receiving the vaccine in the White House as part of a public awareness campaign.

Responding to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, President Barack Obama visited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta to announce that the administration would send as many as 3,000 people to the region.

Mr. Trump, in contrast, contradicted his own health experts in a news conference Wednesday evening, insisting that the spread of the virus was not inevitable, and excoriating two of his favorite foils, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senator Chuck Schumer, the minority leader, for “trying to create a panic.”

For three and a half years, Mr. Trump has repeatedly proved an unreliable narrator on a range of subjects.

At times, he has exaggerated threats, like talking up the caravans of migrants he claimed were storming the southern border before the 2018 midterm elections. Other times, he has minimized potentially serious dangers that could be politically damaging, like the renewed nuclear threat posed by North Korea after the failure of his talks with its leader, Kim Jong-un, and now, the global spread of the coronavirus, which he has persistently tried to play down.

In his response to the coronavirus,



During a time of crisis, presidents are looked to for direct and honest assessments of threats and for the reassurance of a worried citizenry.

Mr. Trump has made inaccurate or questionable claims, twice misstating the number of Americans infected with the virus and insisting that it “miraculously goes away” when warmer spring weather arrives — a prediction that health experts have said is premature.

He based that prediction on a comment made at one of his briefings, when an expert noted that temperatures can affect the spread of viruses. Mr. Trump has used that data point as evidence in saying in public and in private to guests at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Fla., that the global outbreak will be behind him by April.

The president, as he often does, has also focused on coverage of his response, complaining that he is being treated unfairly and blaming the news

media. “If the virus disappeared tomorrow, they would say we did a really poor, and even incompetent, job,” he tweeted on Tuesday. “Not fair, but it is what it is. So far, by the way, we have not had one death. Let’s keep it that way!”

Health officials, however, announced Saturday that the country has had its first coronavirus death, a man in his 50s at a hospital in Kirkland, Wash.

Before he took office, Mr. Trump was an outspoken critic of the Obama administration’s handling of the Ebola outbreak, arguing that infected people should not be allowed back into the United States.

Current Trump allies said the fact that the president chose to address the growing public health crisis quickly after returning from a trip to India showed how

seriously he was taking the outbreak.

But privately, they say he has been reluctant to give in to what he has called an “alarmist” view of the virus’s potential to cause damage as he has warily watched the effect of the outbreak on the stock market. He has been rattled by the Wall Street reaction to the spread of the virus in places like Italy, lashing out at the news media in tweets and accusing journalists of intentionally trying to harm the stock market.

And polls show that Mr. Trump’s credibility with much of the United States is low after an impeachment inquiry in which a majority of voters said they did not believe that he was telling the truth about his actions involving Ukraine.

Federal health officials had been bracing for the arrival of the virus in the country with minimal intervention by the White House.

As Ebola presented both a health and political threat to his administration in 2014, Mr. Obama carefully hewed to proven science, which he repeatedly invoked in his carefully calibrated public messages.

“We have to be guided by the science. We have to remember the basic facts,” he said in an October 2014 radio message.

Mr. Trump, in contrast, has not been focused on scientific detail. Alex M. Azar II, the secretary of health and human services, has told officials they should give the notoriously impatient president simple, paint-by-numbers briefings on coronavirus.

But a larger fear has been that he would contradict scientific experts. “That’s where Trump is most pernicious, potentially,” said Ron Klain, who served as Mr. Obama’s “Ebola czar,” and now is an adviser to the presidential campaign of former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. “When he contradicts those experts, when he suggests they have biases, or when he intimidates them not to be straight, that’s when the risk really grows.”

As Mr. Trump faces this emergency, his history of issuing false claims could

make it harder to sell the public on any plans to address coronavirus.

“Making false promises and them turning out not to be true undermines people’s confidence,” Mr. Dach said. He pointed to Mr. Trump’s claim this month about the virus that, “We did shut it down, yes.”

As recently as last week, the president appeared to simply want to put the coronavirus response in his rearview mirror. “I think that’s a problem that’s

“I think the president has a unique opportunity to dispel fears and calm the situation — if people believe he is telling the truth.”

going to go away,” he said in remarks last week in New Delhi.

Last Wednesday, before Mr. Trump’s news conference, his allies on television and radio appeared to be speaking to the proverbial “audience of one” as they sought to give their unsolicited advice to the president.

Jason Miller, a top adviser to Mr. Trump’s 2016 campaign who hosts a podcast that is currently focused on the coronavirus, tweeted that the president had to “make clear full Administration working around the clock on this, and explain in everyday, layman’s terms what we need to both do and avoid to remain safe.”

On Fox News, daytime hosts noted the news conference presented an “opportunity for him to act presidential.” Mr. Trump, however, chose to conduct the news conference his own way.

“It is what it is,” he said of the potential for a virus with a higher fatality than the flu to spread through communities. “We’ve got the greatest people in the world.”

Noah Weiland contributed reporting from Washington, and Donald G. McNeil Jr. from New York.

A moment to savor a long-sought victory

NEWS ANALYSIS
GREENVILLE, S.C.

Joe Biden now faces test in multiple primaries after taking South Carolina

BY MATT FLEGENHEIMER
AND KATIE GLUECK

Joe Biden did what he had to do, and then some. Now, his supporters say, it is time for fellow moderates to do the same.

With a commanding victory in South Carolina's primary on Saturday, Mr. Biden made a compelling case that he is the Democrat best positioned to head off the nomination of Bernie Sanders, the democratic socialist senator whom centrists fear would doom the party this fall. Next comes the awkward part.

If a place like South Carolina, built to reward Mr. Biden's strength with black voters, helped mask some of his weaknesses for one week, his fate ahead of Super Tuesday, when 14 states vote, is still shadowed by the preceding failures of both Mr. Biden's campaign and the candidate himself. These aftereffects are already complicating a stretch that finds his rivals preaching patience as Biden allies demand urgency — and unity, around him.

After months as the front-runner, with the power to clear the field if he excelled, Mr. Biden is now a candidate at once determined and dependent. He is convinced that he has done enough to demonstrate his dominance with a core Democratic constituency and affirm his argument that no one is better suited to take on President Trump. "If the Democrats want a nominee who's a Democrat — A lifelong Democrat! A proud Democrat! An Obama-Biden Democrat! — then join us," he told supporters in Columbia, S.C., speaking with more force and precision than usual. "We have the option of winning big or losing big. That's the choice."

Mr. Biden took direct, conspicuous aim at Mr. Sanders: "Talk about revolution isn't changing anyone's life," he said. "We need real changes, right now."

But for all his undeniable success on Saturday, Mr. Biden remains hamstrung on two fronts: by several competitors still disinclined to stand down, even if they siphon crucial non-Sanders votes, and by a campaign organization that party officials have described as jarringly thin in many of the states that will vote on Tuesday.

His ability to address either of these problems in time is far from assured, in a primary that has already exposed his capacity for bungling on the campaign trail, his enthusiasm deficit with many younger voters and his struggles in fund-raising.

Why would Michael R. Bloomberg step aside, before the states he is contesting have even voted, with hundreds of millions of dollars already sunk into



Former Vice President Joe Biden with supporters after his decisive victory in South Carolina's primary election on Saturday. His next big test comes on Tuesday.

his bid and a conviction that he is the man for the job?

What do Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar owe Mr. Biden, whom they each dusted in New Hampshire (and, in Mr. Buttigieg's case, in Iowa), where the voters who spend the most time with their candidates decided that the former vice president could not be trusted to defeat President Trump?

The result is a party establishment that agrees on the desired end of avoiding a Sanders nomination but is still bickering about the means.

The most creative among old-guard Democrats have spent recent weeks gaming out knotty scenarios to keep Mr. Sanders from the top of the ticket: a convention migration to another contender if Mr. Sanders falls short of a pledged delegate majority or the drafting, somehow, of a white-knight candidate who is not even running.

But settling for Mr. Biden would appear to be the straightest line. And in the coming days, his supporters plan to argue, loudly, that the time for dithering has passed.

"The case you're going to make is, 'Look, guys, this is the only alternative to Bernie, which is the only alternative to losing the election to Trump, and we need to consolidate,'" said Rufus Gifford, who was finance director for Barack Obama's re-election campaign and supports Mr. Biden. But, he quickly

"To be like, 'We're going to drop out and go back to the Senate on Tuesday' — it's just not appealing."

acknowledged, "the big challenge there is Bloomberg. We all know that the Bloomberg vote is not going to Bernie, for the most part. So without a doubt, Bloomberg could be playing a spoiler."

Top Democratic officials in key battleground states that go to the polls Tuesday, from Alabama to Texas, have said that Mr. Bloomberg poses an acute threat to Mr. Biden, eating into his standing with moderate voters. It does not help that early voting has already

been underway in many states against the backdrop of Mr. Biden's bleak finishes in Iowa and New Hampshire.

Mr. Bloomberg's presence is not the Biden campaign's only cause for concern. On Saturday, Mr. Biden's most important endorser in South Carolina, Representative James E. Clyburn, acknowledged organizational problems and, in a CNN interview, raised the prospect of assessing "how we retool this campaign."

But Biden advisers are hoping that his victory in South Carolina will resonate in states, congressional districts and media markets that, like this state, have a significant base of African-American Democrats.

Mr. Biden is scheduled to visit Selma, Ala., and Norfolk, Va., on Sunday, and Houston and Dallas on Monday before heading to California. The campaign is also optimistic about an influx of cash that traditionally comes with primary victories. Such an infusion could be plowed into both his Super Tuesday operation and the states that vote later in March. There are also efforts underway

to organize fund-raisers throughout the rest of the month.

"Hopefully, some other of the candidates will really start thinking about, you know, stepping away and letting this race shape up where the democratic socialist folks can have their say, and the moderates to the left can have their say," said Representative Tim Ryan, Democrat of Ohio and a former 2020 presidential candidate who is supporting Mr. Biden. "And we can have an argument to the finish."

Mr. Ryan said that he would be at one of several organizing events the campaign is holding in his state on Sunday. He hopes to persuade Sanders opponents that Mr. Biden must be embraced for the good of the party.

Of course, "the party" is less a monolith than an unruly collection of fiefs, none necessarily powerful enough to make candidates or voters come to heel through sheer force of will or strongly-worded-statement.

For 2020 contenders, who have committed a year or more to the cause, the incentives to drop out have perhaps

never been weaker than in this political era. Even lower-polling candidates are often still drawing large crowds, still appraising a field without a runaway favorite, still being told that the fight is worth fighting, especially in a campaign so unpredictable.

"Everybody believes they are two days away from the big turnaround," said Jennifer Palmieri, a former top aide to Mr. Obama and Hillary Clinton. "It's also a candidate and staff on the ride of their lives. To be like, 'We're going to drop out and go back to the Senate on Tuesday' — it's just not appealing."

After the former vice president's event in Spartanburg, S.C., on Friday evening, Antwion Yowe, 43, a local pastor, summoned a favored family analogy about separating standout options from the rest.

"My dad used to say: 'barbecue and mildew,'" he said. "You're either barbecue and you go forward, or you're mildew and you're done." After South Carolina, he suggested, everyone except Mr. Biden and Mr. Sanders belonged in the latter camp.

Even if his peers were to fall away, Mr. Biden's path would not be straightforward. Mr. Sanders has shown himself capable of building a formidable coalition, particularly in his blowout win in Nevada in late February. He remains the favorite in California, the grandest delegate trove on the map. He has also flashed a victor's swagger in scheduling events in the home states of two fellow hopefuls, which also happen to have primaries on Tuesday: Massachusetts, represented in the Senate by Elizabeth Warren, and Minnesota, the province of Ms. Klobuchar.

Any further setback for Ms. Warren could prove especially helpful to Mr. Sanders, potentially sending some of her progressive supporters into his camp.

But voters do not always behave ideologically, a fact that cuts both ways for Mr. Sanders as Mr. Biden banks on a boost if other center-left candidates drop out: Some of that support will drift to Mr. Sanders even if voters do not align precisely with him on policy.

For one evening, though, Mr. Biden and his team seemed content not to dwell much on any of that. In Columbia on Saturday night, Mr. Biden — who has often campaigned in smaller venues — walked onstage to a raucous victory rally in a large gym. "We love you, Joe!" someone cried out.

"We can say, without fear of contradiction, the Bidens love you guys," Mr. Biden replied. "The Bidens love you. That's real."

He had won a state for the first time in his life — in his third presidential campaign, more than three decades after his first.

He had three whole days before he would have to do some winning again.

Matt Flegenheimer reported from Greenville, S.C., and Katie Glueck from Columbia, S.C.

Stoking grievances and collecting data at a Trump rally

WILDWOOD, N.J.

BY KATIE ROGERS
AND BRYAN ANSELM

The president asked for nothing less than everything they had.

"If you want your children to inherit the blessings that generations of Americans have fought and died for to secure," President Trump told a crowd of supporters in Wildwood, N.J., at one of a string of campaign rallies he has held this winter, "we must devote everything that we have toward victory in 2020."

A few yards to the president's right, a 53-year-old retired police officer, Jacqueline D'Angelo, was taking Mr. Trump's words to heart. Sitting with her 14-year-old son, Lorenzo, she pumped her fists as Mr. Trump's voice rose and fell. She waved her made-for-TV sign — "Women for Trump" — and jeered along with the crowd when the president ran down his list of villains: Democrats, Nancy Pelosi, the news media, Nancy Pelosi again. Mostly, she was having fun.

The rally in January was just like any of over 500 that Mr. Trump has hosted since announcing his candidacy in 2015, but this one was special to Ms. D'Angelo because it was her first. When she emerged from the rally, her cheeks were flushed.

"That," she said, "was a release."

For the campaign, it was a capture.

Ms. D'Angelo's experience represents the ideal outcome for a campaign that leads the way in using digital platforms to bring followers into the flock and hoovering up crucial voter information once they get there. Rallies like this one — and one Friday night in North Charleston, S.C. — turn out to be the crown jewels of data collection for Mr. Trump's campaign.

THE DATA/TICKET EXCHANGE

Campaign officials are open about viewing the rallies as data-mining expeditions that can help create a red-hatted army of volunteers.

Ms. D'Angelo and her son, according to the campaign, were two of nearly 100,000 people who registered to attend the New Jersey rally, Mr. Trump's first in the state as president. To register for the



Jacqueline D'Angelo, with her son, Lorenzo, attended her first Trump rally in Wildwood, N.J., in January. The Trump campaign is adept at rolling out new lines of merchandise like Trump teddy bears, above right, and collecting personal data in return.

rally, she visited the campaign site, clicked a button, then turned over her name, email address and phone number. She received two tickets in return.

Ms. D'Angelo heard about the president's appearance through a friend who helps her operate a pro-Trump Facebook page she created before the 2018 midterm elections. Like most Facebook groups that support Mr. Trump, hers is a cascade of links to conservative websites, Trump White House social media posts and doctored photos of the president's enemies, including Ms. Pelosi.

For Ms. D'Angelo, hearing the president talk was validation of her decision to vote for Mr. Trump in 2016. Watching his performance over the past three years — particularly, she said, in securing America from "illegal immigrants" — she has gone from someone who was raised politically independent to someone who now says she believes that the truth is to be trusted only if it comes from Mr. Trump.

"I was on the fence, like anybody else," she said. But now, "it's like a leap of faith for me, knowing he's trying to do the right thing."

SHARE VIEWS (AND PERSONAL DATA) During the 90 minutes or so that Mr. Trump is onstage at every rally, he deliv-

ers what his campaign sees as its best product: a president who reinforces a feeling that the news media and the Democratic Party refuse to see anything positive about his administration or his supporters.

As she waited in line in Wildwood, Ms. D'Angelo was approached by a Bikers for Trump member who was volunteering to collect names, addresses and phone numbers from people in the crowd on behalf of the New Jersey Republican Party. (Ms. D'Angelo told him she had already signed up.) She groused with an acquaintance, James Toto, a local councilman who is running for Atlantic County freeholder, over L.G.B.T.-friendly bathroom policies in schools.

Ms. D'Angelo also took time to check in on her pro-Trump Facebook page, sometimes broadcasting live video for others back home. Many of its members once worked in law enforcement, as did Ms. D'Angelo, an Army veteran who is retired from the police force in Paterson, N.J. She now collects a pension that she supplements with an auto body business she runs with her husband in Brigantine, N.J.

At Mr. Trump's rallies and campaign events, his words are fine-tuned to appeal to white, Christian, blue-collar voters.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BRYAN ANSELM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ms. D'Angelo, who is white, said his overtures to the military and law enforcement communities helped win her over. She cannot understand why anyone would dislike Mr. Trump, a leader who, as she puts it, "has cojones."

"The last time I experienced such a patriotic push was 9/11," Ms. D'Angelo said. "Apple pie. Baseball. Christmas. He really embodies the traditions we hold so dear."

Christmas, as Ms. D'Angelo mentioned, is something Mr. Trump often mentions at his rallies. He claims that he alone made it safe to say "Merry Christmas" again.

Ms. D'Angelo likens staying updated on pro-Trump news on Facebook to another full-time job.

She and other supporters who look at such pages are nearly certain to encounter the countless ads the Trump campaign has used to flood the platform. Facebook's fact-checking rules do not apply to political ads, letting candidates spread false or misleading claims.

Finding friendly faces nearly everywhere in the crowd, Ms. D'Angelo complained with a stranger about the rough deal Mr. Trump got by inheriting the Obama-era national deficit.

When a reporter pointed out that the president had actually helped widen the

national debt — despite a campaign-trail pledge to erase it within eight years — she said that Mr. Trump had come into the job with a lot on his plate.

"The thing is, he's also straightened things out," Ms. D'Angelo said in the president's defense.

As she spoke, a message came on the Jumbotron asking Trump supporters to text their phone numbers to the campaign to stay in touch.

The campaign has aggressively pushed text sign-ups across its digital platforms to create a direct relationship with individual supporters to ask them for small donations.

The tactic has long been used by political campaigns — 12 years ago, the Obama campaign was praised for its leveraging of SMS texting, by offering special merchandise and targeting voters in specific areas with news about rallies and events.

But Teddy Goff, the Obama campaign's former digital director, said the Trump campaign had taken traditional digital tactics in a new direction by spreading misinformation and news of the president's latest political skirmish — basically, keeping supporters angry enough to vote.

JUST ADD MONEY

After making it inside the Wildwoods Convention Center, Ms. D'Angelo almost immediately encountered a table laden with Trump merchandise.

With \$100, she bought T-shirts, bumper stickers and hats, before turning around and spending \$70 more on gifts for her brother. Along with her American Express card, she also handed over her driver's license, which was scanned and put into a database for campaign contributions.

The Trump campaign is adept at rolling out new lines of merchandise, sometimes tailoring it to the latest social media outrage.

Most of the merchandise requests are routed through a company called Ace Specialties in Lafayette, La., whose owner, Christl Mahfouz, can often be seen mingling with fans outside Trump rallies.

Her team sells hats in exchange for money and the buyer's voting data: Each time supporters buy a T-shirt or a hat at a rally, a digital interface prompts

them to turn over their names, addresses and other voter-specific information. This data is then logged as a donation to the Trump Make America Great Again Committee and each person's contribution is saved for future Federal Election Commission reports, according to a campaign official.

For Ms. D'Angelo, her purchases would serve another function: Wearing them would give her pro-Trump protective armor after she left the bubble of the rally for the outside world.

"There's a whole army behind him," Ms. D'Angelo said. "Even in New Jersey."

The campaign has aggressively pushed text sign-ups to create a direct relationship with individual supporters.

Roughly 10 hours after she arrived in Wildwood, the president took the stage and launched into his familiar call-and-responses, reserving special treatment for Democrats, whom he called "do nothing" and "crazy." Eventually, he landed on the news media.

"Do you see the fakers back there?" Mr. Trump said, pointing to reporters and camera people in a roped-off area. "Fake news."

The president also spent time hammering home a key message: that he and his family have sacrificed a life of luxury for him to be president. Ms. D'Angelo heard that message loud and clear.

"Sometimes he looks so tired and I go, 'Ugh, look at him,'" Ms. D'Angelo said. "He's going through so much abuse to protect us. I know he's strong. I know he can take it. But compliment the man sometimes. I don't see anything he's done wrong."

By the time she left, the hours and money Ms. D'Angelo had spent in Wildwood ended up solidifying her bond with a campaign — and a president — who has prioritized his ability to connect with his supporters on an emotional level. And after the rally, she knew her marching orders.

"We need to do everything to get him re-elected," she said, "is what we're going to do."

A polarizing plan to fix the housing crisis: Build

Development battle in suburb of San Francisco leads to an insurrection

BY CONOR DOUGHERTY

The City Council of Lafayette, Calif., met the public two Mondays a month, and Steve Falk liked to sit off by himself, near the fire exit of the auditorium, so that he could observe from the widest possible vantage. Trim, with a graying buzz cut, Mr. Falk was the city manager — basically the chief executive — of Lafayette, a wealthy suburb in the San Francisco Bay Area that is notoriously antagonistic to development.

With a population of just 25,000, Lafayette was wealthy because it was a small town next to a big town, and it maintained its status by keeping the big town out. Locals tended to react to new building projects with suspicion or even hostility, and over a series of Mondays in 2012 and 2013, Mr. Falk took his usual spot by the fire exit to watch several dozen of his fellow Lafayetteers absolutely lose their minds.

A developer had proposed putting 315 apartments on a choice parcel along Deer Hill Road — close to a Bay Area Rapid Transit station, and smack in the view of a bunch of high-dollar properties. This wasn't just big. The project, which the developer called the Terraces of Lafayette, would be the biggest development in the suburb's history. Zoning rules allowed it, but neighbors seemed to feel that if their opposition was vehement enough, it could keep the Terraces unbuilt.

In letters to elected officials, and at the open microphone that Mr. Falk observed at the City Council meetings, residents said things like “too aggressive,” “not respectful,” “embarrassment,” “outraged,” “audacity,” “very urban,” “deeply upset,” “unsightly,” “monstrosity,” “inconceivable,” “simply outrageous,” “vehemently opposed,” “sheer scope,” “very wrong,” “blocking views,” “does not conform,” “property values will be destroyed,” and “will allow more crime to be committed.”

Mr. Falk could see where this was going. There would be years of hearings and design reviews and historical assessments and environmental reports. Voters would protest, the council would deny the project, the developer would sue. Lafayette would get mired in an expensive case that it would most likely lose. As Mr. Falk saw it, anything he could do to prevent that fate would serve the public interest. So he called the developer, a man named Dennis O'Brien, and requested a meeting.

It was imperative that they cut a deal. Much more was at stake than just one building on one plot of land in one suburb.

America has a housing crisis. The homeownership rate for young adults is at a multidecade low, and about a quarter of renters send more than half their income to the landlord. Homelessness is resurgent, eviction displaces a million households a year, and about four million people spend at least three hours driving to and from work.

One need only look out an airplane window to see that this has nothing to do with a lack of space. It's the concentration of opportunity and the rising cost of being near it. It says much about today's winner-take-all economy that many of the cities with the most glaring epidemics of homelessness are growing centers of technology and finance. There is, simply put, a dire shortage of housing in places where people and companies want to live — and reactionary local politics that fight every effort to add more homes.

Nearly all of the biggest challenges in America are, at some level, a housing problem. Rising home costs are a major driver of segregation, inequality, and racial and generational wealth gaps. You can't talk about education or the shrinking middle class without talking about how much it costs to live near good schools and high-paying jobs. Transportation accounts for about a third of the nation's carbon dioxide emissions, so there's no serious plan for climate change that doesn't begin with a conversation about how to alter the urban landscape so that people can live closer to work.

Nowhere is this more evident than California. It's true that the state is addressing facets of the mess, with efforts on rent control, subsidized housing and homelessness. But the hardest remedy to implement, it turns out, is the most obvious: Build more housing.

According to the McKinsey Global Institute, the state needs to create 3.5 million homes by 2025 — more than triple the current pace — to even dent its affordability problems. Hitting that number will require building more *everything*: Subsidized housing. Market-rate housing. Homes, apartments, condos and co-ops. Three hundred and fifteen apartments on prime parcels of towns like Lafayette.

Legislation is important, but history suggests it can do only so much. In the early 1980s, during another housing crisis, California passed a host of bills designed to streamline housing production and punish cities that didn't comply. But the housing gap has persisted, and more recent efforts have also failed. In late January, the Legislature rejected S.B. 50, a bill that would have pushed cities to accept four- to five-story buildings in amenity-laden areas.

What this suggests is that the real solution will have to be sociological. People



IAN C. BATES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



CARLOS CHAVARRIA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ple have to realize that homelessness is connected to housing prices. They have to accept it's hypocritical to say that you don't like density but are worried about climate change. They have to internalize the lesson that if they want their children to have a stable financial future, they have to make space. They are going to have to change.

Steve Falk changed. When he first heard about Dennis O'Brien's project, he thought it was stupid: a case study, in ugly stucco, of runaway development. He believed the Bay Area needed more housing, but he was also a dyed-in-the-wool localist who thought cities should decide where and how it was built. Then that belief started to unravel. Today, after eight years of struggle, his career with the city is over, the Deer Hill Road site is still just a mass of dirt and shrubs, and Mr. Falk has become an outspoken proponent of taking local control away from cities like the one he used to lead.

A UNIVERSAL PLATFORM OF MORE

Although he didn't know it at the time, Mr. Falk's transformation began in 2015, with a phone call from a woman he'd never heard of, with a complaint he had never once fielded in his 25 years working for the city. Her name was Sonja Trauss, and she thought the Deer Hill Road project was too small.

Ms. Trauss was a lifelong rabble-rouser and former high school teacher, who'd recently become a full-time housing activist. She made her public debut a couple of years earlier, at a planning meeting at San Francisco City Hall. When it was time for public comment, she stepped to the microphone and addressed the commissioners, speaking in favor of a housing development. She returned to praise another one. And another. And another.

In backing every single project in the development pipeline that day, Ms. Trauss laid out a platform that would make her a celebrity of Bay Area politics: how expensive new housing today would become affordable old housing tomorrow, how San Francisco was blowing its chance to harness the energy of an economic boom to mass-build homes that generations of residents could enjoy. She didn't care if a proposal was for apartments or condos or how much money its future residents had. Ms. Trauss was for anything and everything, so long as it was built tall and fast and had people living in it.



CARLOS CHAVARRIA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



CARLOS CHAVARRIA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The data was on her side. From 2010 to 2015, Bay Area cities consistently added many more jobs than housing units — in some cases at a ratio of eight to one, way beyond the rate of one and a half jobs per housing unit that planners consider healthy. In essence, the policy was to enthusiastically encourage people to move there for work while equally enthusiastically discouraging developers from building places for those people

to live, stoking a generational battle in which the rising cost of housing enriched people who already owned it and deterred anyone who wasn't well paid or well off from showing up.

Ms. Trauss organized supporters into a group called the San Francisco Bay Area Renters Federation, or SF BARF, which was amateur even by local activist standards. But amateur was the point, part of Ms. Trauss's knack for get-

Top to bottom: a contested parcel off Deer Hill Road in Lafayette, Calif.; Steve Falk, the former city manager of Lafayette; Sonja Trauss, an advocate for housing who helped found the Yes in My Back Yard movement; and Dennis O'Brien, a developer who proposed building 315 apartments on the Deer Hill Road lot.

ting attention. She drove a glittery orange Crown Victoria, showed up to municipal meetings in leggings and white cowboy boots, and spoke in pop philosophical monologues, like declaring that the reason people don't like new buildings is that it reminds them that they're going to die.

Her aims were explicitly revolutionary. She told people that her goal wasn't to enact any particular housing policy, but to alter social mores such that neighbors who fought development ceased being regarded as stewards of good taste and instead came to be viewed as selfish hoarders.

Ms. Trauss started to attract the attention of wealthy donors like Jeremy Stoppelman, a co-founder of Yelp, who had started to worry about housing costs crimping economic growth. And her tactics got more sophisticated. With a friend, Brian Hanlon, who worked a desk job at the United States Forest Service, she co-founded a nonprofit called the California Renters Legal Advocacy and Education Fund, or CARLA. Its mission: “Sue the suburbs.” After reading about an obscure 1982 California law called the Housing Accountability Act, Ms. Trauss decided to try to use it to force Lafayette to build Dennis O'Brien's 315 apartments.

By then — 2015 — Mr. Falk had been working on the Deer Hill Road project for years. Through dozens of meetings with Mr. O'Brien, he'd hammered out a deal for a more modest development of 44 single-family homes, as well as an agreement to build the city a soccer field and dog park. Mr. Falk was a frequent user of the analogy about sausage-making, and this was definitely some sausage, but he walked out of his talks with Mr. O'Brien feeling like an A-plus public servant who might have a second career in conflict resolution. When Ms. Trauss phoned him to say the 44-home approach was entirely inadequate, Mr. Falk tried to persuade her otherwise. Of course, he never had a chance.

At a City Council meeting a week later, Mr. Falk noticed a gaggle of BARFers, throbbing with the conspiratorial energy of teenagers before a prank. The microphone was already going to be crowded. Neighbors had formed a vociferous nonprofit called Save Lafayette, which opposed both the 315-apartment idea and the 44-house compromise on grounds from view-ruination to carcinogenic construction dust. Mr. Falk sat by the fire exit and watched as BARF and Save Lafayette collided at the podium, one side arguing the project was too small, and the other arguing it was too big.

When it was Ms. Trauss's turn to speak, she argued that the entire notion of public comment on new construction was inherently flawed, because the beneficiaries — the people who would eventually live in the buildings — couldn't argue their side.

“An ordinary political process like a sales tax — both sides have an opportunity to show up and say whether they're for or against it,” she said. “But when you have a new project like this, where are the 700-plus people who would initially move in, much less the tens of thousands of people who would live in it over the lifetime of the project? Those people don't know who they are yet. Some of them are not even born.”

Ms. Trauss sued a few months later. The great irony was that nobody was more unhappy about it than Mr. O'Brien. He had spent years and millions of dollars proposing two completely different projects. Now some activist group he'd

never heard of was suing the city, and him, on behalf of his original project — in essence, suing him on behalf of him.

CARLA's lawyer had the impossible job of trying to convince a judge that Lafayette had unfairly forced Mr. O'Brien to build 44 houses instead of 315 apartments, while Mr. O'Brien sat on the other side more or less going, *No they didn't*. CARLA lost the argument, but after it threatened to appeal, Mr. O'Brien ended up agreeing to pay its legal fees. He had now argued, and paid for, both sides of the same case.

Other litigation continued. Members of Save Lafayette sued to force a referendum where residents could rescind the 44-home plan, and eventually, they succeeded. Ms. Trauss and her fellow insurrectionists moved on to other battles, filing more lawsuits for more housing until they started winning. The movement she helped found — YIMBY, for Yes in My Back Yard — has become an international phenomenon, with supporters in dozens of housing-burdened regions including Seattle; Boulder, Colo.; Boston; Austin, Texas; London and Vancouver, British Columbia.

A REBELLION AND A BACKLASH

Development battles are fought hyper-locally, but the issues are resonating everywhere. In late 2018, Minneapolis became the first major city in America to effectively end single-family zoning. Oregon followed soon after. California and New York have significantly expanded protections for renters. And as more economists give credence to the notion that a housing crisis can materially harm G.D.P., by exacerbating inequality and reducing opportunity, all of the Democratic presidential candidates have put forth major housing proposals.

They run the gamut from tax breaks for renters, to calls for more affordable housing funds, to plans for bringing federal muscle to bear on zoning reform. These ideas share a central conflict: Can city leaders — who in theory know local conditions best — be trusted to build the housing we need? Or will they continue to pursue policies that pump up property values, perpetuate sprawl, and punish low-income renters?

Mr. Falk began his career on the local control side of that debate. But somewhere along the Deer Hill odyssey, he started to sympathize with his insurrectionist opponents. His son lived in San Francisco and paid a fortune to live with a pile of roommates. His daughter was a dancer in New York, where the housing crunch was just as bad. It was hard to watch his kids struggle with rent and not start to think that maybe Ms. Trauss had a point.

So he started to rebel. When California's governor at the time, Jerry Brown, threatened to override local control with a proposal to allow developers to build urban apartments “as of right” — bypassing most of the public process and hearings — Lafayette citizens were apoplectic.

America has a housing crisis. A look out any airplane window shows that this has nothing to do with a lack of space.

Mr. Falk, against his own interest, wrote a memo in favor of the idea.

“Cannot be trusted,” “ineptitude,” “disingenuously manipulating the City Council,” “should be publicly and explicitly reprimanded” — these were some of the things citizens said in response. His future was untenable. The City Council reprimanded him, and when it came time for his contract negotiation, members of Save Lafayette protested a clause that would guarantee him severance of 18 months of pay if he was ever fired; a few months later he forfeited the amount — close to half a million dollars — and resigned.

It's hard to look at what happened in Lafayette and see a population that acted rationally. After the 44-home plan was derailed, Mr. O'Brien activated an insurance policy that few people knew about: The terms of his negotiation with Mr. Falk allowed him to return to his original plan for 315 apartments. When residents learned at a City Council meeting that their agitation might have brought them full circle, they got so angry that a sheriff offered to escort one of Mr. O'Brien's employees to her car.

Mr. Falk, on the other hand, seems at peace. At the council meeting marking his departure, he sat, uncharacteristically, up front. The mayor gave him the honor of leading the room in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Falk had a resignation letter in front of him, but told the audience that he was only going to read it in part.

The portion he read was polite. It was about how he loved the city and believed Lafayette was a model of civility and democratic engagement and had a brilliant and professional staff. Afterward, people said nice things and Mr. Falk nodded thank you. The paragraphs he didn't read became public soon enough — and started making the rounds on Twitter.

“All cities — even small ones — have a responsibility to address the most significant challenges of our time: climate change, income inequality, and housing affordability,” Mr. Falk had written. “I believe that adding multifamily housing at the BART station is the best way for Lafayette to do its part, and it has therefore become increasingly difficult for me to support, advocate for, or implement policies that would thwart transit density. My conscience won't allow it.”

To take on the coronavirus, go medieval on it

Quarantines and restrictive measures served a purpose in the old days. They can now, too.

NEWS ANALYSIS
Donald G. McNeil Jr.

There are two ways to fight epidemics: the medieval and the modern.

The modern way is to surrender to the power of the pathogens: Acknowledge that they are unstoppable and to try to soften the blow with 20th-century inventions, including new vaccines, antibiotics, hospital ventilators and thermal cameras searching for people with fevers.

The medieval way, inherited from the era of the Black Death, is brutal: Close the borders, quarantine the ships, pen terrified citizens up inside their poisoned cities.

For the first time in more than a century, the world has chosen to confront a new and terrifying virus with the iron fist instead of the latex glove.

At least for a while, it worked, and it might still serve a purpose.

The Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, was able to seal off the city of Wuhan, where the Covid-19 outbreak began, because China is a place where a leader can ask himself, “What would Mao do?” and just do it. The bureaucracy will comply, right down to the neighborhood committees that bar anyone returning from Wuhan from entering their own homes, even if it means sleeping in the streets.

The White House, in defiance of recent American history, also opted to go medieval by aggressive measures like barring entry to non-Americans who were recently in China and advising Americans not to go to China or South Korea.

Over the years, states and cities have imposed local quarantines, but there have been no national restrictions on entry since 1892, according to Dr. Howard Markel, a medical historian and the author of “Quarantine!”

In that year, President Benjamin Harrison ordered that all ships from Hamburg be kept offshore for 20 days because officials in that city, one of the world’s biggest ports, had lied about its cholera epidemic.

It apparently succeeded. The United States had cholera outbreaks in 1832, 1849, 1870 and 1910, but not in 1892.

Many public health figures consider shutting a nation’s doors to be an archaic tactic, and nearly impossible in the jet age.

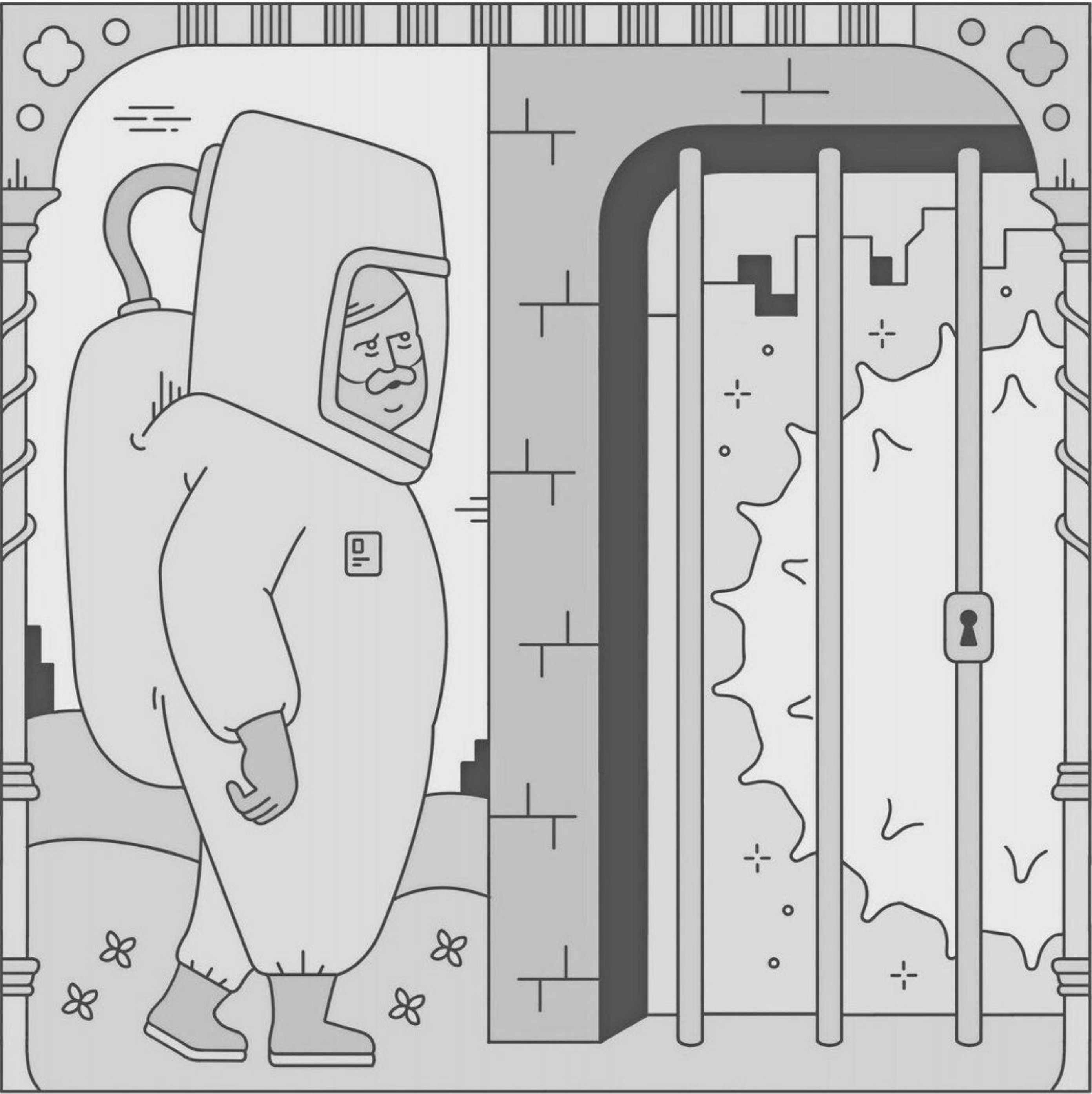
But for President Trump, such a move is natural. He was elected on a Build-the-Wall platform and in 2014, when a few heroic American medical workers got infected fighting Ebola in West Africa, he advocated leaving them there to die. (They were flown back, and survived.)

Also, this virus’s speed and apparent lethality gave the experienced doctors in the White House Coronavirus Task Force reason to be nervous. It is spreading between nations very quickly. And, while data is still sketchy, some measurements indicate that its fatality rate might be close to that of the 1918 Spanish flu.

As a result, they endorsed dropping the portcullis and shutting off air links to China.

They even created quarantine stations on military bases, the equivalent of Venice’s island lazarettos, where, in the time of the doges, the infected awaited their fate outside the city.

This has led to much consternation among other public health experts, who argue that travel restrictions can cause more panic, misery and death than they



GIACOMO GAMBINERI

prevent. Crowds may besiege hospitals, supercharging the infection rate. Closed borders can cut off vital medications like insulin. Factory and shop closings mean lost wages, hardships and possibly recession.

Also, quarantines feed racism and stigma.

Officially, the World Health Organization opposes travel and trade restrictions. It reiterated that even as it declared the epidemic a global emergency on Jan. 30.

But it now admits that they helped. The head of the W.H.O. team that visited China said last week that China “took one of the most ancient strategies and rolled out one of the most ambitious, agile and aggressive disease-containment efforts in history.”

The W.H.O.’s epidemic-modeling teams concluded that travel restrictions had slowed the spread of the virus outside China by two to three weeks.

For the United States, the delay was probably far greater. Air-traffic data shows that flights from China to the United States dropped much more than they did to Europe.

As of this writing, cases not connected to any known transmission had turned up in three states, but there are no indications of large outbreaks like those in Italy and Iran.

Harsh measures horrify civil libertarians, but they often save lives, especially when they are imposed in the early days. The best-known modern example is Cuba’s AIDS epidemic. In the 1980s, Cuba and the United States were both hit hard by the AIDS epidemic. In Cuba, the virus first infected thousands of soldiers, doctors and nurses who had served in Africa.

The Castro regime’s response — roundly condemned by other countries — was to make H.I.V. tests mandatory, and to force everyone infected into quarantine camps. The camps were not hellholes: they had bungalows, gardens, theater troupes, medical care,

more food than people outside often had, and less homophobia than gay men often faced in macho rural Cuba. But no one could leave, except for brief family visits with an escort whose main job was to make sure that no sex took place.

Meanwhile, the United States took a pro-legal-rights approach. Even offering an H.I.V. test was made illegal without a separate counseling session, which scared many away from testing. Although gay bathhouses were epicenters of transmission, there were long divisive fights over closing them.

After triple therapy was developed in the mid-1990s, most Cuban camps

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How Afghans can work together to end the war

Negotiators from the Taliban and the Afghan government must build on the achievements of the past two decades.

Aref Dostyar

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN Momentum is building toward peace in Afghanistan.

On Saturday, the United States and the Taliban signed an agreement that paves the way for talks between the Taliban and a team of negotiators led by the Afghan government in March. There is hope, at last, of respite from the long war.

The Afghan government deserves credit for planting the seeds of peace two years ago by offering unconditional talks to the Taliban and announcing a unilateral cease-fire that blossomed into a three-day pause in hostilities in June 2018.

Kabul continued to reach out to the Taliban and sent some officials in July to an informal peace dialogue in Doha that brought together the warring sides for the first time. In February, the government of Afghanistan agreed to stop its operations against the Taliban for seven days to facilitate the first formal negotiations between Kabul and the insurgents. The Afghan government and the American forces abided by the agreement. There were reports of several attacks by the Taliban on the Afghan civilians and security forces, but vio-

lence certainly decreased during this period.

Negotiations between an inclusive Afghan government-led team with the Taliban offer us a historic opportunity to end the war. If these talks are going to deliver peace, both the Afghan government and the Taliban urgently need to think more clearly about their coming talks and what they envision as the potential outcomes.

In October, President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan published a plan articulating his vision for peace. He laid out the steps for peace from talks with the United States and NATO about the withdrawal of their forces and a subsequent counterterrorism framework. The plan includes the creation of an inclusive Afghan team to negotiate with the Taliban and talking to regional and global partners to ensure national security and cooperation to develop the Afghan economy in “post-peace agreement” Afghanistan.

President Ghani also put forth the path to resolving long-term local grievances caused by feelings of exclusion from political processes or low levels of accessibility to law enforcement and justice. Furthermore, the plan aims to strengthen national public institutions to maintain order and deliver essential services to the people.

But the Taliban have shown profound and worrying lack of clarity, and their intentions remain inscrutable. They insist that they want the violence to stop, but they agreed to only a seven-day “reduction in violence” and refuse to accept a cease-fire until after official peace negotiations, the parameters of which remain undefined.

The Taliban have also been extremely vague about their proposed policies on human rights, the relationship of the Afghan government to its people and the future of relationships between Kabul and the world.

The details are absolutely crucial. The Taliban have spoken about agreeing with human rights

The people of Afghanistan deserve to hear the Taliban’s positions on many questions.

based on Islamic law. Will their interpretation be aligned with the positions of its founder Mullah Omar, or will it align with something that progressive scholars of Islam would approve? They are entirely silent about this.

The Taliban say that their proposed governance system is one that is “based on consensus among people.” But they have not clarified whether they agree that all men and women of age have the right to vote and whether they would accept peaceful transitions of power

based on free elections through secret ballots. The insurgents have not explained whether they would accept the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which is informed by the core ideas of Islam and explicitly prohibits the promulgation of any laws contravening the tenets and provisions of Islam. The people of Afghanistan deserve to hear the Taliban’s positions clearly on these and many other questions.

These uncertainties and the absence of trust of the Taliban have created certain attitudes toward the peace talks among pro-government factions, particularly among some political parties who seek a share of power and a new generation of politicians who don’t want to lose their hard-fought gains.

The most common of these attitudes are the “compromise model” and the “defensive model.” The “compromise model” sees a degree of compromise with the Taliban as a prerequisite to successful peace negotiations, and it is implicitly and explicitly propagated by some international peace experts as well. But it is a shortsighted and problematic approach.

The opponents in negotiations, at best, compromise on superficial bargaining positions rather than on their core interests. In the Afghan context, it focuses on a division of government

positions among certain people or groups of people instead of building a sustainable system for political inclusion of all Afghans. And it is difficult to understand what one can afford to compromise on. Development? Social and political freedoms? People’s right to food and education? Can one agree to halfway rights for women?

In Kabul, the “defensive model” plays out as a feeling of defensiveness, a compelling urge to guard against a dreadful past when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. It stems from a sense that the ideals and achievements of the past two decades are under attack by the Taliban, and that fear is based on the regressive and ultra-Orthodox positions the Taliban demonstrated when they were in power in the 1990s.

Perhaps a better approach for the Afghan talks to succeed and deliver a just and lasting peace could be that both groups take a transformative approach. Negotiators from both sides should meet to create the blueprint of the future by building upon the achievements of the past two decades. They must find common ground based on arguments that reflect the realities of the new Afghanistan.

For such fruitful discussions, the two sides should distinguish between questions that will be resolved in formal

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GLOBAL PANDEMIC WARNINGS IGNORED

After many fire drills, the world may be facing a real fire.

There is still a chance that Covid-19 will prove to be more fire drill than actual fire. A global pandemic is all but certain, but there are many unknowns: Will the virus itself prove to be less contagious or far less deadly than is currently feared? Will it show a tendency to recede in warmer weather the way that seasonal flu does? Can a vaccine be made quickly available? Any of these developments may yet break the global transmission chain, and the vortex of fear and market-tumbling anxiety in which the world now finds itself may yet pass.

If the next few weeks or months bring calm — and scientists increasingly worry that they will not — the world would do well to remember this time what it seems to have forgotten again and again. Another pathogen will emerge soon enough, and another after that. Eventually, one of them will be far worse than all its predecessors. If we are very unlucky, it could be worse than anything in living memory. Imagine something as contagious as measles (which any given infected person passes to 90 percent of the people he or she encounters) only many times more deadly, and you'll have a good sense of what keeps global health officials up at night.

Here's what is certain: Despite many warnings over many years, we are still not ready. Not in China, where nearly two decades after that SARS outbreak food markets that sell live animals still thrive and authoritarianism still undermines honest and accurate communication about infectious diseases. Not in Africa, where basic public health capacity remains hobbled by a lack of investment and, in some cases, by political unrest and violence. Not in the United States, where shortsighted budget cuts and growing nationalism have shrunk commitments to pandemic preparedness, both at home and abroad.

To be sure, some broad progress has been made in the past few years. Vaccine development and deployment now proceed faster than at any point in history. The World Health Organization has corrected many of the institutional shortcomings that thwarted its responses to previous outbreaks. Other countries, in both Europe and Africa, have stepped up to fill the global health leadership position that America appears to have vacated.

But, as Covid-19 makes clear, much more is still needed.

Plan and prepare. America's stockpile has only a fraction of the personal protective equipment that may be needed to respond to Covid-19 — or that would be needed in any pandemic situation. The Food and Drug Administration says that Covid-19-related supply chain disruptions have led to at least one drug shortage already. Public health experts say that more will almost certainly follow. Federal officials, responding directly to the Covid-19 crisis, have also apparently failed to adhere to even the most basic principles of infection control. Americans expect more from their government. Experts have been warning about the importance of proper training, and the need to plan for equipment shortages and supply chain disruptions since at least the anthrax scare of 2001.

Invest in state health departments. They are the front line of every public health emergency, from vaping-related lung illnesses to resurgent syphilis to the opioid epidemic to Covid-19. They are underfunded and deeply strained, and the vast majority of them do not have the capacity to respond to a full-blown pandemic. They cannot do the work of rapid diagnosis and contact tracing, or promote public awareness and combat misinformation in real time, without financial and human resources. A 2019 reauthorization of The Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act, which includes state-level funding for public health emergencies, was a step in the right direction, but it was not enough to compensate for nearly two decades of steady funding cuts.

Fund federal health agencies. To wage the best fight against any pandemic, the country needs more than vaccines and medical supplies. It needs reliable diagnostics, advanced disease monitoring systems and sensible drug development. One of the most reliable ways to develop those things is through federal research and development. It's disconcerting that for every fiscal year of his presidency so far, Donald Trump has called for deep cuts to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health.

Forget isolationism. One thing the current moment shows is the folly of presuming that viruses will respect borders — that they can be kept out by walls or wrangled into submission with good intentions. They cannot. Restricting and rescinding foreign health and development aid, pulling global health workers from outbreak zones abroad and undermining health care at home makes Americans more vulnerable to threats like Covid-19.

The best strategy for thwarting this epidemic, and for preventing the next, is to help other nations — wherever they are — fight humanity's common enemy — wherever it is — before the United States has to fight it at home.

The untapped potential of women in space

Mae Jemison

Two years after I joined NASA in 1987, I was preparing for a trip to Brazil to help the United States Information Service celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. The souvenir posters I would give out referred to the "first American men on the moon." I suggested it would be more appropriate if they read "first humans on the moon."

A male astronaut sneered at the idea and said that it had been "men who landed on the moon."

"But it was women who helped put them there!" I pushed back.

I was referring to the countless generations of women who have done so much to support human achievements but have gone unrecognized.

Even though I was soon to become the first woman of color who went to space, at that time I did not know of the mathematician Katherine Johnson, who died last Monday at the age of 101, or of the crucial calculations she made for the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo missions.

It would have put such a fierce smile on my face had I known about Katherine Johnson, her colleagues Mary Jackson and Jackie Vaughn and the other women mathematicians at NASA when I was growing up on the South Side of Chicago in the 1960s. I always assumed that I would go into space, even though the United States had no astronauts who were women or of color at the time. I could see on TV that the mission control rooms were filled with white men. Even at 8, 9 or 10 years old, I was sure that the picture misrepresented the capabilities women and I possessed.

Though I majored in African and

African-American studies as well as chemical engineering at Stanford, when I joined the NASA astronaut corps I only knew vaguely of some African-American women at NASA and in aviation. I knew of African-American men and white women who were science and exploration legends. Yet I was unfamiliar with Bessie Coleman, who became the first black woman in the world to get a pilot's license in 1921; or Willa Brown, an African-American and the first U.S. woman to get both a pilot's and a mechanic's license and who lobbied the government to integrate the Army Air Corps. That helped lead to the establishment of the Tuskegee Airmen, a number of whom she trained.

It fortified me to get to know and work with Christine Darden, Patricia Cowings and other women scientists, engineers and mathematicians of all ethnicities who worked at NASA centers throughout the nation.

I was the first woman of color in space. Here's what Katherine Johnson means to me.

I am so pleased the book and movie "Hidden Figures" allowed the world to meet and celebrate Katherine Johnson and her colleagues. Katherine Johnson was a revelation. An inspiration. But she was not a "one-off" to be put on a shelf and admired for her singular genius. She was representative of the deep well of talent and potential that is so often buried by lack of opportunity, access, exposure and expectation for women and particularly women of color in science and technical fields.

She was a beacon who heralded the contributions made by women that were hidden and stymied by the deep

institutional and societal bias that accredits achievements to white men, deemed by society to be the unique holders of genius.

Katherine Johnson today is a balm for the discomfort that arises when you stand up in a crowd — a crowd that doubts your capabilities due only to your gender or race — and press a point, disagree with a widely held premise or challenge the sugar coating of facts meant to make the powerful feel better while disregarding the less powerful, who need the truth revealed.

I have been working with a group of experts to understand what is needed to achieve the equitable participation and leadership of women in STEM fields. The insight may be uncomfortable for some allies, because effective, lasting solutions demand profound change in core beliefs and behaviors.

The changes require the dismantling of a gantlet: of persistent bias, obstacles and actions that block women's entry or push them out. It is a gantlet that has gone unacknowledged even decades after Katherine Johnson's accomplishments at NASA. Organizations value women for their work when it aligns with the organization's traditional perspectives; but they fall back on exclusionary behavior when new, diverse perspectives are generated or required.

Women have continued to advance within NASA — Peggy Whitson is the American astronaut who has spent the most time in space. In October, a pair of female astronauts, Christina Koch and Jessica Meier, walked in space together.

Even great organizations may be blind to persistent intersectional bias that treats African-American women so differently. As I testified before the House space and science committee in



Mae Jemison in 1992.

May, there have been just six African-American women astronauts; three of them have flown in space. It is confounding that of 338 NASA astronauts, two of these African-American women, of stellar accomplishments and tenures of over 10 years each, are the only American astronauts who have been denied or pulled from a spaceflight assignment without any official explanation.

While I did not meet Katherine Johnson, when I channel her, I am jazzed. Katherine Johnson is the shining example. Through her I see the possibilities when the full scope of human experience, talent and perspectives are engaged to address the challenges and opportunities to improve life on Earth for all and push the limits of our knowledge.

MAE JEMISON, an engineer and physician, was the first woman of color in space.



Katherine Johnson at her desk at the NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, in 1962.

Why Bernie Sanders scares me



Bret Stephens

Most of us go through life revising our opinions. At 16 I thought "The Fountainhead" was a great book. At 18 I realized it was rubbish. At 25 I thought Bill Clinton should be thrown out of office for lying about a consensual dalliance. At 46 I don't know what I was thinking.

In 2040, assuming I'm still kicking, I'm sure I'll have misgivings about some of what I wrote in 2020. Maybe that will include this column.

To have our convictions knocked sideways by stronger arguments, fresh experiences, contrary evidence, maturing judgment, or simply the honesty of a second-guessing mind, is how we become educated. The alternative is intellectual stagnation, puerility, and arrogance. It takes a fanatic, or a fool, to believe that the person who's most right is the one who almost never admits to being wrong.

Which brings me to Bernie Sanders. There was a moment in last week's generally awful South Carolina debate

in which I briefly warmed to the senator from Vermont: when he acknowledged casting a bad vote in 2005 in connection to gun manufacturers. It wasn't that he changed his position to something more congenial to my views. It's that he changed his position at all.

Otherwise, the presumptive Democratic front-runner communicates a sense of moral and ideological certitude — unrelentingly sustained for decades — that seems to thrill his followers but terrifies me. Other candidates have changed their views on one thing or another over the years, albeit with varying degrees of sincerity: Joe Biden on the war in Iraq; Mike Bloomberg on stop-and-frisk; Elizabeth Warren on super PACs.

Not Bernie! The young man who joined the Young People's Socialist League as a student at the University of Chicago in the early 1960s on the hoary notion that "capital" should be in the hands of workers, not capitalists, is now the old man who rails compulsively against "the billionaire class" and wants to nationalize the health insurance industry. The guy who was angry about the downfall of Salvador Allende's Marxist regime in Chile in 1973 is still angry about it today.

He isn't entirely letting go of Fidel's achievements, either, even if it risks Florida's 29 electoral votes. Yes, literacy in Cuba (largely for purposes of indoctrination) is high, and Sanders thinks he

has a moral obligation to affirm this.

This isn't to say that everything Sanders ever thought as a young man — and still thinks today — is wrong. At Chicago he helped force the university to end racial segregation in its private housing. He made the definitive case, in the pages of the college newspaper, for the right of students to have sex. He joined Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963.

These are things of which the senator can be proud. Other things, not so much.

He was affiliated with the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party when it was

He seems mostly incapable of admitting past errors of judgment.

shilling for the Khomeini regime during the Iran hostage crisis. He shilled for the Ortega regime in Nicaragua in the 1980s, while denouncing skeptical journalists as "worms." In 1985, as mayor of Burlington, Vt., he made the case for bread lines: "Sometimes American journalists talk about how bad a country is because people are lining up for food," he said. "That is a good thing! In other countries, people don't line up for food. The rich get the food and the poor starve to death."

This isn't just a callous comment. It reveals a whole substructure of political ignorance and moral idiocy that was

altogether common among Sanders's wing of the political left, both in the U.S. and abroad. Some members of that wing, like Germany's Joschka Fischer or France's Bernard Kouchner, came honestly and openly to grips with their youthful errors, which commends them, and, more important, changed their minds on fundamental questions.

I know of no similar decisive break by Sanders with his past comments and associations. Yes, he now downplays his association with the S.W.P. and clears his throat about his opposition to the Castros and Ortegas of the world. Good for him, and it's not for me to doubt his sincerity.

But I do doubt his seriousness. In America's 46-year Cold War with some of the vilest regimes in history, Sanders's main contribution was loudly to find fault with America while remaining remarkably mum about the sins of the other side — when he wasn't finding occasions to praise them. The least he can do is acknowledge that he was wrong.

The Cold War is long over, and Sanders deserves to be judged chiefly on the merits of his proposals and the strength of his character. I have serious doubts on the first score, but that's for future columns. For now, what needs saying is that a man who refuses to make an honest break with the worst convictions of his youth should never be entrusted with the presidency.

My ex-boyfriend’s new girlfriend is Lady Gaga

Lindsay Crouse

I was eating bodega grapes at my desk on a recent Monday morning, gearing up to wrangle my inbox, when my phone started buzzing:

“Check Facebook.”
“Check Twitter.”
“Are you OK?”

It was an emergency: My ex-boyfriend, I learned, had a new girlfriend. Lady Gaga.

“Lolol” if you want. (Everyone I know did.)

But it was true. While I’d been watching the Super Bowl on television in New York, they were snuggling in her private box at the Hard Rock Stadium at Miami Gardens. There were

How do you compare yourself with one of the most famous women in the world?

the paparazzi as he escorted her away, her pink hair flowing and sequins pasted around her eyes.

Page Six produced a deep dive into Lady Gaga’s new “mystery man.” Refinery29 announced that Gaga was “wearing 2020’s

hottest new accessory: a normal boyfriend.” The story appeared in the Daily Mail, and Business Insider and People, where my mother read about the couple after checking the magazine out from our local library.

I dated this normal, mystery man for seven years. Our relationship lasted all of college, and then a few years more. (A popular song from back then described being “caught in a bad romance.”)

As you can guess from the fact that you’ve probably never heard of me, I’m not famous. So suddenly it’s like I’m star-gawking by proxy (yes I know there’s another word for that). But there’s almost no way to avoid it.

Social media in 2020 is so ingrained that it’s no longer a supplement or even an addiction. It’s just an accelerated extension of the way humans have always behaved. We live in a culture of constant updates. You want to unsubscribe? Well, you can’t.

I don’t follow my ex on social media. We were “friends” on Facebook. Then we were “in a relationship” on Facebook. After we broke up, I noticed I was “blocked” on Facebook. And then we moved on. I hadn’t googled him in forever (I promise). But in February I



Lady Gaga at the Super Bowl with her “mystery man.”

knew everything about his new relationship status, within hours of when it was disclosed.

In some ways this is the natural, if absurd, arc of my generation’s entire adult life. In a vertical cascade of photos, I watch my friends’ ex-boyfriends nurturing the pregnancies of the nice-looking women they married instead. Sometimes I know the names of the resulting children, kids I will almost certainly never meet — but I will know whether they were princesses or pirates for Halloween anyway. I’ve seen their Christmas trees and sand castles and their tablescapes on special occasions. Sometimes they go dark for a period, the dinner parties disappear and they’re single again. I keep follow-

ing, a passive but not unwilling audience.

We used to obsess about celebrities and then started obsessing about one another. Maybe a decade ago I would have subscribed to US Weekly. Today there’s no need: I have the parade of people in my phone. I mix “real” celebrities with people I know and I can curate it all however I want. Then I scrolled through Instagram and saw a post from Lady Gaga: she was sitting in her new boyfriend’s lap.

Friends from college liked it — along with nearly three million others.

If you’ve ever googled an ex’s new partner (be honest) you’ve probably played a certain game with yourself. You’re either just curious — which is

healthy of you — or you want to know how you compare. Ideally the ex’s life didn’t improve too much without you? In this case, though, that’s all upended. How do you compare yourself with Lady Gaga?

Instead of thinking, “Why not me?” when I see them together, I think “That was me.” It pulls the illusion of celebrity down.

At first that was confounding. When one friend called me at my desk that morning to discuss, my voice actually shook. (Who wants to rehash an old relationship at work the day after the Super Bowl?) So I gave myself till noon. And then I thought again.

Lady Gaga is amazing. Comparing yourself with her is incredibly motiva-

tional, and I recommend you try it, regardless of how you relate to who’s dating her.

At least, that’s what I did.

For example: I was going to wear a black dress I’d gotten on sale years ago to an event that weekend, for probably the 27th time. But Lady Gaga would never do something like that. I’ve never owned anything that costs more than a week’s worth of groceries — whereas she is a woman who wears pieces of raw meat on the red carpet. I went to a nice store I’d never been inside before and I tried something on. The clerk asked me what the occasion was. I found out from Facebook that my ex-boyfriend was dating Lady Gaga, I told her, and she looked me up and down. “Huh,” she said. “Really?”

Yes.

The dress was too expensive, but I bought it anyway. Why should I accept less than Lady Gaga?

I went to a coffee shop. Did I want a large? Yes. For the event: Did I want my makeup done? I never had, but yes. And yes, I’ll get the lashes too. When I was emailed praise, did I forward it to my boss? Yes. Did I agree to do the work presentation I was anxious about? Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

(I haven’t figured out how to start a multimillion-dollar entertainment empire yet, or a major advocacy campaign, but yes to that, too.)

The point is, Lady Gaga is living the ambitious life that we keep saying women should embrace. A quote I remember reading from her, probably on Instagram, says, “*Don’t you ever let a soul in the world tell you that you can’t be exactly who you are.*” It’s so easy as you get older to find the best in who you’ve become, to make the most of it — and maybe even to get a little complacent about it. But if Lady Gaga can do what she wants, and even expand on what she wants, why not me, too? Why not let being “exactly who I am” mean trying to be the best I could be? Lady Gaga continues to challenge herself, to try new things, to thrive.

At least that’s what I gather from my phone, the place where we all converge.

Recently someone sent me a photo of my fiancé and me dancing at a wedding, and I posted it on Instagram. I saw Lady Gaga’s boyfriend in the views, and I realized we’re actually all the same: strangers, smiling on a screen.

LINDSAY CROUSE is a senior staff editor in Opinion.

Go medieval on the virus

MCNEIL, FROM PAGE 9

closed.

But the difference in lives saved by choosing brutality over freedom was stark: Cuba’s H.I.V. infection rate was for decades about one-sixth that of the American one. New York City and Cuba have roughly the same population. In the epidemic’s first 30 years, fewer than 2,500 Cubans died of AIDS. Over 78,000 New Yorkers — mostly gay men — did.

As the virus creeps closer, stark choices will arise. The United States cannot shut out the whole world. Even if all air travel were stopped, the virus could reach Latin America or Canada and enter over our land borders.

With luck, the extra time that China bought us by falling on its viral grenade will help produce a treatment or a vaccine. The threat will subside and reporters like me will be accused of alarmism.

Top American health officials now say “it is not a matter of if but when” the virus begins to spread here. But the American experience will not echo the Chinese one.

China has had imperial rule since 221 B.C. The United States, born of rebellion, prizes individual rights.

There will be no national lockdown. No threats to have anyone “forever nailed to history’s pillar of shame,” as one of Mr. Xi’s underlings warned those who hid cases of infection.

But local control — and the political factionalism that is endemic to democracy — can carry grave risks in the face of a crisis, Dr. Markel noted.

In 1918 and 1919, as the Spanish influenza swept across the country in waves, various cities reacted in their own ways.

Cities like St. Louis that reacted quickly — canceling parades and ballgames, shutting schools, transit systems and government offices, ordering the sick to stay home — ultimately had fewer deaths.

In cities like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, which were paralyzed by political feuds or pressure from local businesses to avoid shutdowns, many more ultimately died.

To overcome the divisiveness that would imperil a cohesive national response, Dr. Markel said, “you need leadership from the top — and there has to be trust. In an epidemic, the idea that ‘everyone is entitled to their own facts’ is really dangerous.”

DONALD G. MCNEIL JR. is a science reporter for The New York Times who has covered epidemics since 2002.

Why is the coronavirus data so limited?

ROSENTHAL, FROM PAGE 1

rumor-mongering and the “illegal activity of publishing false information online.” (Dr. Li later died of the illness.)

There is a tradition in China (and likely much of the world) for local authorities not to report bad news to their superiors. During the Great Leap Forward, local officials reported exaggerated harvest yields even as millions were starving. More recently, officials in Henan Province denied there was an epidemic of AIDS spread through unsanitary blood collection practices.

Indeed, even when Beijing urges greater attention to scientific reality, compliance is mixed. On Feb. 13, the Communist Party secretaries of Wuhan and Hubei Province lost their jobs over their botched initial handling of the crisis. But damage had been done. As the virus was taking hold, doctors were not wearing proper protective equipment. Sick people, thinking they just had a cold, didn’t seek medical attention. And travelers continued to board cruise ships spreading a new pathogen.

“Early on, management was less than optimal in Hubei and they’re paying for that now,” Dr. Ian Lipkin, a professor of epidemiology at Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health who has been working in China and advising the Chinese government since the SARS outbreak, told me.

There were, of course, some genuine barriers to understanding what exactly was happening in Wuhan: Pneumonias are not unusual in winter, and there was no way to know that there was a novel virus. (Dr. Lipkin’s group is working on building a new test that distinguishes between different cause of viral pneumonias, with a researcher headed to China this week for testing.)

Least Americans feel that it could never happen here, Dr. Lipkin points out that it took many months for health officials in the United States to acknowl-

edge and recognize H.I.V. as a new virus, despite the fact that gay men were turning up at alarming rates with unusual pneumonias and skin cancers.

Scientific competition has also slowed reaction and response, experts fear — leading to the extraordinary editors’ plea in Nature. For a young researcher, a paper in Nature or the New England Journal of Medicine is gold in career currency. Scientific prestige may encourage perfecting data for peer review, but preparedness requires rapid dissemination of information.

While federal officials in the United States warn Americans to be ready for the virus, there are some important aspects of its spread about which we

Lots of data is being collected. The world deserves to see more of it.

have little information — even though they have likely already been studied by scientists and officials, in China, in Japan and elsewhere. Scientists in various countries are presumably gathering large amounts of data day by day and the world deserves to see more of it.

“Were there patterns around infections, places, procedures? Maybe that is being collected and readied for the medical literature. But it would be hugely important to know,” said Dr. Tom Inglesby, director of the Center for Health Security of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, which studies epidemics. For example: Of the more than 1,700 health workers who were infected in China, did those infections occur before they knew to wear protective equipment? Were they doing procedures that might lead to exposure? Those answers would quell fears about how the virus spreads and how to protect front line workers.

Likewise, there were hundreds of people who tested positive aboard the

Diamond Princess cruise ship and were transferred to the hospital. But there has been little public information released about what shape they were in. How many in the cohort were really sick, how many just had minor symptoms and how many just needed isolation? Does the pattern of infection suggest a role for transmission via plumbing on the ship?

Finally, the world’s public health researchers need much more transparency about how officials are monitoring this epidemic. What exactly is China’s surveillance strategy among the general population? To gauge the actual death rate of Covid-19, researchers would need to know how many people actually have it, even if they have only mild symptoms. In-country surveillance may reveal a very large pool of people with mild or no symptoms at all.

Dr. Lipkin noted that because cases noted early in an epidemic are the most severe, early mortality estimates tend to be high. As more information comes out, the death rates are likely to fall. “We’re probably six months out from having a good picture and when we do I’d guess the mortality will drop dramatically,” he said.

Compared with the situation in 2003, when it took about five months for the Chinese central government to publicly acknowledge a deadly crisis associated with SARS, the flow of information has clearly improved. But since then, travel and commerce between China and the rest of the world has increased manifold. The spread of information about emerging infectious diseases needs to keep up with that new reality.

ELISABETH ROSENTHAL, a former New York Times correspondent, is the author of “An American Sickness: How Healthcare Became Big Business and How You Can Take It Back” and editor-in-chief of Kaiser Health News.

Working together to end the war

DOSTYAR, FROM PAGE 9

talks and questions that can be resolved through informal talks. They need to build an effective mechanism for addressing the right questions in the right settings.

Questions such as an agreement on the venue and timeline of talks, and clearing of roadblocks to peace along the way should be discussed informally. Issues such as return of refugees, reintegration, prisoners, sanctions, political inclusion and agreement on policies to strengthen the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan should be discussed formally.

Finally, the language surrounding the

peace process should be agreed upon, because it affects the negotiations. The coming negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban are described by some as “intra-Afghan peace negotiations” and by some as “negotiations between the Islamic Republic and the Taliban.”

The term “Islamic Republic” refers to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as it stands today with a Constitution and a Parliament. It must not be confused with the Taliban’s implied system of some sort of an Islamic emirate. The idea of Afghanistan as an Islamic republic is nonnegotiable, while there is openness to reforms among most Afghans.

It is normal for groups on opposite

sides of peace negotiations to joust ahead of time about what narratives to promote by using certain language or what to include on the agenda. That is the reality of a protracted war.

But it is important to maintain the ability to think clearly, strategically and constructively in the midst of the complexities of the peace process. These are confusing times for many Afghans, but the political jigsaw presents the first glimpses of hope for a better future.

AREF DOSTYAR is the former director general for international relations and regional cooperation at Afghanistan’s National Security Council.

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A cellist’s tragic tale, told in dance

LONDON

Jacqueline du Pré’s story is the subject of a new work at the Royal Ballet

BY FARAH NAYERI

The stirring sounds of Elgar’s Cello Concerto rise from the orchestra pit in an opening scene of a new production by the Royal Ballet, “The Cellist.” The ballerina in the title role settles into position with her instrument: a male dancer, dressed in brown tones. She grips his upstretched arm as if it were the neck of a cello and makes sweeping gestures across his back, as if moving a bow.

This rapturous musical union is suddenly interrupted, as the cellist collapses onstage, then rubs her hands, trying to chase away the numbness. Soon, her hands begin to quiver intermittently, as do her legs. Playing the instrument becomes impossible. Her human cello tries to revive her musical powers, as does her husband, who has been conducting from a nearby podium. They wrap themselves around her in a desperate embrace. But her musical career is permanently over.

Choreographed by Cathy Marston for the Royal Ballet, “The Cellist” tells the story of two highly gifted musicians: the cellist Jacqueline du Pré, considered one of the instrument’s finest musicians, and her husband, the star conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim.

The two met in London in 1966 and married the next year, performing and recording together nonstop and forming one of the most memorable couples in classical music.

But multiple sclerosis cut short Ms. du Pré’s career. At a 1973 concert at Lincoln Center in New York, she went onstage “not knowing what G was, where C was, and not knowing what sounds were going to come out, and how I’d find them,” she later recalled. It was to be her last performance. She died 14 years later, at age 42.

“It’s very sad, in many respects, but I also wanted to make it a celebration,” Ms. Marston said in an interview at the Royal Opera House. “She has this life force that everyone you speak to conveys, somehow, and it goes on.”

“I made it really clear from the beginning that I’m not interested in the gossip-mongering,” she added, referring to books and a movie that focused on Ms. du Pré’s private life with Mr. Barenboim.

Taking a musician’s passion to the stage decades later, with a human cello acting as a bridge between characters.

“This is not a biography. It’s dance, it’s wordless, it’s emotional.”

Lauren Cuthbertson, the principal dancer playing Ms. du Pré, said she did a lot of research into the life and personality of the cellist to be able to translate her story into body language, and described her as a “magnetic performer” who “looked truly possessed with where she was with the music.”

“Jackie is an icon, and I think that’s something that I remembered the whole way through,” the ballerina said. “She wasn’t just an average player; she was an incredible cellist. She wasn’t a little bit smiley and sweet; she was really smiley. Everything she felt, she felt in the extreme.”

She described the human cello in the production — danced by Marcelino Sambé — as “a wonderful bridge” between the characters of the cellist and the conductor. The instrument “really isn’t displayed in that kind of ‘Fantasia,’ ‘Beauty and the Beast’ way, where there’s a Disney-like cello with a smiley face on it,” she explained.

The ballet came about when Ms. Marston was approached by Kevin



REG WILSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

O’Hare, director of the Royal Ballet, to propose ideas for a new production.

Ms. Marston discussed the matter with her sister, a drama teacher, who had found an old cello in her classroom and asked her students to do physical theater improvisations with it, a concept that had proven interesting.

Ms. Marston herself, in a ballet she had previously choreographed, had asked one of the group dancers to impersonate a cello, and it worked. So she came up with the idea of adapting the life of Ms. du Pré for the stage.

The idea was all the more relevant because the choreographer’s mother, who was born in the same year as Ms. du Pré, learned she had multiple sclerosis a decade ago. She acted as a consultant on the project.

The ballet was a way to “come to terms” with her own mother’s condition, Ms. Marston said.

Before any work began, however, the choreographer traveled to Berlin to meet with Mr. Barenboim. She did not want to go ahead “without getting his blessing, so to speak,” she said. He was surprised that someone should want to make a ballet about the life of his late wife, she recalled, but was “totally behind our idea,” and was fine with being depicted as a conductor, even though his musical interactions with Ms. du Pré were mainly as a pianist.

Mr. Barenboim observed the 30th anniversary of his first wife’s death in October 2017 with a tribute concert at the Royal Festival Hall in London. “The greatest musical joy was to play together with her,” he recalled in an interview at the time. “I think we complemented each other. She had an abandon that was very contagious, and I loved it.”

The dancer Matthew Ball said it was “quite intimidating” to play Mr. Barenboim, a conductor now in his 70s, at the pinnacle of his classical music career.

“He’s a titan of the music world, and over his long-established career has set many precedents,” Mr. Ball said.

He approached the role by focusing on Mr. Barenboim “at a slightly more innocent time,” when he was “finding his voice as a conductor and as a musical icon,” he said. “Then I can relate it back to myself more easily: I’m an ambitious

young man, and I want to do well for myself and work hard, and I’m passionate about my art. These are similarities.”

The specially composed musical score for “The Cellist” is by Philip Feeney, but it contains recognizable segments of the music that Ms. du Pré performed in her lifetime: the Elgar concerto, her signature piece, but also works by Rachmaninoff, Fauré, Mendelssohn and Beethoven. Live per-



ROSA, PHOTO BY BELL COOPER

formances of the ballet end on Wednesday, but theaters worldwide will have screenings into August.

Newly created ballets with a strong story line — and particularly biographical ones — are uncommon.

“Often, more contemporary dance fits into an abstract box, and it doesn’t necessarily tell a very clear story, even if it does have a story of some sense,” Mr. Ball explained. “This is quite clear nar-

rative, and a biography, if you will, of Jacqueline du Pré, or some aspects of her life.”

Ms. Cuthbertson defended the genre. Narrative ballets “touch people’s hearts, touch the artists,” she said. “Stories draw me in, so I’m thrilled to be telling the story.”

She said the piece did have elements of sentimentality about it, “but I hope it will also be a great piece of dance.”



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Honoring a life
Cathy Marston choreographed “The Cellist.” The ballet is sad because of Ms. du Pré’s illness, but “I also wanted to make it a celebration,” Ms. Marston said.



TOM JAMESON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A London ‘Fidelio’ with a German twist

A new director brings a fresh approach to Beethoven’s only opera

BY A.J. GOLDMANN

This season, opera in London speaks with a German accent.

At the Royal Opera House, the director Tobias Kratzer wants to tap into the spirit of Beethoven with a fresh production of “Fidelio” in a year of celebrations that mark 250 years since the composer’s birth.

In just a few years, Mr. Kratzer has shot to prominence with a string of acclaimed productions across Europe. His recent triumphs include an emotionally wrenching production of Alexander von Zemlinsky’s “Der Zwerg” at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and a mischievous “Tannhäuser,” which won near universal acclaim at the 2019 Bayreuth Festival.

“Fidelio,” with sold-out performances through March 17, marks Mr. Kratzer’s debut in the English-speaking world. In London, he is one of the youngest practitioners of a German stage philosophy sometimes known as Regietheater (literally, “director’s theater”) that often takes liberties with plot details and can subject canonical works to strenuous deconstructions.

Speaking between rehearsals in early February, he sounded unfazed by the challenge of bringing his avant-garde sensibilities to London’s main opera house, even if doing so rubs up against local traditions.

“The idea of having a director not only arrange things, but really to interpret pieces, is more or less a German invention, dating back to the time of the Weimar Republic,” said Mr. Kratzer, 40. If London or New York audiences expect more from a production than mere window dressing, the influence of German directors is part of the reason.

“The British theater tradition is still much more based on a narrative level, while the German tradition starts from a more deconstructive point of view,” he explained.



ROSE, PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARA CAPPELLI

But Mr. Kratzer’s productions show that a director can approach a well-known opera from an unusual angle without destroying it. His Bayreuth “Tannhäuser” turned Wagner’s minnesinger into a prankster whose anarchist pals include a dwarf and a drag queen; his Berlin “Zwerg” read between the lines of the libretto to construct a portrait of the tortured composer.

Such approaches may prove refreshing to audiences for whom German opera productions often carry a stigma as chaotic spectacles.

Mr. Kratzer feels a primary responsibility to communicate a piece’s emotional weight in order to connect with his listeners even as he surprises them. “This doesn’t mean that you have to fulfill an audience’s expectations,” he said, “and it doesn’t mean that you need to break them at any price.”

Over the past decade, London has seen more examples of German theatri-



cal styles, and this season, some of Mr. Kratzer’s compatriots have been tasked with new productions. At the Royal Opera House, Claus Guth stages “Jenufa” later this month, followed by Christof Loy’s new “Elektra” in May. At English National Opera, Tatjana Gür-

baca directs a new “Rusalka” in late March.

Oliver Mears, the Royal Opera House’s director of opera, invited Mr. Kratzer to direct “Fidelio” after seeing Mr. Kratzer’s 2018 “Les Contes d’Hoffmann,” Jacques Offenbach’s opera

about a hard-drinking poet and his sad love affairs, in Amsterdam.

In “Fidelio,” a devoted wife assumes a false identity to break her husband out of prison. Like “Hoffmann,” it is an opera that is easy to be jaded about.

Part of what fascinated Mr. Kratzer about “Fidelio” was how Beethoven, writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, used opera as a medium capable of delivering a political and personal message. “He’s really trying to use this art form almost as a philosophical tool,” he said. “And this is a starting point for a tradition that goes through Verdi and Wagner, up to Helmut Lachenmann,” he said.

The contemporary challenge for a director, Mr. Kratzer said, is to find a way to present Beethoven’s only opera that expresses its idealistic message. A searing ode to the Enlightenment and to marital love, “Fidelio” is a piece whose faith in lofty ideals can easily seem naive and dated.

In his productions, Mr. Kratzer seems to purposely avoid any sort of instantly recognizable, signature style, preferring to approach each work on its own terms. In the case of “Fidelio,” he said, he was aiming to convey something of the piece’s radical idealism in a production that fused modern and traditional elements.

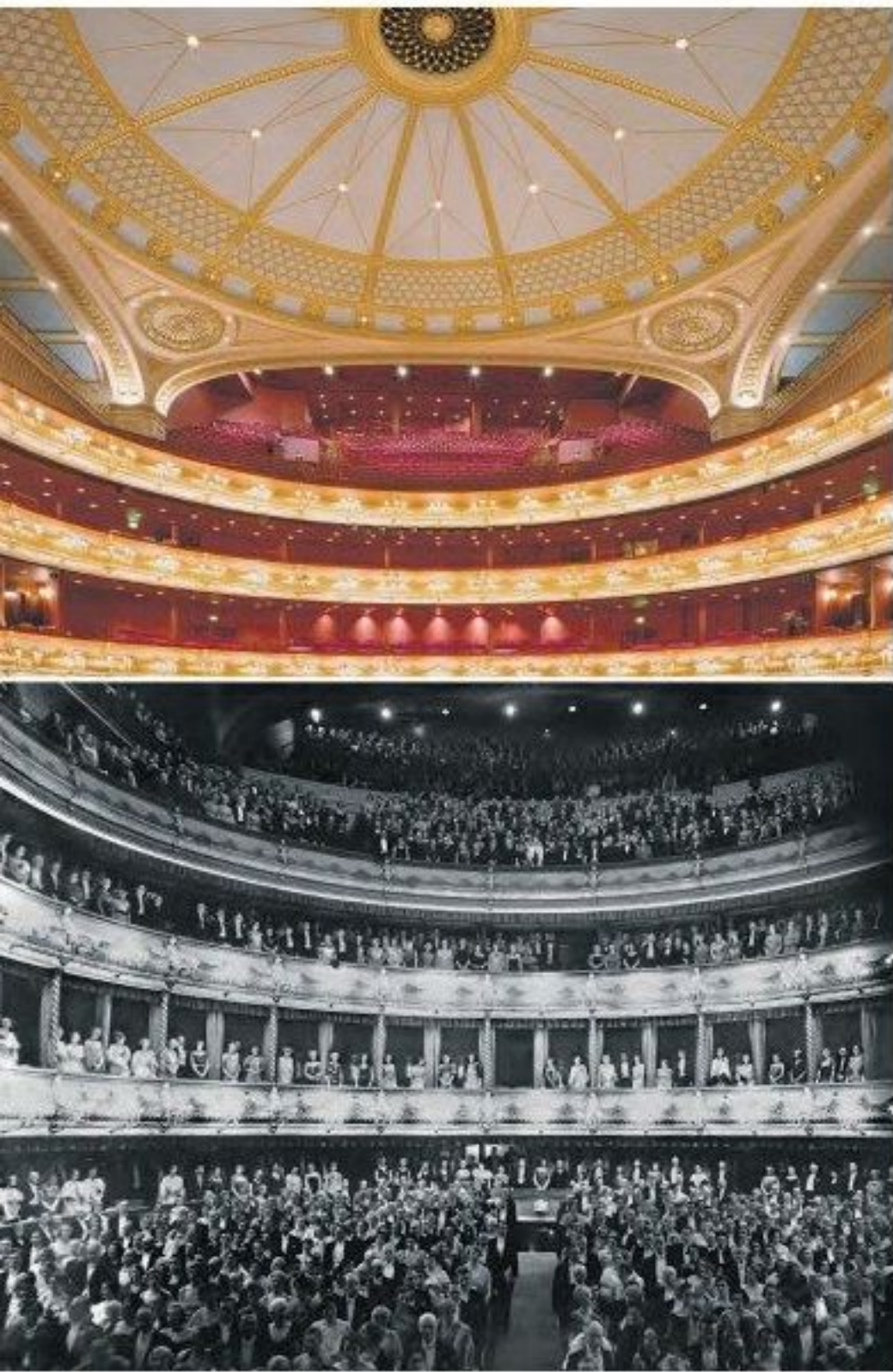
“I think even in a period piece there can be completely modern, psychological investigations,” he said. “For me, it’s not primarily a matter of setting an opera in modern times or not. For me it goes deeper. You can have quite a modern production in a period staging, and a pretty old-fashioned production in 20th or 21st century settings.”

“The specific challenge of this piece is that it has a very optimistic, utopian message,” he continued. He added that it is very easy now for directors to fall into the trap of actively undermining the opera’s message (and many have). “Looking at the world today, it’s quite easy to be cynical about this opera,” Mr. Kratzer said.

“Times are difficult for utopia,” the director added. “In this anniversary year, I’d like to recapture the spirit Beethoven intended for this opera,” he said. “It’s a hard goal, but worth aiming for.”

On stage

At left, the director Tobias Kratzer, far right, is making his debut in the English-speaking world with “Fidelio.” Below, Jonas Kaufmann as Florestan and Lise Davidsen disguised as Fidelio during rehearsals.



OYSTER PERPETUAL DATEJUST 31



Strife and survival

Leos Janacek’s late operas tend to revolve around tortured heroines

BY REBECCA SCHMID

For the first time in company history, the Royal Opera is mounting a cycle devoted to the Czech composer Leos Janacek. Following “From the House of the Dead” — presented in its house premiere two seasons ago — and “Katya Kabanova” last year, “Jenufa” takes the stage from March 24 to April 9 in a Claus Guth production. The annual series continues until 2022.

Oliver Mears, the director of opera, called the initiative “long overdue.” “Any serious international opera house has to have Janacek in their repertoire,” he said. While “Jenufa” was performed as early as 1956, “The Makropulos Affair” will be presented for the first time at the Royal Opera.

Janacek ranks among the most widely performed 20th-century opera composers, not least thanks to the Australian conductor Charles Mackerras. The conductor played a pioneering role in 1950s London at the Sadler’s Wells Theater (now English National Opera) and, internationally, with a recording series on the Decca label. But while the English National Opera has a tradition of performing in English translation, the Royal Opera is presenting all Janacek’s operas in the original Czech.

Mr. Mears pointed to the theatrical immediacy of operas as one reason for their appeal. “Janacek is often bracketed as difficult modernism,” he said. “In some ways, it’s the opposite. This is a man who really understood theater and connected with character.”

Not unlike Bela Bartok in his native Hungary, Janacek absorbed the folk melodies and — starting with “Jenufa,” his first successful opera — speech patterns from the region of Moravia. With the exception of “From the House of the Dead,” in which the chorus of male prisoners takes center stage, his late operas revolve around tortured heroines. These characters may represent various phases of the composer’s real-life affection for Kamila Stosslova, a married woman more than three decades his junior.

But there are also parallels between the earlier “Jenufa” and “Katya Kabanova,” in which both title characters find themselves thwarted by repressive societies. Katya drowns herself once it becomes clear that she cannot escape a loveless marriage and provincial town life to be with her lover, Boris; Jenufa swallows her pride and agrees to settle down with the enamored but abusive Laca after her stepmother has murdered her child.



ROSE, PHOTO BY CLIVE BARDA

For Mr. Mears, these characters are nevertheless “strong, charismatic, virile people” who “represent a break with the past,” not least with regard to “operatic convention and cliché.” “They are put in situations that are intolerable by any measure,” he said, “and yet somehow despite the horrific things that happen to Jenufa, she manages to survive.”

The title role of the new “Jenufa” production features the London debut of the rising star soprano Asmik Grigorian, who became an overnight sensation at the Salzburg Festival two summers ago. Mr. Mears expects her to bring an “intuitive response” to the character. “She combines extraordinary vocal talent with a rich psychological instinct and a stage charisma which is very, very thrilling for the audience,” he said.

The cycle’s stage aesthetic, meanwhile, takes a step away from the naturalistic approach that has a long tradition in Janacek and that Mr. Mears said “can lead to rather clunky set designs.” Mr. Guth is collaborating with the designer Michael Levine for the first time.

But Mr. Mears was reluctant to distinguish between a “traditional” or “Regietheater” aesthetic, emphasizing “the quality of the practitioners, their imagination and rigor, which speaks to as many people as possible.” He pointed to the “machinelike quality of the chorus and society which enfolds Jenufa” in Mr. Guth’s hands.

“It’s that tension between these strong female characters and the society in which they live — in particular the demands that men put on those characters — which provides these pieces with their electricity,” he said.

And yet despite the preoccupation with human cruelty in Janacek, Mr. Mears emphasized that “even in his darkest operas like ‘House of the Dead,’ there is a hint of redemption. These are not at all relentlessly gloomy pieces. There’s an enormous amount of light and shade.”

Show of strength

Amanda Majeski last year in Leos Janacek’s “Katya Kabanova” at the Royal Opera House. This season the opera house will present Janacek’s “Jenufa” in a Claus Guth production in the original Czech.



Teamsters members at an International Workers Day event in Los Angeles last May. The Teamsters have joined other unions in seeking a study of Amazon's business practices.

Unions take aim at Amazon

SEATTLE

They ask Washington to study whether retailer is warping the economy

BY KAREN WEISE AND DAVID MCCABE

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, with its 1.4 million truck drivers, warehouse workers and other transportation laborers, does not represent any Amazon workers, nor is it organizing them. But the union keeps butting into the e-commerce giant, which ships billions of packages a year.

The Teamsters joined several other major labor unions in filing a petition last week, asking the United States Federal Trade Commission to open a wide-ranging study into Amazon's business practices. The unions, which represent more than five million American workers, hope to direct the focus of the antitrust regulator to a company increasingly reaching into the industries they represent.

"We wanted to demonstrate that there is a real desire to see them take this on," said Michael Zucker, director of Change to Win, a federation of labor unions that led the effort.

The petition asks the F.T.C. to use its broad powers to gather nonpublic information about a company's or industry's effects on commerce. In a 28-page document with 149 footnotes, the unions lay out areas they think the F.T.C. should explore, including whether Amazon requires companies to use more of its services to succeed on its marketplace.

The petition, which took several months to prepare, is a greatest hits of concerns reported in the news media, but the unions said it should just be a starting point.

"You could just say to the F.T.C., 'Look into this company,'" Mr. Zucker said. "The reason why we laid out a detailed case for why was because we were trying to convince the F.T.C. in the request that they look at the company in all of its manifestations and all of its systems."

Amazon says it has created more than 500,000 jobs domestically for people with various education levels, training and skills.

In an Op-Ed published in The New York Times last month, Jay Carney, who runs the company's communications and policy teams, argued that Amazon used its scale for good. "Because Amazon is a large company with hundreds of thousands of employees, as well as contractual relationships with hundreds of thousands of other businesses of all sizes, what we do can generate positive ripple effects across the country," he wrote.

Mr. Carney said the company's minimum wage of \$15 an hour had pushed other employers to increase pay, and "in keeping with what political leaders say they want to see from companies, Amazon has plowed \$270 billion into the domestic economy since 2010." That sum includes money Amazon has spent on payroll, buildings, equipment and other business investments.

A variety of liberal groups have gone after Amazon for its impact on workers, competition and local communities. Last year, many of the groups formed a coalition called Athena to coordinate their criticism of the company. Competitors like Walmart have funded research into negative impacts of Amazon.



Tim Wu, a law school professor, top, said a petition calling for a study of Amazon made sense. Above, a delivery by UPS, a partner whose business Amazon has encroached on.

The company has also become a target for elected officials, including candidates vying to be the Democratic nominee for president. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont has pressured it over the wages and working conditions for its warehouse employees. Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts has said it should be broken up. And former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. said last year that he had "nothing against Amazon, but no company pulling in billions of dollars of profits should pay a lower tax rate than firefighters and teachers."

Amazon has yet to disclose receiving requests for information from antitrust investigators at the Justice Department or F.T.C., and it has not been publicly targeted by state attorneys general, unlike Google and Facebook. The company has continued its push for even faster deliveries and recently announced it was building a warehouse dedicated to house-brand products that critics say could push smaller competitors out of the market.

While Amazon's workers are not unionized, those at some suppliers and competitors are, and they feel pressure to adapt to Amazon's business. For the Teamsters, Amazon is a major customer of the transportation companies where they work, and the company is building its own delivery network through a series of small contractors and gig-economy drivers, who aren't unionized.

"We have watched Amazon's logistics infrastructure grow pretty exponentially over the past few years," said Iain Gold, a director with the Teamsters. "That has a direct impact when we are

at the bargaining table with UPS or DHL or other companies."

In their 2018 contract negotiations, UPS and the Teamsters agreed to create a new job type, with lower pay, to service demand for weekend e-commerce deliveries, a trade-off that some union members resisted.

In their petition, the unions ask the F.T.C. to study whether Amazon forces its third-party merchants to buy its delivery services if they want to rank high and succeed on the site, which they say could harm competing shipping and logistics providers.

"We have watched Amazon's logistics infrastructure grow pretty exponentially over the past few years."

Amazon said its delivery services were optional, but many sellers loved them "because it gives them peace of mind, knowing that shipping logistics and customer service are taken care of 24-7, year-round," a spokesman, Jack Evans, said in a statement.

Betsy Lordan, a spokeswoman for the F.T.C., said the agency had received the labor groups' petition.

In 2000, the Communications Workers of America tried to organize Amazon's customer service workers, as an outgrowth of its work with the telecom industry. The company pushed back, and the unionization effort failed.

The union has since followed how the company affects its industries. It repre-

sents workers in AT&T's retail stores, which compete with Amazon for phone sales, for example, and the union in January announced plans to organize tech workers, starting with people in the gaming industry.

Tom Smith, head organizer at the Communication Workers of America, said it turned to the F.T.C. because much about Amazon's business is still a mystery, even to a union that has followed it for two decades. "We see a company that we know very little about, that is very secretive, that there are just tons of unknowns," Mr. Smith said.

Mr. Smith declined to comment on whether his union was trying to organize Amazon's tech workers. (The NewsGuild, which represents journalists at The New York Times, is part of the C.W.A.)

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, which represents grocery workers at companies like Kroger and Safeway, began closely tracking Amazon after it bought Whole Foods for more than \$13 billion in 2017. The move catapulted Amazon from the 17th-largest grocer in the country to the sixth largest, according to the investment bank Cowen.

The grocery workers' union was particularly interested in a question the petition asks the F.T.C. to study: whether Amazon depresses wages in areas where it is a major employer. The petition estimated that half of all warehouse workers in Mercer County, N.J., were employed by Amazon. Federal data shows that warehouse wages in the county have fallen 18 percent since 2014, when Amazon opened its largest fulfillment center in the state there, according to the petition.

Mr. Evans said that Whole Foods represented just 4 percent of grocery sales domestically, and that Walmart and Kroger sell far more. "This competition ultimately leads to innovation for consumers, as you can see across the grocery industry right now," he said.

The Service Employees International Union, with two million members in health care, the public sector and other industries, also joined the petition.

The labor groups are making a novel use of the F.T.C.'s right to conduct research into how a market or industry works, using its legal authority to compel companies to provide private information. The results of these studies can influence policy changes at the agency or inform its efforts to police an industry.

In the past, these studies have been used to look at other industries, as varied as data brokers and pharmaceuticals. One study into hospital mergers bolstered the agency's ability to successfully challenge new deals, while others have led to legislative changes.

Tim Wu, a professor at Columbia Law School and an advocate for greater antitrust enforcement, said the approach made sense because the F.T.C. has struggled to find a single route into an investigation of Amazon — where low consumer prices provide a shield against antitrust action. (Mr. Wu is on the advisory board of the Open Markets Institute, an influential group that has called for the breakup of Amazon. He is also a New York Times contributing opinion writer.)

"I think the unions here are thinking, 'There's a lot of concerns raised by Amazon and the F.T.C. kind of has a blind spot,'" said Mr. Wu, who reviewed a draft of the groups' petition.

Karen Weise reported from Seattle, and David McCabe from Washington.

Bonds' rich profits and dark messages

Strategies

JEFF SOMMER

The news is gloomy for stock investors. Shares have been plummeting as traders have absorbed the latest information about the coronavirus's spread around the world.

Most commodity markets have been miserable, too, with the prices of oil, gas, coal and copper falling relentlessly.

But if you focus on the bond market — which doesn't dominate the headlines but is much bigger than the global stock market — you will get a different and more complex picture. And if you own bonds, they have probably been growing rapidly in value.

The reasons for these paper profits are disconcerting. The bond market isn't merely reacting to the coronavirus: It is reflecting a perception that the global economy was vulnerable long before the disease emerged, because financial markets have never fully recovered from the last financial crisis.

David Rosenberg has been tracking the bond market for decades. He is now the chief economist of his own firm, Rosenberg Research. Until 2009, he was chief North American economist for Merrill Lynch, and he takes a very long view. "If you had told me a decade ago that bond yields would be this low now, it would have been shocking," he said.

"Basically," he added, "interest rates have never returned to where they were before the last recession. They've kept dropping. We've been in a long secular bull market for bonds, and it's not over yet, not by a long shot. Rates are going lower."

I think he's probably right. Which means that it's likely you can make more money in bonds, even at this late stage of a decades-long rally.

But it also means that we are living in a strange new world, one in which financial markets are being stretched in ways that scarcely could have been comprehended a decade ago.

NO MARKET ROUT FOR BONDS

The headlines have focused on the cascading losses in the stock market over the last week or so. But that's not been the case for bonds.

To the contrary, it has been a time to reap astounding profits from bond holdings. And for buy-and-hold investors who have kept both stocks and bonds, it has been a reminder that those boring bonds can offset painful stock losses, making it easier to hang on for the long run.

Consider these numbers:

Through Thursday, a fund that tracked the investment-grade long-term U.S. bond market — the Vanguard Long-Term Bond ETF — generated a 7.5 percent return so far this year. But in the same stretch, a fund that tracked the S&P 500 stock index — the SPDR S&P 500 ETF, or SPY — fell 7.6 percent, according to Morningstar.

Long-term bonds have also outstripped stocks over the last 12 months. In that period, the stock fund returned 7.5 percent, but the long-term bond fund gained more than 26 percent, a staggering return for an asset category often thought of as dull.

Bond prices have risen sky-high because they move in the direction opposite to that of interest rates. And rates for the benchmark 10-year Treasury note have dropped to levels that have never been seen before. On Friday morning, for example, the rate for the 10-year note dropped as low as 1.15 percent. Mr. Rosenberg expects that it will fall even further.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO REJOICE

The bond market has been conveying truly disturbing messages, not just about the current state of the economy

but about the world's inability to recover entirely from the last recession and our vulnerability when the next one comes.

Recall the downturn set off more than a decade ago by the global financial crisis. That recession started in the United States in December 2007 and ended in June 2009, according to the official arbiters at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

The ensuing economic recovery has been the longest in American history, yet it has been one of the feeblest as well. One indication of that can be seen in the bond market right now. Interest rates typically fall when the economy is weak but then rise, along with inflation, in periods of rip-roaring growth. But that is not the pattern we've seen over the last 10 years.

Both the short-term rates controlled by the Federal Reserve and the longer-term rates determined by the bond market did drop sharply, during and after the last financial crisis. But since then, inflation has remained low, the rate of economic growth has been modest and interest rates have never returned even close to their prerecession levels.

The 10-year Treasury note in 2007 was as high as 4.85 percent, Treasury data shows. It hasn't been much above 3 percent in the last five years. And the federal funds rate, the short-term interest rate set by the Federal Reserve, reached 5.25 percent in 2006. It rose to only 2.5 percent in 2018 and 2019, and now is in the 1.5 to 1.75 percent range, according to the Fed.

RATES THIS LOW AREN'T NORMAL

The United States has entered dangerous territory, a paper published last month by the Federal Reserve emphasized.

The paper, written by the Fed economist Michael Kiley, says that the current low level of rates will cause severe policy dilemmas when the next recession actually hits.

Historically, interest rates tend to decline significantly during recessions and for two years afterward, Mr. Kiley wrote. But with rates as low as they are now, he said, "simple arithmetic" shows that in a recession, both short-term interest rates and those for bonds will approach zero — or even be negative.

That, he says, will bring the "U.S. experience closer to that seen in Europe and Japan," where many long-term bonds are already paying negative interest.

As I wrote several years ago, this amounts to the kind of proposition expected from gangsters: Hand me your money, watch me skim off some of it and you get what's left later. Yet it's become commonplace in the global bond market.

That might not happen in the United States, Mr. Rosenberg said, because of "legal and logistical constraints."

"Negative rates are a tax on money," he said, "and it's one thing to have them in Japan and Germany, but something else entirely when you're talking about the world's reserve currency, the dollar."

Essentially, with negative rates, people would be paying money for the privilege of sheltering their funds in the United States bond market. Could that happen? We may soon find out, as interest rates drop during the coronavirus crisis, which appears to be sapping economic growth around the world.

A recession will come sooner or later. Whether we are seeing the beginnings of one now or just a precursor to an eventual downturn is impossible to know.

But bonds are not merely providing a comfort for investors. They are issuing a warning of even more difficult times ahead.



The Federal Reserve building in Washington. A paper by the Fed says that the current low level of rates will cause severe policy dilemmas when the next recession hits.

Why a recession could be hard to fight

The Fed can cut rates, but it can't put goods on empty store shelves

BY NEIL IRWIN

It looks more and more likely that the novel form of coronavirus will do meaningful economic damage to the United States. Stock and bond prices already suggest that the outbreak could halt the longest expansion on record and even send the nation into recession.

The risks loom larger because the usual tools the government has to stabilize the economy are ill suited to this particular crisis. If a recession happens, it will probably be a result of this poor fit between the economic effects of the potential pandemic and the mechanisms that the government uses to try to keep the economy growing.

Interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve — which appeared more likely Friday after a late-afternoon statement by its chairman, Jerome Powell — can lower borrowing costs and raise stock prices. But they can't replace the goods made by factories closed to keep their workers from getting sick with Covid-19, the serious respiratory illness the virus causes. The government can try to pump more money into people's pockets directly, such as with tax rebates, but money alone won't put goods on empty store shelves.

Beyond the natural limitations of policy to cushion the damage, there is the economic and political backdrop of the current moment: a Fed with little room to cut already-low interest rates and a Congress divided along partisan lines while a president seeks re-election.

If a potential coronavirus downturn were a fire, the recession-fighters would be like a fire brigade low on supplies, fighting among themselves and probably lacking the right chemicals to quench the flames anyway.

"I'm looking at the combination of fiscal and monetary policy as potential triage," said Joseph Brusuelas, chief economist at the accounting firm RSM. "All they can do is really mitigate the shock of supply chains and reduce the second-order effects."

A recession, defined as a significant decline in economic activity lasting more than a few months, hasn't occurred in the United States in more than 10 years. If one happens, it will mean



Outbreaks of the new coronavirus have already disrupted daily life in Italy. Cafes like this one in Milan are deserted, as possible customers stay away to avoid exposure.

higher unemployment and lower incomes. And it would be a different kind of downturn from most of the recent ones. The core of the economic problem emerging from coronavirus is a "supply shock," meaning a reduction in the economy's capacity to make things. Companies in China that have shut down because their workers are quarantined are not making goods. That could eventually mean shortages of certain items for which there are few sources of elsewhere in the world.

Multinational companies typically operate complex supply chains, with lean inventories and essential merchandise that often arrives just in the nick of time. That means American companies that rely heavily on Chinese suppliers might begin facing shortages of key goods in the weeks ahead, said Nada Sanders, professor of supply chain management at Northeastern University.

"I believe we're going to have a massive shortage of goods," she said. "Two weeks ago I told people this was coming.

The big problem was economists don't understand how global supply chains work, how intertwined and interconnected they are." It is an issue she said would particularly affect pharmaceuticals and electronics.

Macroeconomic policies can't really do anything about supply shocks like those. But it's possible that supply shocks can bleed into demand shocks, and there economic policy can help.

Tara Sinclair, who studies business cycles at George Washington Univer-

sity, compares the situation to a grocery store. A store with no goods on the shelves has a supply problem, while a store with full shelves but no customers has a demand problem. And it is generally easier to increase short-term demand than short-term supply.

But supply problems can bleed into demand problems, and vice versa.

"If first the store is empty of products, and then people don't go to the store anymore and they lose their jobs, they can't buy anything," Ms. Sinclair said.

A tough challenge for central banks

CENTRAL BANKS, FROM PAGE 1

role, and especially psychological," Mr. Trump said, after indicating that he considered Mr. Powell's statement insufficient. "We should have the lowest interest rates. We don't have the lowest interest rates; the Fed rate is higher."

The president, who has repeatedly faulted the Fed for not cutting rates more aggressively, criticized it again on Saturday, saying it was putting the United States at a disadvantage with other countries with negative interest rates.

"Our Fed should start being a leader, not a follower," he said. "Our Fed has been a follower."

But lowering borrowing costs will only get the global economy so far: Rates are historically low across advanced economies. They are already negative across Europe and Japan, where infections are rapidly mounting. Officials in those economies had already been trying to coax households and businesses to spend amid lackluster growth by purchasing huge quantities of bonds.

And it is unclear whether monetary policy is the ammunition needed to fight this particular type of economic threat, at least at the outset. Policymakers cut rates to ward off an economic downturn — or contain one that has already arrived — by making it cheaper to borrow money, assuming that will help prod the economy. That's what the Fed did in the financial crisis in 2008, when it lowered rates nearly to zero and bought government-backed bonds in an attempt to stoke lending, pushing businesses and consumers to resume investing and buying.

But a rate cut can do little to restart production lines hobbled by workers placed in quarantine or told to stay home. Nor can central banks do much to lure tourists back to Venice or encourage people to fly again. And because monetary policy works slowly — a rate cut today takes more than a year to fully filter through the economy — it is better suited to dealing with protracted slumps.

"We would rather have a vaccine than a rate cut and fully recognize that monetary policy is not optimized for addressing this type of shock," Krishna Guha and Ernie Tedeschi of Evercore ISI wrote in a note to clients.

America's economy is susceptible to the threat posed by coronavirus, given that growth has largely been powered by consumer spending. Long-lasting quarantines could keep shoppers at home while the fear of infection could prevent even those not quarantined from venturing out.

The shock might be particularly dire for small businesses that do not have big cash cushions: A few weeks of depressed sales can push them to the edge of ruin.

and jobs are lost, consumer spending will suffer even more.

Florian Hense, an economist at the German bank Berenberg, said central bankers can at best mitigate the economic impact, not contain it.

"You can't bring people back to factories. How are you going to convince consumers to leave their houses and buy goods?" Mr. Hense said.

Despite those shortcomings, economists say that pre-emptive action might still be of some help. Rate cuts — or even hints that they are coming — can help calm markets and keep credit flowing. If it seems that the coronavirus is going to have longer-lasting effects on consumer and business spending, lower borrowing costs can offer some reprieve by stoking demand.

"I think it would send a huge signal if the Fed was willing to cut rates, even a quarter of a point, on an inter-meeting basis," Narayana Kocherlakota, a former president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, said Friday. And coordinating statements with other global central banks could help, he said. "This is obviously a global shock, so it's reasonable to think about a global response."

The United States' central bank is in a better starting position than many of its peers. It managed to lift rates amid a stronger recovery, and borrowing costs



Above, a factory in Foshan, China; top, the Shanghai Stock Exchange. The threat to the world economy from the coronavirus is linked to possible loss of factory production.

are now set in a range of 1.5 to 1.75 percent. But it too has far less room to cut than it had before the Great Recession, when it slashed rates nearly to zero from above 5 percent.

Markets are betting on rate cuts totaling a full percentage point by the end of the year. But in many places, monetary policy has less room to work.

China's central bank has already lowered its key interest rate, and the government's tight control means that it

can pump a lot of money into the economy quickly. But Beijing has been doing just that ever since the global financial crisis, producing an ever-rising mountain of debt that could grow even taller as the authorities force banks to respond to the current difficulties.

The Bank of Japan has few options left for juicing growth, though its governor, Haruhiko Kuroda, has said it stands ready to act as needed. Its already-negative interest rates mean it is more ex-

pensive for Japanese banks to stow money away than to lend it to businesses, but banks can have a hard time finding places to lend.

And in South Korea, where rates are low but positive, the central bank surprised investors by leaving interest rates unchanged on Thursday, even as the country struggled with the largest known coronavirus outbreak outside China.

The European Central Bank could offer loans with negative interest rates to eurozone banks, on the condition that they loan the money to customers. But benchmark interest rates are already at historic lows and Christine Lagarde, who became president of the European Central Bank in November, has not encouraged hopes for a swift jolt of stimulus.

Because no one knows how bad the outbreak will get, it is unclear how much stimulus will be needed — which is part of the reason this is such uncertain territory for the Fed and other central banks. If contained quickly, the coronavirus could deal a short-term blow to growth and economies could quickly snap back. But the chances of a painful slump are rising as the virus spreads.

Forecasters have cut economic growth estimates in the United States and globally, though the projections vary widely, as economists struggle to predict the virus's trajectory and the resulting damage. Bank of America researchers reduced their forecast for

2020 growth in the United States by 0.1 percent on Friday, to 1.6 percent overall.

Moody's Analytics said last week that the odds of a recession had risen to 4 in 10. Capital Economics pegged it much lower, at 1 in 10.

There is a risk that conditions could devolve if the virus spreads more quickly than expected. There is a growing consensus among economists that Europe is already headed into a recession and that weakness is likely to spread, hampering growth in the United States as well.

"We would rather have a vaccine than a rate cut."

Other vulnerabilities also exist. As in the 2008 crisis, financial risks threaten to aggravate any growth slump that materializes. Corporations owed \$13.5 trillion to bond holders at the end of 2019, an all-time high. Half of the corporate bonds issued last year were rated just one notch above junk. If debt-laden companies fail to keep up with payments amid supply chain shutdowns and work closings, they could default, handing big losses to the investors backing the loans and rippling through the financial system in unexpected ways.

Markets are already wary about such a possibility. Investors are pulling money from funds that track loans to highly indebted companies and those

"That's what we're risking here."

In parts of Italy, for example, where outbreaks of the virus have disrupted daily life, tourism is slowing and restaurants and stores are reportedly empty as people seek to avoid exposure. That could result in waiters and store clerks who endure a drop in income, which could in turn feed back into less demand for all sorts of products, and a weaker economy. Similarly, businesses might go bankrupt if the financial markets freeze up and they cannot get access to credit, meaning otherwise sound businesses end up laying off employees or closing down.

The role for economic policy, in that sense, wouldn't be to solve the supply shock, but to try to prevent that initial supply shock from triggering a demand shock.

So, for example, the government could offer widespread tax breaks, or direct payments to unemployed workers. The Fed, with interest rate cuts, can help ensure financing keeps flowing. Those actions might in turn give consumers and businesses the space to figure out how to operate despite the problems they face.

But this is not the only challenge. If coronavirus were to spread widely in the United States, and officials decided to impose widespread quarantines, the economic impact is hard for economists to model. What happens to a service economy if people can't safely travel, go shopping, or even go to work?

The answer is no one really knows. The closest comparison may be the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when air travel was temporarily suspended. But that didn't keep the vast majority of Americans from going to work.

And in those more dire scenarios, it's anybody's guess how things might shake out.

"There are a lot of reasons to think we don't have a lot of tools for this," Ms. Sinclair said. "It's more of a supply-side issue, and we can't do a whole lot to stimulate supply. And if it does trickle over into demand, it will be a real test of whether the Fed has any firepower left and whether we have appetite for the kind of fiscal stimulus that's actually impactful."

In other words, it would be best if the public health efforts to contain the spread of the virus are effective enough that we don't have to ask very much of the economic firefighters.

with low credit ratings — running away from the type of debt that usually fails first when companies run into trouble.

"There are plenty of risks in terms of financial stability, and also a lot of geopolitical risks," said Lorenzo Codogno, former chief economist for the Italian Treasury, who is now an independent consultant in London. "The situation is intrinsically fragile. In my view, the coronavirus could be the tipping point."

The fallout could present the first significant test of the defenses central bankers and the regulatory authorities erected around the financial system after the 2008 meltdown plunged their economies into the abyss.

It should help that the system is stronger now than it was more than decade ago. Bank capital levels are much higher, meaning big banks that nearly toppled in 2008 can withstand major losses. And so far, there are no signs of the sort of funding pressures and cash crunches that defined the financial crisis.

The Fed has other tools at its disposal, should the financial system run into trouble: It can keep dollars flowing internationally and provide loans to banks through the so-called discount window, which can help to relieve any short-term shortage of funds among commercial banks.

Because monetary officials in Europe and parts of Asia are short on tools to combat a potential crisis, the pressure is on governments to act instead. Central banks have urged their elected counterparts for years to move more decisively to prop up growth.

China has announced measures including tax cuts for small companies. Italy has already promised to let businesses delay paying their taxes until sales get back to normal, a measure it has used in the past in regions hit by earthquakes. In Germany, politicians have been hinting they may loosen limits on debt spending.

The Trump administration has been discussing another round of tax cuts, but Mr. Trump said the plan would not be rolled out until later this year. Some Democratic lawmakers have asked the administration to think about interest-free loans for small business and other targeted spending, but so far that has not gained any traction.

Whether fiscal policy can be more effective depends on how the economy reacts. For now, the best thing policymakers can do is stem the flow of infection with an effective public health response, economists say. But if that fails, fiscal policy could be more adept at getting assistance to the places that need it — helping vulnerable businesses by issuing low-cost loans or other types of financing or directing funds to communities struggling with the virus.

Keith Bradsher, Carlos Tejada and Jim Tankersley contributed reporting.



Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister and owner of A.C. Milan, would like to see his new club, Monza, promoted to Italy's Serie A by 2021. The club is comfortably atop the standings in its division of Serie C.

New cause for disgraced Italian mogul

On Soccer

BY RORY SMITH

Filippo Antonelli remembers the days when his calls went unanswered. As sporting director of Monza — a soccer club with a shoestring budget and narrow horizons in Serie C, Italy's third tier — he had little clout with his peers. To discuss a player on another team, or to make an offer to sell or buy one, he usually had to phone “four or five times” before anyone deigned to pick up.

It is a little different now. These days, Antonelli finds that pretty much everyone answers on the first call. Most of the time, he said recently, they pick up on the first ring, as soon as his name flashes on the screen. But more often than not, “they call me first.” In Italy, everything changes, Antonelli has realized, when you work for Silvio Berlusconi.

At first glance, Monza is little changed from the club it has always been: a modest, provincial place, where parents of youth-team players, coaches and sundry older locals mill around the coffee bar that serves as the centerpiece of the practice field. They down espressos, grab pastries, flick through newspapers. People greet one another warmly before heading off to watch a training session.

Antonelli sits at a table, surrounded by colleagues. He has an office upstairs, in the club's headquarters, but the coffee bar is as good a place as any to hold an impromptu scouting meeting, with schedules and lists strewn across the table. There is no sense of secrecy, no security at the gate, no parking lot full of sports cars.

But beneath the surface, it has been transformed. By 2017, Berlusconi's public career appeared to be over, the former Italian prime minister mired in an endless tangle of shame and scandal. He had been forced to resign as prime minister when Italy was swept up in the euro debt crisis; he was thrown out of Italy's Parliament after being convicted of tax fraud.

Forza Italia, the political vehicle that had propelled him to power, remained in place, though its electoral prospects have ebbed and flowed. After three decades, too, he had finally sold the jewel in his crown: A.C. Milan, the soccer team he turned into the best in the world in the 1980s and 1990s. It seemed Berlusconi was finished, destined for a gilded, disgraced retirement.

And then, in September 2018, Antonelli was informed that Fininvest — the holding company for Berlusconi's \$5 billion media empire — had completed a takeover of his club. He had known there was a buyer lurking and that the club might soon change hands. He had been given no hint as to who it was.

A cadre of Berlusconi's most trusted lieutenants was installed to run it — including his brother, Paolo, as president and Adriano Galliani, his long-



Berlusconi, center, owned A.C. Milan for decades, and its success and popularity sometimes corresponded with his own.

standing aide-de-camp, as chairman — and work began on improving the training facility and the stadium. Berlusconi had an ambitious goal in mind.

“The aim is to be in Serie A in 2021,” Galliani said, meaning Monza has to be promoted this season, and speed through Serie B in only a year — and to do it with a squad composed largely of young Italian players, a team that plays a “clean, epic and beautiful type of soccer.” Most of all, though, Berlusconi wants to see one thing in particular: “The dream,” said Cristian Brocchi, Monza's coach, “is to see Monza play against A.C. Milan at San Siro.”

It is easy to suspect that this is the motivation for Berlusconi's investment: that this project is about reclaiming his place in Italian soccer's elite, to prove to his critics that he can do it all again, that he is just as powerful and smart as he used to be, that though he may look as if he is finished, he is anything but.

And then, who knows? Perhaps that success might be used to continue the resurrection of his political career, especially after he was elected to the European Parliament last year. That, certainly, would fit Berlusconi's playbook. A.C. Milan was always more than a toy, a trophy asset, in his eyes: He did not bankroll the club to five European Cups and eight Italian championships as an end in itself; he did it, at least in part, in pursuit of real power. It was no coincidence that when



A Monza home match in January. Berlusconi sometimes mixes with fans, basking in the kind of adulation he enjoyed as Milan's owner and as prime minister.

Berlusconi formed his political party in 1993, he borrowed its name from soccer's lexicon: “Forza Italia!” pretty much “Let's go Italy.” The label echoed a stadium cheer, a deliberate attempt to leverage Milan's success in the minds of voters. It worked.

“The success of A.C. Milan definitely helped propel Berlusconi's political aspirations,” the political analyst Franco Pavoncello said in 2010. “It is doubtful whether he would be prime minister now without that link.” Soccer and politics have always been entwined in Berlusconi's mind: soccer as a route into politics; the dynamics of politics as a mirror of the sport. Those who know him best, though,

insist that Monza does not fit that pattern. “It is absolutely a decision of the heart,” Galliani said of Berlusconi's investment. Specifically, it was a decision of Galliani's heart: He grew up in Monza, supported Monza and worked as a director of Monza, all before Berlusconi recruited him to Milan. “I was at Monza for 10 years,” Galliani said. “And then I went on loan to Milan for 31.”

Buying the club was Galliani's idea. He suggested it to Berlusconi, who owns a home in Arcore, a few miles away. Galliani did not, he said, see it as a way for Berlusconi to make money, or to win trophies, or to regain political prestige. “It is pure romanticism,”

Galliani said. “Monza is a state of the soul.”

Indeed, it is Galliani who is in charge day to day: He speaks with Antonelli several times a day; he checks in with Brocchi to see how training has gone; he has opened the impeccable contacts book he developed while working at Milan to help strengthen the squad.

Last January, Monza completed more than 30 deals in a single transfer window, overhauling its team completely. “There was not much time for sleep,” Antonelli said. “It was like running a marathon, but at sprinting speed. Galliani made history. Working with him is like doing a master's degree in soccer.”

The effect was immediate: Though it missed out on promotion to Serie B last year, Monza sits comfortably atop its division today. Promotion is almost a certainty. Suddenly, players want to join Monza, something that has not always been the case in Antonelli's experience. “A lot of players in higher divisions would like to come here,” he said.

That is, in part, financial, of course, but it is also because of all of those little touches that Berlusconi prioritizes: things like making sure everyone has a designated parking space. Berlusconi and Galliani “make you feel valued, make you want to do well for them,” Brocchi said. “They make you feel special.”

Brocchi knows better than most. He has spent most of his career working for Berlusconi and Galliani, first as a player and later as a coach at Milan. “I owe them my life,” he said. He knows that both like to be involved, connected.

“I like it,” he said. “If I sensed coldness, that would put me off. I want to feel part of something, part of the club. Berlusconi calls before games. He likes to know how the team is doing. He is not like a distant powerful person. He has a charisma, an ability to find the right words. That someone so important has time for you means you go out feeling like a lion.”

Berlusconi attends most home games, said Antonelli, the sporting director, and has appeared at a number of away matches, too. In Antonelli's mind, Berlusconi was drawn to Monza, not just because he wanted to fulfill Galliani's dream, but also because he “missed soccer a little.”

It is this, perhaps, that is the most convincing explanation for his investment. Monza is not an attempt to revive his political career, or restore his name, or reprise his glory days. It is not simply a favor for a friend. For Berlusconi, soccer was always about power: not just obtaining it, but feeling it.

Berlusconi, those who work with him say, is always happy to pause and talk with fans, to meet and greet his public, to find time to bask in an echo of the adulation he got while he owned Milan, while he ran Italy. This is not a second chance to dominate the world, or to build a sporting empire. But it is the only way he knows to drink in the spotlight, to win favor, to feel what it is like, once again, to be the ringmaster.

After death of an icon, a reckoning in Australia

Brain disease diagnosis was first for an ex-star in popular form of football

BY KEN BELSON

For the first time, researchers have found chronic traumatic encephalopathy, the degenerative brain disease linked to blows to the head, in a player of Australian rules football.

The disease, which can be definitively diagnosed only after death, was found in Graham Farmer, one of the game's best players, who died at 84 in August.

The diagnosis, which was detailed in a report in the journal *Acta Neuropathologica Communications*, was made by doctors at the Australian Sports Brain Bank, run by Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in partnership with the University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Centre.

The finding is significant because for years, leaders of Australian rules football have straddled an uncomfortable fence, talking down the risks of potential long-term brain damage from the sport while also focusing on eliminating head hits and trying to prevent concussions and other traumatic brain injuries.

Dr. Michael Buckland, the founder of the Australian Sports Brain Bank and a co-author of the report, had already found chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or C.T.E., in the brains of two former rugby league players. In 2013, researchers at Boston University found C.T.E. in an Australian rugby union player.

Farmer, who was known as Polly, was found to have Alzheimer's disease in 1999, when he was 64.

Australian rules football is wildly popular in Australia, where it is seen as the country's national sport. About 1.5 million people play the game nationwide, and the Australian Football League, which formed in 1990, is the largest sports league in the country, with about 7.5 million fans attending games. The women's professional league continues to expand. The A.F.L. Grand Final — Australia's version of the Super Bowl — routinely draws 100,000 fans.

But in recent years, a growing number of former players have gone public about their declining health, including many cognitive problems. Many former players have complained that the A.F.L. has not done enough to help them cope with their medical conditions.

Graham Farmer, one of Australian rules football's greatest players, was found to have Alzheimer's disease in 1999.

While several prominent former players have spoken about their health issues, Farmer's diagnosis emphasizes the seriousness of the situation, even though the disease affected Farmer at an age when many people's brains show signs of deterioration.

Farmer, an Aboriginal from Western Australia, starred in the semiprofessional leagues in Western Australia and Victoria from 1952 to 1971, before the formation of the A.F.L.

Farmer was considered one of the innovators of the modern game for his skill at punching the ball forward. In 1996, the Australian Football Hall of Fame named him a Legend of Australian rules football, the sport's highest award. He was also named to the Team of the Century.

In a statement released later on Thursday, the A.F.L. stood behind the efforts of the Australian Sports Brain Bank, though the league said it had not seen the report on Farmer.

“As knowledge and understanding of concussion has increased, the A.F.L. has strengthened match day protocols, changed the Laws of the Game to further discourage high contact and has improved the identification of potential concussive incidents through the use of video,” the league said in a statement.

“The A.F.L. will continue to invest in research to better identify and manage concussion and other brain related trauma at all levels of the game.”

Australian rules football is still extremely violent, but by today's standards, the games in Farmer's era were all-out brawls. Players used their fists, forearms and shoulders to knock out their opponents. There were no established rules for diagnosing or treating concussions.

Players, who had to work second jobs to make ends meet, endured brutal practices between games.

After he retired as a player, Farmer coached for several years and later owned a motel with his wife in Western Australia.

Dr. Buckland and the other authors of the report said that the severity of Farmer's C.T.E. was consistent with what had been found in players from other contact sports.

“A head knock is a head knock, regardless of the circumstances in which you get it,” he wrote. “C.T.E. is real, and it is here in Australia.”

After hitting ‘a very dark spot,’ Angels look to reset

On Baseball

BY TYLER KEPNER

TEMPE, ARIZ. There is no memorial patch on their jerseys, no empty locker in their clubhouse. There are new starting pitchers, a new superstar at third base, a new pitching guru in the coaches' room. This is Joe Maddon's team now, so there is also a six-foot tin flamingo in the hallway outside the manager's office. Life goes on for the Los Angeles Angels.

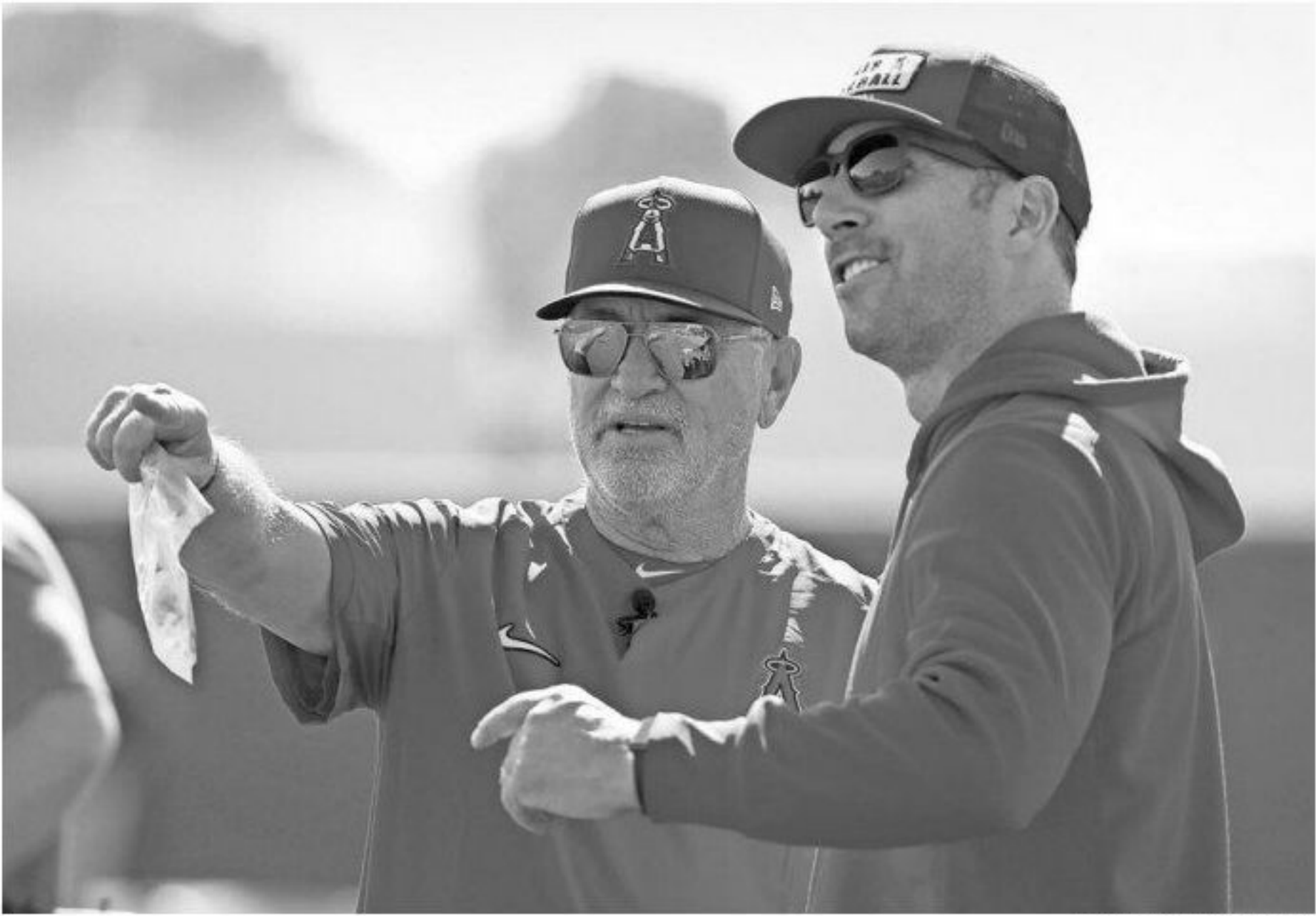
More than any other team in baseball, the Angels needed a fresh start. They were rocked on July 1 when pitcher Tyler Skaggs was found dead at 27 in a Southlake, Texas, hotel room. They played the final three months of last season in a daze and finished 72-90, the club's worst record in 20 years.

"We hit a very dark spot with our team," the closer Hansel Robles said last week through an interpreter. "We lost a great teammate and an even better person. Everybody rallied around each other, trying to pick each other up if somebody needed help. Looking back at it now, we still haven't forgotten him. We have to continue thinking about him and moving forward."

Skaggs had fentanyl and oxycodone in his system when he died, a revelation that led to a change in the league's drug agreement with the players' union. In December, Major League Baseball announced that players would be tested for opioids and cocaine, starting in spring training, with an emphasis on treatment. Only players who do not cooperate with an initial evaluation or treatment plan may be disciplined.

Before Skaggs's death, major leaguers could not be tested for opioids without reasonable cause because they were classified as drugs of abuse, not as performance enhancers. The new policy is a lasting legacy in the players' effort to get help to peers who need it.

"You hear guys talk about it in the clubhouse: 'We're a family, we're part of a community,' and I think there is a real sense of responsibility for one another," said Angels starter Andrew Heaney, who said he thinks about Skaggs every day. "A lot of guys felt



Los Angeles Angels General Manager Billy Eppler, right, with Joe Maddon, who is in his first year managing the team.

like it was our job to step up and say, 'Because of the nature of our work, this is something that some guys need to be protected from and need to be helped out with.'"

It was important to Heaney and others that any policy changes focused on help, rather than shame or punishment.

"Taking a pill — I mean, every single guy in here has probably taken a pill this morning," Heaney said. "Some of it's fish oil, some of it's Aleve or Tylenol, whatever it may be, but you don't really know. That's the danger of it. It's really hard to necessarily see what other people have going on. To be able to stand up as a collective unit and say, 'Hey, we want to really help guys out,' I was proud of that."

The Angels rallied for a while after Skaggs's death; Taylor Cole and Felix Pena combined for a no-hitter in the team's next home game on July 12, with all of the players wearing Skaggs's No. 45. But by early August the

Angels had slipped below .500, and they would lose 41 of their last 59 games.

Manager Brad Ausmus, after one year on the job, was fired by General Manager Billy Eppler the day after the season ended. The Chicago Cubs also parted with Maddon, who spent decades with the Angels' organization before leaving to guide the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cubs to the World Series. By mid-October, the irreverent Maddon was back with the Angels, and on Tuesday he basked in the memories of Tempe Diablo Stadium, the Angels' spring home here in Arizona.

"You get over here and you see the buttes in the background," Maddon said. "I remember throwing batting practice to Bo Jackson out there, and having Gene Mauch and Whitey Herzog standing back there watching the whole thing, and Preston Gomez sitting up in the stands right there reading his newspaper."

He laughed and continued: "No, I

have nothing nostalgic about this place. It's exciting to come here in the morning, and it's only going to get better."

Maddon has welcomed generations of former Angels to camp, from Bobby Knoop (1960s) to Frank Tanana (1970s) to Wally Joyner (1980s), and so on. "There's WAR in the alumni," Maddon explained, and he has hired an artist to paint stylized words on a blank hallway wall: "relentless," "tough," "first-to-third," "la familia." He calls it the identity wall.

"Listen, they're universal words, it's nothing new," Maddon said. "But I felt when I was here with the Angels, we played the game a certain way, and there was a toughness about it."

Maddon was the bench coach for the Angels' only championship team, in 2002. That team was known for relentless contact hitters who slashed doubles and ran aggressively. They hit .320 in the postseason and won despite an unimposing rotation.



A welcome sight for Angels fans is the slugger Anthony Rendon, right, in the same lineup as the reigning American League most valuable player, Mike Trout.



Former New York Mets Manager Mickey Callaway returned to a pitching coach gig.

For these Angels to win, they may need to do it the same way. Their offense is built around the American League's reigning most valuable player, Mike Trout, and the new third baseman Anthony Rendon, who left the Washington Nationals for a seven-year, \$245 million contract in Southern California. But the rotation looks shaky, with the newcomers Julio Teheran and Dylan Bundy joining Heaney and several pitchers who were rookies last season, like Griffin Canning (4.58 earned run average), Patrick Sandoval (5.03) and Jose Suarez (7.11).

The new pitching coach Mickey

Callaway, the former New York Mets manager, wants his staff to be fearless in the strike zone, like the 2002 team, for which he made six starts.

"Our pitchers weren't afraid to throw the ball over the plate, and this is a very similar rotation," he said. "Aaron Sele and Kevin Appier — they were Teheran and Bundy types. Jarrod Washburn was probably our ace that year, and Heaney is very similar. And then we need some of these young guys to step up, like John Lackey did. Suarez, Sandoval, Griffin Canning — they have big arms and big stuff."

No Angels pitcher made even 20 starts last season, but Teheran started at least 30 games in each of the last seven years for the Atlanta Braves. Bundy, the former Baltimore Oriole, has allowed a major league-high 70 homers over the last two seasons, but he did make 61 starts.

"The fact that they wanted a guy that can go out there every fifth day is important to me, and I take a lot of pride in that," Bundy said. "Even though there's some starts where it might be iffy if you can throw a ball that day, I think it's important to at least go out there for the team."

Callaway has implored the pitchers to avoid walks and limit damage, because the offense will keep them in games. That is a hard way to win, but it may be the only path in Anaheim, where hardship is relative and the team deserves to dream.

NON SEQUITUR



SUDOKU

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

Fill the grid so that every row, column 3x3 box and shaded 3x3 box contains each of the numbers 1 to 9 exactly once.

For solving tips and more puzzles: www.nytimes.com/sudoku

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

FEHTT
BOIRT
LREEMY
KHESNA

WHEN 4-FOOT-10-INCH DANNY DEVITO WAS CALLED TO THE FLM SE, HE SAID HE'D --

Answers tomorrow
Jumbles: SUITE MADLY LETTER JACOBY
Answer: When offered a chance to go skydiving on Leap Day, they — JUMPED AT IT

PEANUTS



GARFIELD



WIZARD OF ID



KENKEN

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2-				
3-	1-			
	2		2-	

12×		5	5-	8×
4-	2÷		15×	20×
		3+		
11+		6+	2÷	3
10+				5-
	2÷		6	8+

Fill the grids with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

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Answers to Previous Puzzles

4	3	2	1
1	4	3	2
3	2	1	4
2	1	4	3

5	6	4	2	1	3
3	1	5	4	6	2
1	4	2	5	3	6
4	5	3	6	2	1
2	3	6	1	4	5
6	2	1	3	5	4

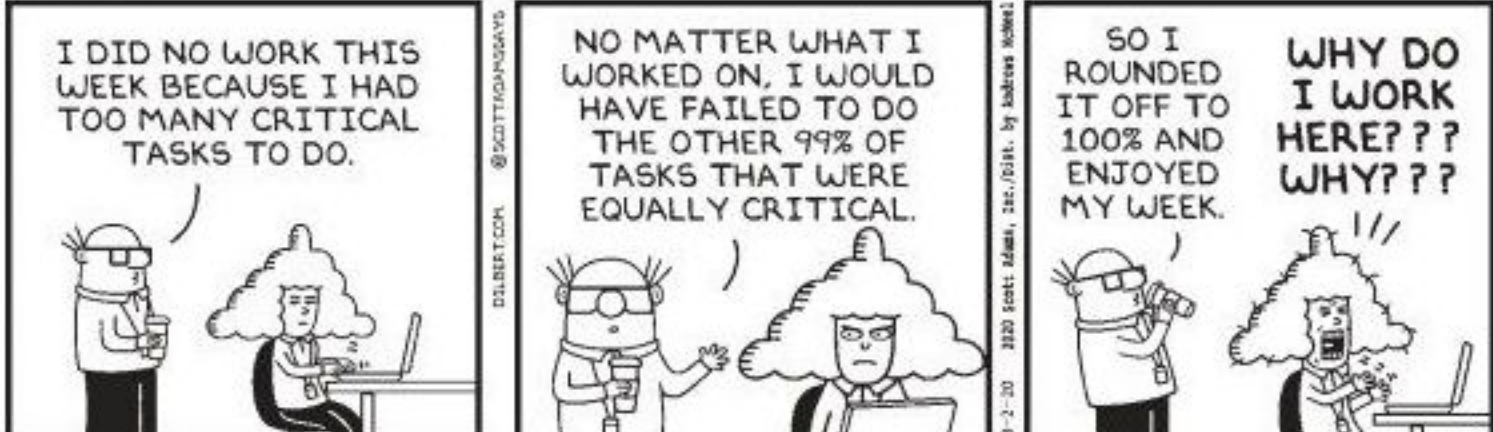
DOONESBURY CLASSIC 1994



CALVIN AND HOBBS



DILBERT



CROSSWORD | Edited by Will Shortz

- Across**
- Airer of "48 Hours" and "60 Minutes"
 - Inscribe, as on a trophy
 - Bottom half of a 45
 - Clue for the clueless
 - Actress Loughlin of "Full House"
 - 10:1, e.g.
 - Website with a "Buy It Now" option
 - Not give ____ (not care)
 - "A Doll's House" playwright Henrik
 - Butane-filled item for smokers
 - "... the land of the free ..."
 - Clumsy
 - Exercises that work the glutes, quads and abs
 - Russian refusal
- Down**
- "Krazy ____"
 - "At Wit's End" humorist Bombeck
 - With 44-Across, N.B.A. player once married to a Kardashians
 - "Who am ____ judge?"
 - Kind of rock for which New Hampshire is known
 - Con's opposite
 - "The Godfather" crowd
 - See 36-Across
 - Communication means for the deaf, for short
 - Stiffly formal
 - Star of Broadway's "Fiddler on the Roof"
 - Tilted, as printed letters
 - 52 to ____ degree
 - "Forget about it!" ... or a clue to the starts of 20-, 27- and 47-Across

Solution to Feb 29 Puzzle

RADISH	JAMESON
ARETHA	CAROLINA
GOSTAG	ONENINTH
ADS	GASLEAKS
EGGROLLS	ICUS
PREY	CEL WORST
BATE	GIGECONOMY
ARM	PREEMIE TIL
BEEF	PHOTODOG TONE
ENNUI	YEN KANT
STUN	LPGATOUR
KEYARENA	ISM
AGERANGE	OLIVIA
BOYARDEE	TAMERS
STEPPES	ESPRIT

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PUZZLE BY ANDREA CARLA MICHAELS

- Someone who might say "There, there"
- Genre for Cardi B and Nicki Minaj
- Lawyer's document
- Teenage witch of TV "Supernatural"
- Casino cube
- Long, long time
- Kind of personality a go-getter has
- Brand of taco shells and salsas
- One living under a bridge, in fairy tales
- Greg ____, first American winner of the Tour de France
- Wedding vow
- Male turkey
- "Somehow it all gets done"
- Clearasil target, in slang
- Went "Hello ... ello ... illo ... lo ..."
- Keep on the shelves
- True-blue
- How thumbs are twiddled
- Middle of the face
- May or June gown wearer
- Mom's mom
- Get taller
- Pérignon
- Rock music subgenre
- Was in first place



From left, Xosha Roquemore and Alano Miller in “Cherish the Day”; Lakeith Stanfield and Issa Rae in “The Photograph”; and Joshua Boone and Zora Howard in “Premature.”



Lives in full for a change

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Recent onscreen romances allow black women to be assertive and sensitive, too

BY SALAMISHAH TILLET

My partner, Solomon, and I still argue about Gina Prince-Bythewood's 2000 romance, "Love & Basketball." The movie tells the story of Monica (Sanaa Lathan) and Quincy (Omar Epps), which begins with Monica's family moving in next door to Quincy's when they are both 11, then follows them as their friendship turns to courtship right before they graduate high school and start playing basketball at the University of Southern California. Once in college, they juggle off-court drama (Quincy learns that his pro-athlete father has impregnated a woman outside his marriage) and on-court demands (Monica fights to earn her spot as the starting point guard).

These pressures reach a climax when Quincy asks Monica to stay up late to help him process his parents' marital crisis, and Monica, worried about her place on the team, returns to her dorm to make curfew. Dejected, Quincy ultimately decides to leave Monica and college and go pro. Monica, meanwhile, ends up playing basketball in Spain. Years later, they meet again in Los Angeles, and after she loses a pickup game to him, she wins his heart and a starting spot on the Sparks.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as black directors turned to black romances in "Love Jones," "The Best Man," "Brown Sugar" and other films, "Love & Basketball" stood out even more for featuring black characters whose ambition (Monica) and craving for domestic bliss (Quincy) challenged traditional gender norms. At the heart of the disagreement between Monica and Quincy — and for that matter, Solomon and me — was our generation's gender wars gone buppie: Could Monica really win the boy next door, play ball and have it all?

A new crop of heterosexual black love stories — including "The Photograph," "Premature" and the series "Cherish the Day" — by black filmmakers answers that question with a definitive yes. Though they pay homage to Prince-Bythewood's vision with African-American female leads as



Above, Daniel Kaluuya and Jodie Turner-Smith in "Queen & Slim." Below left, Sanaa Lathan and Omar Epps in "Love and Basketball," from 2000, and right, Nia Long and Larenz Tate in "Love Jones," from 1997.



complex, cosmopolitan and curious as Monica, the central conflict of these stories is whether their characters can work through trauma, break free of the "strong black woman" stereotype and be vulnerable enough to love themselves and their partners. In line with a recognition of black women's multidimensionality in American culture and



politics, never once do their partners make them feel bad for dreaming big: Their ambition is their appeal. Released on Valentine's Day, "The Photograph," written and directed by Stella Meghie, involves a pair of love stories told across two generations. In the contemporary one, a New York museum curator, Mae (Issa Rae),

meets Michael (Lakeith Stanfield), a journalist who is writing a profile of Christina, a photographer and Mae's late mother. In 2020, Mae's flourishing career is a given. In a flashback to the 1990s, Christina leaves her boyfriend to pursue her artistic passion in New York City.

"I think the benefit of having the two characters Christina and Mae is that you can show them going through different things," Meghie said in an interview. "For Christina, her driving force is figuring out how she was going to be successful careerwise. For Mae, her mom's success and her dad help her to achieve that. Now, she needs to look at what is missing in her life and what issues that she's not confronting emotionally within herself. Hers is a more philosophical journey."

Growing up, Meghie was obsessed with films like "Love Jones" (like Christina, the main character in that 1997 drama was a photographer) and "Love & Basketball." Later, those films became blueprints for her own screenwriting. "I grew up playing basketball, so Monica was a character that I very much saw myself in as an athlete and tomboy who really didn't know how to date or how to have a boyfriend or how to tell a guy you like them," Meghie reflected. "And that last scene when

she's like, 'I'll play you for your heart.' It makes me cry still because it is a moment where you realize you can't just be this strong girl. He's going to walk away if you don't show him that you love him."

In "Premature," the question of whether Ayanna, a 17-year-old Harlem poet, will throw away her ambition for love propels much of the romantic drama. It's the summer before she's planning to attend college, and her

Never once do these heroines' partners make them feel bad for dreaming big: Their ambition is their appeal.

music-producer lover (Joshua Boone) does not want her to sacrifice her education to be with him.

Directed by Rashaad Ernesto Green, who co-wrote it with his star, Zora Howard, the film is the result of what the two saw as a lack of black love stories today, especially those that center on the experiences of young black women.

"One of the things that really drove us to write this story was the very simple fact that we grew up watching love stories in the 1990s with people of

color, black people and brown people, in them," Green said. "In the current landscape, because of what has transpired in this country politically, there has been an overabundance of films that deal with black trauma, victimization, pain and suffering. We wanted to offer a film that dealt with the other side of that narrative, present a story that we felt was universal, and invite people into our lives and our love in a way that we hope is also effective."

Fortunately, this trend is not just limited to movies. Each episode of Ava DuVernay's latest series, "Cherish the Day" (on OWN), follows a single day of a young couple's romance over five years. Revolving around the relationship between Evan (Alano Miller), a Stanford-educated, Tesla-driving tech engineer, and Gently (Xosha Roquemore), a bohemian, globe-trotting caregiver from South Los Angeles, it appears at first to be a story about opposites attracting.

But, as the show's format intentionally accelerates the timeline, we quickly learn that Gently's carefreeness is not a drawback to Evan but rather an inspiration for his entrepreneurship and an indicator of her hard-earned freedom in life and love. In turn, Gently is now front and center, unlike past characters whose whimsical natures would have them sidelined as comic relief (think Freddie from "A Different World" or Lynn from "Girlfriends").

Evan "fits into what we usually see in our iterations of black love," Roquemore said. "He's fiscally successful and highly educated — those stories in which black people have to be perfect."

Unlike Evan, whose parents have been married for 40 years, Gently is raised by a family friend who takes her in after her father's gang-related death and her abandonment by her substance-abusing mother. "Instead of Gently being hardened by her background, it makes her more eclectic or freer or makes her want to travel the world," Roquemore said. "She's trying to channel that pain into something else, which I think is just a little more realistic."

Noting that few Hollywood writers depict black women as both vulnerable and aspirational, Roquemore touched on how clichéd so many stories are still: "Because I live my life as a black woman that is multifaceted, Gently is so very familiar to me. When people are like, 'Whoa, what is this? I've never met anyone like this!' No, they've just never seen it on TV."

A harrowing journey into hell

THEATER REVIEW

Lucas Hnath's new play recreates the abduction of his mother using her voice

BY BEN BRANTLEY

First impressions might suggest otherwise. But Lucas Hnath's "Dana H.," a one-woman drama that explodes expectations at every turn, is one of the richest, most complete works of theater to come along in many seasons. And by its end, you realize that its singular power could be achieved only in real time, on a stage, with a live audience as its witness.

Watching the early moments of this production, at the Vineyard Theater off Broadway, you may wonder, a bit impatiently, why its account of a violent kidnapping is being told in the way it is. "Dana H." is not a conventionally scripted or acted drama.

It is, or at first appears to be, a rather basic documentary work, which consists almost entirely of a recorded interview with the title character. (In some ways, it is a perfect companion piece to the uncanny documentary play "Is This a Room," recently staged at the Vineyard.) The subject is Dana Higginbotham, a Florida hospice chaplain — and the playwright's mother — who was held hostage for five months by a psychotic client, and who is indeed telling her own story.

But while it is Higginbotham's voice we hear, she is not the woman who appears onstage. We see instead the wonderful actress Deirdre O'Connell, who mouths, with near-perfect specificity, what is said on the recording. It is, in other words, a deliberately limited performance, stripped of a whole layer of interpretation that O'Connell might bring to the part if she were allowed to speak it herself.

Yet that implicit distance between performer and character winds up bringing us closer to both.

As directed with virtuosic pace and shading by Les Waters, this first-person account of a season in hell becomes an ever-deepening exercise in concentrated listening — and a journey into an empathy so intimate that it melts the boundaries of your own sense of a solid self.

At the center of "Dana H." is a tale about an unspeakable violation of autonomous self, one so upsetting it perhaps can be approached only by the staggered degrees that give this work its form. Higginbotham says in the recording that this is the first time she has ever talked this explicitly about what happened to her during those five months in 1998. "I can't be who I am with people," she says. "I can't tell people about this."

She had certainly never spoken about it in such terms to her son, Hnath, a dramatist of quicksilver intellect and probing compassion who was a college student in New York at the time of his mother's abduction. Hnath, whose earlier works include "A Doll's



Deirdre O'Connell as Dana Higginbotham, the playwright's mother, in "Dana H."

House, Part 2" and "Hillary and Clinton," did not conduct the interviews that make up "Dana H." The other voice we hear in the recording belongs to Hnath's friend the writer and director Steve Cosson, who conducted the sessions nearly two decades after the events took place.

Those sessions occurred over several days and have been pieced together into a production that is said to last 75 minutes, though what you experience eludes any usual measurement of time. No one here is pretending that what occurs onstage is a facsimile of the interviews.

The tapes include the distortions of a

do-it-yourself recording project, with its prickly static and wandering amplification. (Mikhail Fiksel did the crucial sound design.) We periodically hear metallic beeps, to indicate editing and elisions.

Supertitles are projected, dividing the show into self-contained segments ("A Patient Named Jim," "The Next Five Months," "The Bridge"). Well, sort of, since what is being discussed here renders all dividing lines arbitrary and inadequate.

And of course from the beginning, we know that O'Connell is not Higginbotham. We watch the actress being fitted with the earpieces that will pour

her character's voice into her head, allowing her to concentrate fully on the arduous task of precisely lip-syncing every word she hears.

We are thus deliberately made aware of the conscious exertion required for this process. But there's a point, maybe five or 10 minutes into the show, in which O'Connell's effort to become another person melt into Higginbotham's struggle to describe a chapter in her life that still feels, in many ways, beyond imagining. (She occasionally consults a well-worn manuscript she has written, like a talisman that might bring order to chaos.)

As Higginbotham's voice stumbles, stutters and trails into silence — while O'Connell's face subtly registers the ache and exasperation of words failing their speaker — a part of us can't help leaning in, silently and forcefully willing her to continue. What follows may be deeply upsetting to hear, but there's a sense that it has to be given voice.

It says much about this show's power that I have had to rise from my desk and pace before even trying to summarize the events at the heart of "Dana H." The play's catalyst is Jim, a former convict and member of the Aryan Brotherhood, whom Higginbotham mentored at a psychiatric ward after he tried to kill himself.

He became increasingly reliant on her. And one night, when she wouldn't open the door of her Florida house to him, he broke in through the bathroom window. He hit her with the home alarm system he had ripped off the wall, knocking her unconscious. "That

was the beginning of the end," Higginbotham says. "That was the beginning of the next five months."

What followed was a life on the road, and on the lam, with an abductor who told his captive that he was the only person in the world who could protect her. She is beaten and raped and is (by her own admission) an unreliable witness to Jim's other, often violent crimes.

She also comes to feel that she has entered a claustrophobic underworld, a parallel universe that has no connection to what she once thought of as real life. A part of her thinks that she was a natural victim for Jim. And when she explains why she feels this way, your heart cracks open.

You have probably come across newspaper or television accounts of survivors of similar crimes, and registered them with a shivery, prurient detachment. "Dana H." allows no such self-protecting sense of remove. Higginbotham's descent into a black hole that erases the most basic outlines of selfhood is mirrored here by stealthy, perception-warping stagecraft.

I won't elaborate except to say that the contributions of the lighting designer Paul Toben are essential. So is Andrew Boyce's set, which summons a dingy, mildewed generic motel room. As the show proceeds, a room that you may not have paid much attention to at first will assert a stranglehold on both the woman seated at its center and on your imagination.

Even when she leaves the room, she's still there. So are you.

Being part of the gang. Or not.

PARIS

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

The weekend began in the gilded salons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a grand mid-19th-century building on the banks of the Seine where the foundation of the European Union was laid and where Friday night Diane von Furstenberg received the honor of the Chevalier de Legion d'Honneur from Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank, in recognition of Ms. von Furstenberg's services to women and to the refurbishment of the Statue of Liberty. Symbol of freedom, tolerance, welcome, you know.

It ended on the peeling stage of the Bouffes du Nord theater, as Kanye West and 120 gospel singers brought Mr. West's Sunday Service to the 10th Arrondissement, and a whole lot of jaded fashion folk to their feet, shouting and clapping in unison. (Mr. West is also going to have a Yeezy presentation Monday evening.)

Almost no one at either event wore a face mask, but in between, the Paris half-marathon was canceled and visiting editors started making plans to go home early. This is where we are. Everyone teetering between solidarity and isolation. Not just because of viruses.

Hedi Slimane held his **Celine** show, as he always does, in the shadow of the Invalides, where Napoleon is buried: more than 100 iterations of pipe cleaner pants and lounge lizard jackets; ruffled silk blouses and bourgeois culottes; buttoned-up little day dresses and golden gypsy frocks, one after the other after the other in a relentless parade of fantasy 1970s glam rock-and-jolie-madame-toned conformity for men and women (the looks are unisex).

This is Mr. Slimane's world. He has been building it with great calculation, one sartorial brick at a time, ever since he arrived at the house (first the dresses, then the culottes, then the jeans). Finally, he put it all together.

It is a world full of merch: bags, sunglasses, skinny silk scarves to fling around the neck, what retailers refer to as "items" (even the perfume got a show credit). It is steeped in attitude: bourgeois alienation and cosseted rebellion. It has its own ready-made strength and allure (literally ready-made: most of these clothes have been made before, decades ago). And it is as easy to identify and as restrictive as a size 0. All that velvet called to mind not just clothes, but the ropes that exist outside the clubs where Mr. Slimane's citizens play.

There is no room in Mr. Slimane's Celine for the older models and the models



CELINE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VALERIO MEZZANOTTI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

of different sizes that have begun to infiltrate other shows. These boys and girls — even the ones wearing clothes that are essentially ageless — have the gangly, bony limbs of sour-faced baby giraffes. Even then, the jeans were so tight, my seatmate leaned over and said, "These are making my testicles hurt."

Mr. Slimane is committed to the Celine image and he has constructed it with a built-in "keep out" sign for those who don't fit, in all meanings of that word. Sure, you can take it apart and wear a piece here, a piece there, but Groucho Marx aside, why pretend to be part of a club that won't have you? Does anyone really need that?

Especially now, when things are listing toward tribalism and fashion in return has been, with growing purpose, emphasizing its own inclusiveness; its own awareness that as an industry it is better when borders are loose and other cultures represented; when all sorts of histories — cultural and social, painful and joyful — end up in the same stew and combine to make something genuinely new, and relevant. When freedom and individuality and welcome are en-

shrined as core values. For designers and customers alike.

"I SHALL STAY THE WAY I AM."

As it happened the Celine show took place the same day as the César awards, the French Oscars, where a film about **Balmain's** Olivier Rousteing, the adopted black son of a white French couple, had been among the nominees for best documentary. "Wonder Boy" traces his search for his birth parents, and Mr. Rousteing's journey from the outskirts of the establishment to its inner sanctum (on Monday, he had been seated next to Brigitte Macron, the first lady of France, at a dinner at the Élysée Palace to celebrate fashion week).

He has been on a quest for belonging his whole life and it shapes his fashion — often in ways that are unwieldy and unflattering, but that also symbolize access to a previously closed world. He — we — may not have been able to enter it back in the day. But now everyone can play dress up with its codes!

Like out-of-my-way-buster shoulder pads, scarf-print miniskirts in a horse and chain motif, and Krystle Carrington



COMME DES GARÇONS



BALMAIN



HAIDER ACKERMANN

THIERRY CHESNOT/GETTY IMAGES

not like me so, to hell, my love, with you;" "I shall stay the way I am because I do not give a damn." Don't apologize for who you are, these clothes read: elevate it, in all its singular glory.

C'MON IN, THE WATER'S GREAT!

The designer-as-dictator is an old fashion-world way of thinking. There are more than enough of those around in politics as it is.

Instead, now there is the designer as welcoming host, like Joseph **Altuzarra**, who — in the most sophisticated and fully realized collection he has made in seasons — offered a peek into his own family history with soignée 1940s suiting, all portrait necklines and narrow skirts, waists caught by the thinnest of chains, inspired by treasures found in his grandmother's trunk and grounded by feather-tufted bedroom slippers. Like Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski at **Hermès**, with her egoless clothes in sumptuous materials that whisper only to the person who wears them. (You have to strain so much to hear, sometimes you wish they would announce themselves just a wee bit louder.)

Instead, there is **Junya Watanabe**, excavating the bones and sinews of an idea: This time Debbie Harry, an idol of his youth, in a raucous chorus of leather, tulle, men's wear and false fronts, so volume at the hips came from strapped-on handbags, and what looked from one side to be fairly predictable turned out from the other to be harnessed on. One way or another.

And Kei Ninomiya at **Noir**, growing body topiaries out of massed blood-red feathers, tulle, fake fur and flamenco ruffles; looping thin gold filaments so they trembled like sensors around the body; hiding a few lovely black shirt-dresses underneath (yes, he makes wearable clothes too); and building birds of paradise out of many shades of ... faux Scottish beards? What? Why not? Materials, like people, contain multitudes.

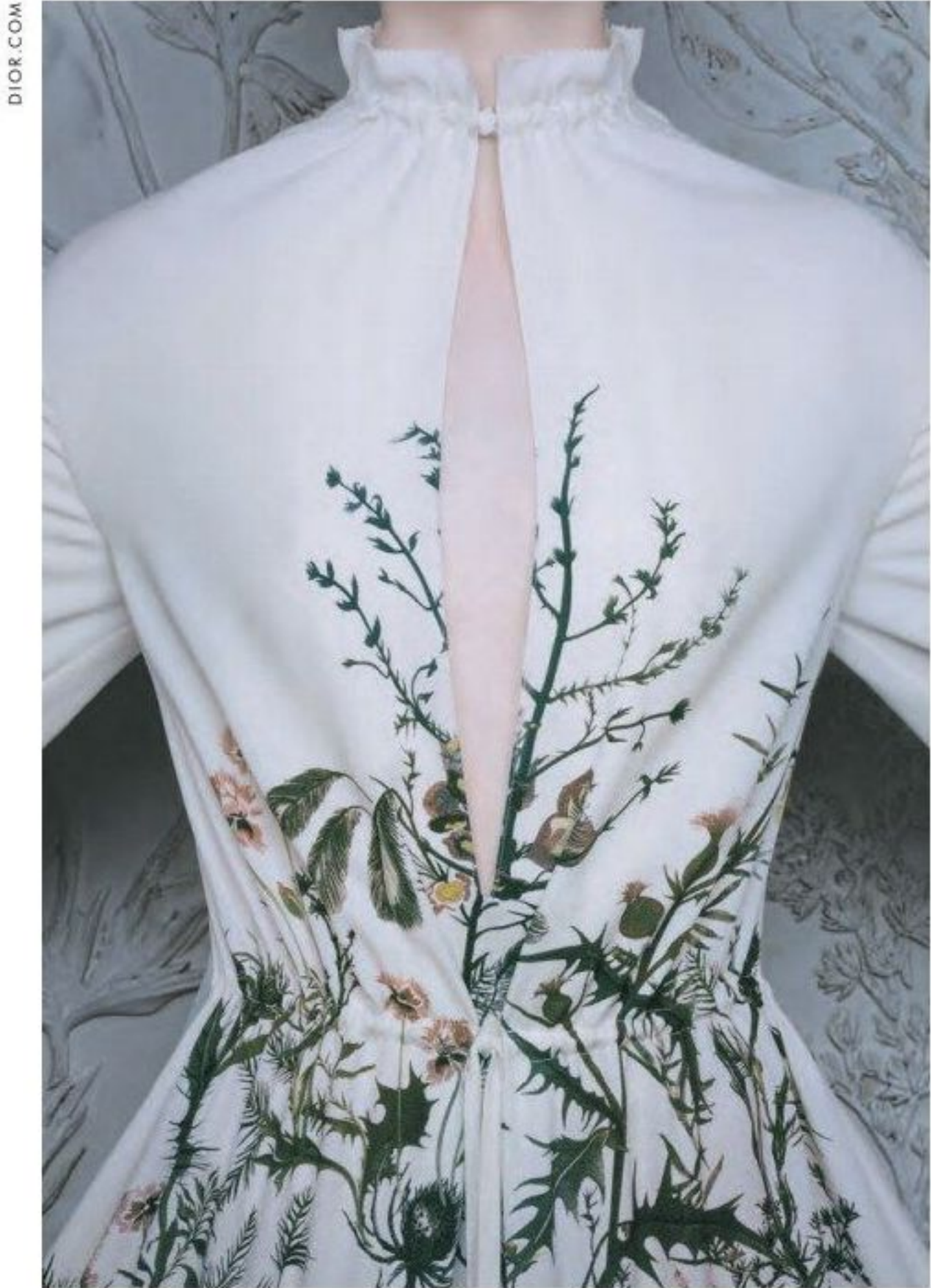
PLAY BY YOUR OWN RULES

Indeed, at **Comme des Garçons** the designer Rei Kawakubo gave each of her 20 looks a unique soundtrack — opera, bongos, classical — as if to underscore each one as an individual unto itself. There were flapper-esque lines finished in a giant doughnut; sleeves that dusted the knees and sleeves that didn't exist; bumps and bulges erupting from all sort of places; lace and nylon and cage-like creations; peekaboo with a belly button.

There were head braces with mantilla-like veils suspended over the face, and stuffed constructions that looked like misshapen airplane pillows around the neck and waist. Sometimes the clothes looked like movable tents and seed pods; sometimes they looked like wedding dresses. What was going on? Ms. Kawakubo wouldn't say. Duh. She never does.

Her clothes often make no sense as clothes. They follow no rules except their own. They are not meant to be worn to a club, or out to dinner. They are meant to make you examine your own assumptions. To force you to open your mind, and invite in possibilities you had never considered.

That's the point: Decide for yourself. Hello, Liberty. Nice to see you. Sing it loud.



DIOR.COM



DIOR

19 things to know about this YSL ‘muse’

PARIS

BY GUY TREBAY

Few more compelling figures have emerged from the rarefied world of French fashion than Betty Catroux, who claims to have no interest in the subject. Her stark and androgynous style has been aped by imitators and cited as an inspiration by countless designers. She has long been the subject of endless speculation about what lies behind the impassive facade of the tall beauty with an air of quizzical detachment.

On a recent visit to Ms. Catroux, occasioned by an exhibition based on a munificent donation she made of her wardrobe to Le Musée Yves Saint Laurent in Paris, we learned a thing or two. Nineteen things, actually.

1. She is not a muse.

“I hate the word,” said Ms. Catroux, a woman to whom the term sticks like a cheap label, an empty portmanteau hardly adequate to describe her complex and decades-long relationship with Mr. Saint Laurent, that master of 20th-century design, and the effect she has had on seemingly every dressmaker who ever picked up a pencil.

2. She is a muse.

Tom Ford called her one when he dedicated his first Saint Laurent Rive Gauche collection to her. Hedi Slimane cited her when designing men’s wear. Anthony Vaccarello, the current creative director of Saint Laurent, did his best to avoid the word but caved after casting Ms. Catroux, now 75, for a 2018 Saint Laurent ad campaign that played on her embodiment of the masculine-feminine dualities that first made her famous.

And it is less likely than ever that she can escape the designation, once “Betty Catroux: Feminine Singular,” a show curated by Mr. Vaccarello and dedicated to examining the broad influence she has exerted on the small world of fashion and the broader one of style, opens at the Saint Laurent museum in Paris on Tuesday.

3. She has a lot of clothes for someone who always dresses the same.

“Betty Catroux: Feminine Singular” is built around a gift of clothes Ms. Catroux made last year to the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, things the designer gave her over the decades of their complicated friendship. There are 180 haute couture Saint Laurent creations, many of them runway prototypes, as well as shoes and hats and handbags and 138 ready-to-wear garments of a type that would all be instantly recognizable to cognoscenti as Catroux signatures.

“Betty likes to say she was the bipolar double of Saint Laurent, which is a chic and elusive way of expressing their twinning,” Mr. Vaccarello wrote in



MAÏME LA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

an email. “Through her, he was able to give life to his vision. Thanks to him, she was able to become herself.”

4. It was a bit more complicated.

Realistically, Ms. Catroux was of service to Saint Laurent in a multitude of ways. She was his female physical double. She was his spirit familiar. She was his daily phone call and constant companion. She was the enabler who accompanied him to rehab at the American Hospital of Paris in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France. She was his lissome 6-foot superwoman paper doll, the form onto which he projected his notion of the feminine ideal.

5. She is unsentimental about YSL.

Looking back now on a relationship that began when Ms. Catroux, then a young model, caught the designer’s eye at the gay nightclub New Jimmy’s in Paris in 1967 and ended when she was one of a handful of intimates at his deathbed in 2008, she does so through a lens of ironic detachment, a distance that is probably the defining attribute of a woman who has often claimed not to have any ambition.

Ms. Catroux kept pace with Saint Laurent, line for line and drink for drink on visits to his manor in Normandy, his Moroccan riad and the shadowed and opulent treasury that was his duplex Paris apartment on Rue de Babylone.

“I was a bad girl in the sense of

doing everything that was forbidden, drinking and, well, you know the rest of the story of Saint Laurent,” said Ms. Catroux, who somehow, despite the years of excess, managed to marry well (her husband of 50 years descends from a celebrated French general) and raise two notably well-adjusted daughters. Daphné handles cultural exhibitions at Dior, and Maxime is an editor at the publisher Flammarion.

6. He refuted the present. She hates the past.

While the two shared a willed remove from the demands of everyday life and a fascination with a style unencumbered by bourgeois strictures, Saint Laurent was fixated on the bygone, and she was not.

“Yves always thought things were better before, but I love to live with my times,” Ms. Catroux said. “I am not at all nostalgic of the past.”

7. She was the original nonbinary.

“Why be the worst girl if you can be the best boy?” Ms. Catroux said one evening this winter in Paris.

8. She may be the last courtesan.

With dusk settling over the city, Ms. Catroux greeted a reporter at the door of the elegant garden apartment she shares with her husband, François (a man who Vanity Fair characterized as the “interior designer to the uber-rich”), on Rue de Lille on a smart stretch of the Left Bank. Sprawled atop a chaise longue there, the couple’s Burmese cat, Mic, which they bought from a breeder in Tulsa, Okla., sharpened its claws on some costly upholstery and emitted unearthly yowls.

“I’m a kept woman since years, and the laziest person you could ever imagine,” Ms. Catroux said as she flicked at the trademark blond bangs that drift across eyes concealed behind dark-framed glasses.

Leslie Camhi, a writer who once spent years doing research for a book about Saint Laurent’s muses (there were, effectively, two — Ms. Catroux and her bohemian counterpart, Loulou de la Falaise) put it this way: “It is as though the world is barely worth looking through her hair for.”

9. She insists she is lazy.

“A big project of mine is never to do any work,” Ms. Catroux told her visitor as she sat with her knees spread manfully in an apartment of substantial chic (icy palette, pony skin upholstery, a bronze of Atlas shouldering the Earth, a wall-size 1995 grid portrait of Ms. Catroux by the photographer Philippe de Lustrac).

“It’s all my husband,” she said. “My biggest ambition in life has always been not to lift a finger.”

10. Her laziness may be a facade.

Five times a week Ms. Catroux takes jazz dance classes centered on the Matt Mattox method at a studio whose address she declined to divulge. She said she also regularly attends Mass.

11. But she really does like to drink.

“It was no sacrifice at all,” Ms. Catroux said, of her donation, which constituted the largest ever to the Saint Laurent

museum. Carrying a chilled bottle of a good white Burgundy to the room, she handily uncorked it. “I’m only giving back what I was given,” she said as she poured herself a glass. “Will you have some?”

12. Everyone has a story about Betty and wine.

“I hate food,” Ms. Catroux said. “It’s dreary, the care to make it and all these people talking about it. I only eat so I can drink.”

Ask Doris Brynner, an ex-wife of the actor Yul Brynner. A friend of the Catrouxes and a frequent guest at their getaway in Provence, listed for sale last year by Sotheby’s for \$11.5 million, she is also a lifelong teetotaler. As such, she has come in for generous helpings of Ms. Catroux’s derision.

“I don’t drink anything, and she always teases me about it,” Ms. Brynner said by phone from Paris. “She says, ‘Go ahead and have your disgusting water.’”

13. She says she is not French.

A lanky blonde with elongated limbs, Ms. Catroux so clearly embodies a brand of what seems like Gallic chic that it seems inconceivable that she is not French. “Not at all,” Ms. Catroux said.

“The French are pretentious and conceited and have the worst character in the world,” she said, noting that there is no place on earth she would rather live than Paris. “It is the perfect city for a person who does nothing.”

14. The man she thought was her father was not.

Born in 1945, she was raised thinking of herself as the only child of Carmen Saint and a Brazilian businessman. It was only after her mother divorced that man and relocated from Brazil to Paris that Ms. Catroux (née Betty Saint) would learn that she was the product of a brief affair by her mother and Elim O’Shaughnessy, the handsome Yale-educated U.S. diplomat who often took her to tea at the Ritz and to whom she bore an uncanny resemblance.

“I guessed at 12 that I was, what is the word in English?” she said. “No,

Betty Catroux, Yves Saint Laurent’s longtime friend and muse (though she hates the word), in her home in Paris. Below left, the designer in 1969, flanked by Ms. Catroux, left, and Loulou de la Falaise. Below center, Ms. Catroux with Anthony Vaccarello, now the creative director at Saint Laurent.

not bastard, not that terrible word. I was his illegitimate daughter.”

15. Being indolent is a tough job.

Though Ms. Catroux likes to say that her mother was a courtesan of the old school, and while she herself cultivates the air of a 19th-century grande horizontale, her successes have been achieved while remaining upright. The image she projects of languor to the point of indolence, of committing to little and planning for less, of consenting to accept few social or other obligations — of, in her words, “never bothering with things” — may conceal something more complex.

No one likes to disrupt the entrenched fantasia of Ms. Catroux traveling as a glamorous vagabond on the unimaginably luxurious Saint Laurent caravan, dressed in clothes he designed especially for her. Yet it can never have been easy to keep company with a moody, mercurial, compulsive human being, one noted for his prodigious appetites for sex, alcohol and drugs and a lacerating tongue. “Yves,” she said, “made fun of everyone.”

16. Pierre Bergé hated her until he didn’t.

“Pierre thought all along that I was a bad influence on Yves,” Ms. Catroux said, referring to Saint Laurent’s former lover, business partner, caretaker and the progenitor of his myth. “But when Yves died, we became very close, and I saw that Bergé was the good-hearted one in the end and that Yves was the monster.”

17. It is true they were sybarites and aesthetes.

“We lived for beauty and amusement,” Ms. Catroux said, referring to Saint Laurent and his ménage. “And the first rule was to seduce. Seduce everybody and make everybody crazy about us and then never mix with anyone.”

18. Fashion leaves her unmoved.

“I never cared about it or understood this fascination with me,” said Ms. Catroux, the woman whose indelible image in Saint Laurent’s lace-front safari suit, in tautly knotted trench coats, in boyish black jeans and snug biker jackets or in the sexually ambiguous evening wear called Le Smoking inspired successive generations of designers to imitate her and photographers like Jeanloup Sieff, Helmut Newton and Irving Penn to attempt to capture her intriguing beauty on film.

“Betty does not wake up with this idea of making a statement with an outfit,” Mr. Vaccarello said. “In that way, she is the opposite of what is called an influencer today. She doesn’t calculate the impact of every little thing she wears.”

19. She thinks gender is a drag.

Ms. Catroux settled down again next to her cat. If she has a regret, it is that she will not be around in 50 years to experience a time when the lines of demarcation between genders blur or vanish.

“In my opinion, the ideal human being transcends the idea of men on one side and women on the other,” she said. “I don’t feel like a boy or a girl. It’s always been like that.”



BEVERLEY GOODWAY/AMIRORPXX, VIA GETTY IMAGES



DAVID SIMS



CHANEL

First lady’s show puts a legacy in focus

The New York mayor’s wife exhibits artworks to extol equity and inclusion

BY ROBIN POGREBIN

With two years left in Mayor Bill de Blasio’s term, it will be some time before New York City’s first family has to pack up and head back to their three-story rowhouse in Brooklyn.

But Chirlane McCray, the mayor’s wife, is keenly aware of the time remaining — “696 days,” she said in a recent interview — and of the legacy she wants to leave, at least as far as art and culture are concerned.

A big part of that effort has been the exhibitions she has spearheaded at the mayor’s official residence, Gracie Mansion, the fourth and last of which opened last week: “Catalyst: Art and Social Justice.”

Like her other shows in the residence on East End Avenue, this one emphasizes equity and inclusion, the general priorities of the mayor and first lady.

“When we came here and were surrounded by all these portraits, it wasn’t long before I said, ‘Where are we?’” Ms. McCray said over strong ginger tea in the mansion’s formal dining room. “‘How do we fit in here? Where are the people we know? Where are the people of our city and what do we need to do to really be the people’s house?’”

“Catalyst,” which will be open to the public through Aug. 25, looks at transformational New York moments from 1965 to the present, including the civil rights movement, the women’s move-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRITANNY NEWMAN/THE NEW YORK TIMES



Left, Chirlane McCray, the first lady of New York City, in the mayor’s residence. Above, Devra Freeland’s “Late Capitalistic Relic” (2018), an iPhone in ice.

I like to just sit with my husband and watch TV.”

At the same time, Ms. McCray said she was proud of what they had accomplished with CreateNYC, the city’s cultural plan, which linked city funding to diversity requirements, and the Gracie Mansion exhibitions, which helped draw 40,000 visitors to the residence last year, up from 25,000 in 2016.

Jessica Bell Brown, an art historian who curated “Catalyst,” said Ms. McCray “has shown interest in art as a bridge for thinking about social justice, the way in which artists can offer a window into the most important issues of our time.” Ms. Brown also was curator of the first lady’s show “She Persists: A Century of Women Artists in New York,” which focused on female and women-identified creators.

Ms. McCray said she was particularly moved by the appreciation of the artists in “She Persists,” some of whom have had “little or no recognition.”

Thelma Golden, director of the Studio Museum, said Ms. McCray’s installations had attracted new audiences and “created the opportunity for a broad range of artists, artistic practices and different visions to be on view.”

Having grown up playing piano, dancing, singing in the school chorus and writing poetry, Ms. McCray, who also oversees the city’s mental health initiative, said she keenly appreciated the value of culture. “I don’t think I’d be alive today if it weren’t for art,” she said. “Everyone needs a healthy way to channel their emotions.”

“Having art,” she added, “makes it possible to live without other things.”

Looking ahead, Ms. McCray has acknowledged that she may consider seeking public office.

“It could be something in Albany, it could be Brooklyn, local, citywide,” she told The New York Times in 2018.

One thing her experience in Gracie Mansion has given Ms. McCray is the desire to live with more art when she returns to Brooklyn and to expand beyond paintings “by Dante and Chiara de Blasio” (their now-grown children).

“I can’t afford a Mickalene Thomas; I can’t afford Faith Ringgold,” she continued. “But I’ll do what I can.”

Preceding “She Persists” was the 2015 exhibition “Windows on the City: Looking Out at Gracie’s New York,” which featured 18th-century art, and “New York 1942,” in 2017, which concentrated on Fiorello H. La Guardia, the first mayor to live at Gracie Mansion.

While the shows are temporary, Ms. McCray said she hoped she had opened a discussion about what art and which artists belong in the mayoral residence.

“Whoever lives here next, I challenge them to do more and do better,” she said.

“Our gift, or our legacy,” she added, “is that we showed what is possible.”



ment and AIDS activism.

“We can’t do everything,” Ms. McCray said. “But I think we’ve done our best to incorporate as much as we can so that people get to see the variety of the activism in our city.”

The nearly 80 works in the exhibition include Martine Fougere’s portraits of trade workers in the South Bronx (from auto-parts makers to cake-bakers), Diana Davies’s photographs of L.G.B.T.Q. activism and Tania Bruguera’s project on undocumented immigrants.

The more than 50 artists in the show, including Nari Ward, Glenn Ligon and Lorna Simpson, have strong connections to the city. “I want to make sure we have artists from every borough,” Ms. McCray said. “We want this to be as inclusive an exhibit as possible.”

That emphasis initially caused concern that the administration would neglect or shortchange larger institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art

and Lincoln Center in favor of smaller ones outside Manhattan.

The city, for example, has given bigger funding increases to smaller cultural organizations than to larger institutions to try to level the playing field.

But Ms. McCray said there was more than enough to go around. “We have not put any institution in jeopardy,” she said. “This is a wealthy city, and there is no reason why we need to concentrate on anyone. There are no losers here.”

Indeed, the pie has increased, over all, by more than 35 percent, to about \$212 million for fiscal year 2020, up from about \$156 million for 2014.

“Despite record funding for culture these last few years, there hasn’t been the sense that the arts are a real passion for the mayor, so it’s a net positive that Chirlane seems to care about these issues,” said Jimmy Van Bramer, chairman of the City Council committee overseeing cultural affairs. “She’s an influen-

tial behind-the-scenes player when it comes to fighting for the arts.”

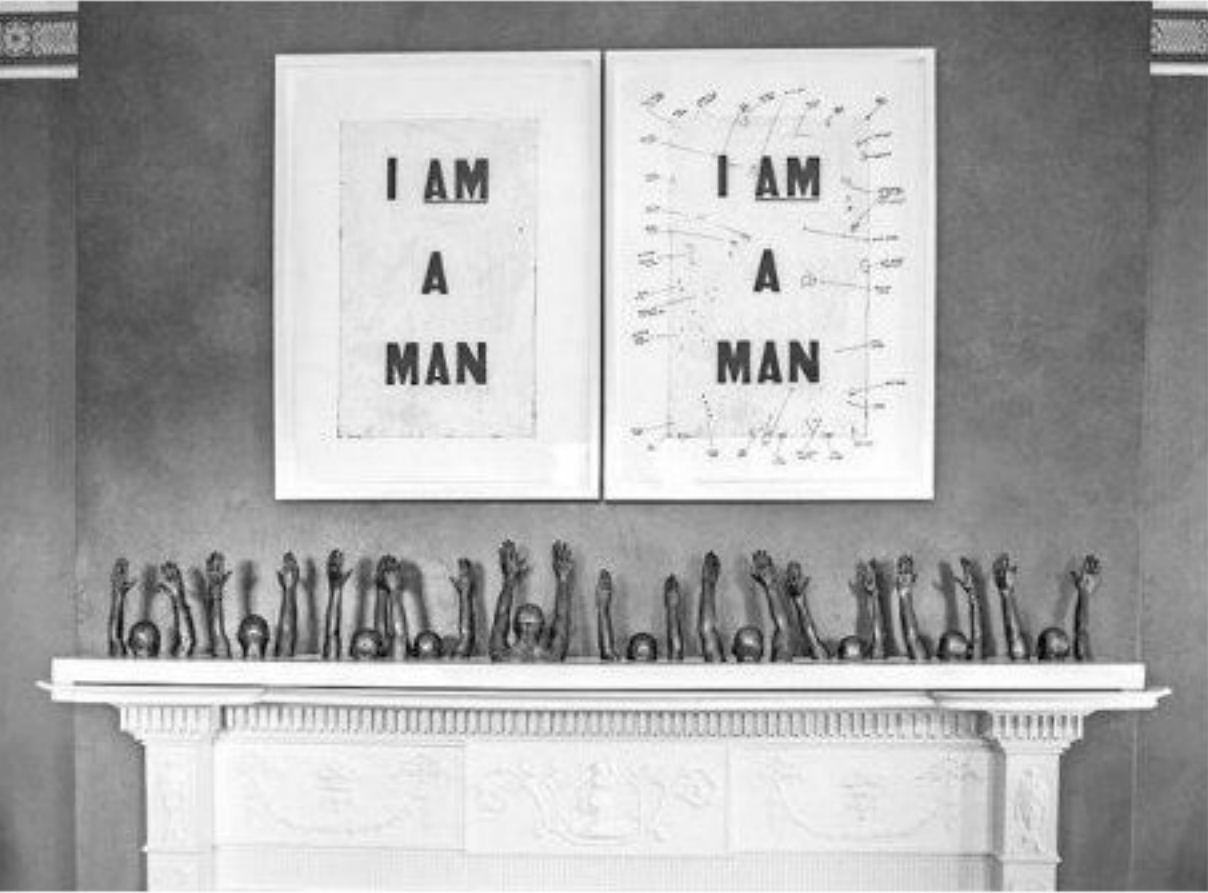
Small arts organizations said there was still progress to be made. “There is a lack of attention and equitable funding to not-for-profit arts and cultural organizations of color,” said Marta Moreno Vega, founder of the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute.

Ms. McCray has taken her share of heat in the cultural sphere. Some blame her for the abrupt departure last fall of Tom Finkelpearl, the former city cultural affairs commissioner.

He resigned amid battles over the city’s rethinking of public monuments to honor more women and people of color, an effort led largely by Ms. McCray’s She Built NYC commission.

“Tom and I got along great,” was all she would say, adding, “From everything I know, it was a mutually agreed upon departure.”

Mr. Finkelpearl said he had a “warm



Clockwise from far left: a view of the show; Glenn Ligon’s “Condition Report” (2000), top, and Hank Willis Thomas’s “Raise Up” (2014), on mantel; and “Miss-ing Signs Were Posted Everywhere” (2001), by Calhoun School students.

were underrepresented, who had no recognition whatsoever,” she said.

Given the strong feelings around the issues, however, Ms. McCray acknowledged that the public process could use improvement. (Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York, who often clashes with the mayor, said the state would commission a Mother Cabrini statue.)

“We need a more coordinated process for statues,” Ms. McCray said. “I’ve been working on that.”

Both the first lady and the mayor have also been criticized for not attending as many cultural events as did Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, his immediate predecessor.

While Ms. McCray has attended the occasional gala, namely at the Studio Museum of Harlem and Carnegie Hall, she said, “That has not been the top priority on my list — to be seen at things.”

“I’m not that kind of person; I don’t like getting all dressed up,” she added. “I work really hard, so at the end of the day

relationship” with Ms. McCray, “who is a strong advocate for arts and culture.”

While the actor Chazz Palminteri called Ms. McCray a “racist” after the city decided not to devote one of its first statues to Mother Cabrini, a patron saint of immigrants, Ms. McCray said, “It has nothing to do with her not being worthy.”

That discussion became conflated with her efforts to honor “people who

Capitalism’s gears spinning toward absurdity

BOOK REVIEW

Temporary

By Hilary Leichter. 184 pp. Emily Books/Coffee House Press. \$16.95.

BY PARUL SEHGAL

In 1973, Elizabeth Hardwick declared that sex could no longer be the subject of great literature. The novel of seduction — in the vein of “The Scarlet Letter” and “Tess of the D’Urbervilles,” of Dreiser, Zola and Henry James — was dead. “You cannot seduce anyone when innocence is not a value,” she wrote in a precise, imperiously beautiful essay, “Seduction and Betrayal.” Some 25 years later, Vivian Gornick asserted that the novel of love was now in uncertain health. We simply know too much to believe such stories with the old fervor, she argued in “The End of the Novel of Love.” The notion of romance as a vehicle for self-discovery asks us to disregard what we know to be true: This is work we must do for ourselves.

I’ve always been intrigued by, if wary of, these arguments, out of a

streak of weird, warrantless optimism, at least where fiction is concerned. I share Arnold Schoenberg’s hope that “there is still much good music that can be written in C major.” But there’s no denying that the novel of love, of sex, has recessed. Friendship is ascendant, or parenthood or elegant alienation (see Rachel Cusk). Even in fiction that takes coupling as its subject, as in the novels of Sally Rooney, the characters seem a bit sheepish, as if caught participating in a nostalgic exercise.

The drama of the romance hasn’t totally withered away, however; it’s merely migrated. You’ll recognize all the familiar throes — exalted expectations and dashed hopes, disillusionment and embarrassing self-delusion — in fiction about work. Specifically, about late capitalism’s carousel of grinding, precarious labor; see the books of Helen DeWitt, Catherine Lacey, Ling Ma, Hiroko Oyamada and Sayaka Murata.

In “Temporary,” a brisk, wildly imaginative first novel by Hilary Leichter, the unnamed protagonist is a temp worker who trudges between 23 jobs. “I have a shorthand kind of career,” she tells us. “Short tasks, short



Hilary Leichter.

stays, short skirts. My temp agency is an uptown pleasure dome of powdered women in sensible shoes. As is customary, I place my employment in their manicured hands. With trusty carpal alchemy they knead my résumé into a series of paychecks that constitute a life.”

The narrator doesn’t yearn for the rescue, revenge or adventure that

typically drives a novel. It’s something more elusive she’s after, what she and her fellow temps call “the steadiness” — a permanent job. When she encounters an old friend who has achieved the impossible, she is pierced by envy. “What does it feel like?” she asks, trying not to cry. “The steadiness?” Her friend soothes her with all the banalities detested by the lovelorn: “Sometimes these things happen when you’re not looking for them.”

She waits. She washes skyscraper windows, directs traffic and delivers mail. She fills in for a mannequin in a department store window, having her limbs twisted into pleasing poses.

Her tempting positions tip into the surreal. She fills in for the board chairman of a major corporation, and after he dies, carries around his ashes — he insists on continuing to be a man about town. Later, she’s sent to live in a beautiful house and instructed to open and close the doors at specific intervals during the day — to fill in for a ghost. There is the pirate ship on which her duties include handling severance, very literally defined (“Any limb will do,” she’s told). She temps for a murderer, which she accepts with strange equanimity: “Files and docu-

ments come and go by way of the shredder, but murder is a task that lasts.”

In these snippets, you can hear an old note, a note I’ve missed in American fiction, and am surprised to have noticed myself missing — for so long it seemed dominant to the point of imperishability. The violent, surreal, often cartoonish scenarios delivered deadpan that draw attention to the freakishness of ordinary life — from writers like Donald Barthelme, Gordon Lish, Ben Marcus. At one point, Leichter’s narrator is enlisted to work as a human barnacle, standing in for those that had gone extinct. It’s not so bad, a co-worker tells her. “No different than filling in and growing roots at a desk, really.”

Leichter’s deeper interest is in mining how transient, insecure work inflects our private life — if it even permits a private life. Can we afford to stop working? Do we remember how? The narrator’s love life is exquisitely compartmentalized. Eighteen boyfriends minister to her needs, each fulfilling a particular role on an allotted night. (“It’s the way I can multitask,” she explains.) There is the handy boyfriend, the life coach boyfriend, the

earnest boyfriend (“he who plucks the spiders from my rug and tucks them onto window ledges”), the caffeinated boyfriend she dates “for the suspense.”

Later, she embarks on something approaching motherhood, when hired by a young boy whose own mother has gone missing. She’s meant to cook, clean and occasionally yell for no reason, then stare sadly out the window. “Like this?” she asks the boy. “More desperate,” he corrects her. “Pick a point of focus outside and commit.” The question that goes unmentioned — that, perhaps, never needs mentioning — is where did his real mother go? Likely to a temp job of her own, sitting in for some other barnacle.

This novel could have easily sagged into dogma, but Leichter keeps the narrative crisp, swift and sardonic. “Temporary” reads like a comic and mournful “Alice in Wonderland” set in the gig economy, an eerily precise portrait of ourselves in a cracked mirror. As the Red Queen told Alice, seizing her wrist and goading her on for a race: “It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!”

A cure for winter in Montreal’s Nordic spas

Wood-fired saunas, refreshing, icy plunges and public napping

BY PEG TYRE

Right around the middle of winter, when the afternoon sun was hanging low and the weather forecasters were warning of an evening commute complicated by “wintry mix,” I found myself strategizing. How was I going to survive until spring? It surprised me. I always liked winter, but somehow, this time around, the season seemed longer and more harsh. I needed to find a way to fall in love with winter again.

But when I found myself standing on the windswept deck of Bota Bota, sparsur-leau, a Nordic spa in the Montreal harbor fashioned from a converted barge, clad only in a Speedo and a white terry cloth robe, it occurred to me that the restoration I’d come for might break me all together. Stunned with cold, I stared into the rising steam, my damp hair stiffening into icy dreads and sharp snow pellets stinging my cheeks and my naked calves.

Then I dropped the robe and slipped up to my shoulders into a roiling hot pool and joined a dozen or so of my fellow spa-goers gazing silently out at the ice floes in the St. Lawrence River. I exhaled audibly, and something in my spine uncoiled. This was not just a “see how tough you are” experience calibrated for preternaturally robust Canadians. I was in the right place to relearn how to fully embrace the season.

While Montreal’s reputation for great food, a slamming night life and a vibrant art scene is well known, lately, the ever-so-Instagrammable Nordic spas in the region are attracting attention, too.

Sweat culture has a long history in Canada, dating back hundreds of years to the sweat lodges of the First Nations people, said Marianne Trotier, press director for Groupe Nordik, which opened its first and most popular spa, Chelsea, outside Ottawa, in 2005. Skiers adapted it for a post-slope unwind, and “more and more Canadians from all provinces are now part of it.”

Armed with copious car snacks and good company, I made the six-hour drive from New York City to Montreal. Two members of my all-female spa-going squad scored low-cost tickets for the brief flight from La Guardia to Montreal-Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport. None of us had experienced anything comparable in or around New York City, where spa-going tends to be a wallet-ravaging, ultrarefined experience or the more boisterous, family-friendly and affordable Russian banya and Korean jjimjilbang.

By contrast, the Nordic spas we visited around Montreal put the emphasis squarely on rejuvenation through intensive immersion in nature. While their roots are plainly Finnish and Scandinavian, stylistically, the older ones tend to rock the 1950s ski-chalet look, with lots of plaid cushions and knotty pine. The more recent entries have a cool monochromatic design.

All rely on a ritual with three main components; first is heat, which comes in the form of hot saunas, eucalyptus-



The Polar Bear’s Club in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec is the place for a post-ski unwinding, once night falls.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID GIRAL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ume conversation is allowed in designated sections. Later into the evening on the weekends, as spa-goers rehydrate with craft beer, those no-loud-talking rules get bent but never entirely collapse. The vibe is less scantily clad après-ski pub and more friendly yoga retreat with an endless waterfall soundtrack.

We “embarked” on Bota Bota via a gangplank, and after a brief wait in line, were handed a towel and bathrobe. All three spas we visited required bathing suits. Water bottles and flip-flops are recommended. I had left my flip-flops in my suitcase and opted to go barefoot, which was a mistake, since at times my feet were freezing. You can buy some at the spa’s little gift shop. Our troupe descended via a spiral staircase to a cramped dressing room in what was

Rue Saint-Paul Ouest, scoring a table at Barroco, a popular European-style bistro, and feasted on plates of oysters, fresh bread, squash soup and winter salads. (From about 3.50 dollars an oyster to 15 dollars for the soup.)

The next day, we drove about 50 minutes from downtown Montreal through the sleet into the Laurentian Mountains, passing strip malls and, as we entered the Saint Sauveur Valley, ski slopes, before arriving at the Polar Bear’s Club shortly before noon. Checking in took longer than expected — the receptionists were more friendly than efficient. I remembered my flip-flops this time. The funky ski-chalet-style property, decorated with crossed skis and snowshoes stuck in the snow, includes four hot baths; two cold baths; two river access points (I got up to my ankles in the Simon River, but patrons of the Bagni spa, on the opposite bank, were doing the full-body plunge); two dry saunas; one steam bath; and plenty of indoor and outdoor napping spots. We paused for a snack at Cuisine Spontanée, the simple restaurant there, and enjoyed a satisfying version of grilled cheese (14 dollars).

Quiet contemplation is key. Silence is strictly enforced and, after a brief adjustment, significantly contributes to the experience.

Two highlights to the day: baking in a wood-fired sauna with a picture window that looked out onto the frozen river, the hiss of water on hot stones competing with the roaring water; and a hot pool with a steaming waterfall and, behind the waterfall, an illuminated grotto. It was a completely cheesy, cozy, utterly relaxing place to hang out. (Score discounted admission to the water circuit online before you go: 49 to 54 dollars, although some seasonal promotions are as low as 30 dollars.)

For our final spa visit, we had planned to drive to Balnea, about an hour southeast of Montreal. Slick road conditions forced us to recalibrate, and instead we drove 10 minutes from the city center to Strom Nordic Spa on Nun’s Island, which was the most corporate-feeling (the same company runs three other spas in Quebec province) but equally entrancing. We arrived in the middle of a snowstorm, so at first we had very little company in the round barrel sauna, the hot pools or the steam room. We visited the restaurant, Nord, which featured a thoughtful Scandinavian-inspired menu of soups, salads and more elaborate entrees, all made with locally sourced produce, as well as craft beers and regional wines. (Prices range from 8 dollars and up for soups and salads to 23 dollars for entrees; drinks run from 7 dollars for beers to up to 14 dollars for cocktails or wine.)

The napping rooms were next-level. I settled down in a slatted-wood lounge chair overlooking a picturesque winter-scape while a glowing heating element



At Strom, slatted-wood lounge chairs have heating elements to warm your back.

saturated steam rooms and steaming hot pools. Then comes the cold, administered via a quick plunge in an outdoor pool, an ice-edged river or, for the bold, a roll in the snow. The third element was one that was even more shocking for my band of tightly wound New Yorkers than jumping into a snowbank: a prolonged embrace of public napping.

How do you get a crowd of strangers to doze together in a room? Fluttering eyelids are encouraged by a range of high-hygge warming rooms solely dedicated to resting. And, oh, those rooms. The ones we sampled had crackling fires, private nooks for couples, flickering torches, hypnotic rocking chairs, private macramé cradles, bean bag chairs and fleece blankets. Nearly all had picture windows that allowed nappers to drift off while separated from the majesty of nature by a single pane of glass.

Quiet contemplation is key. For the most part, cellphones are left in private lockers, along with your parka and street clothes. Silence is strictly enforced and, after a brief adjustment, significantly contributes to the experience. At Bota Bota and the Polar Bear’s Club, in the Laurentian Mountains, low-vol-

once the hull of the barge. Our belongings safely stowed in lockers, we ascended again, and went our separate ways, exploring the additional four levels of spaces designed by Sid Lee Architects, a Montreal firm. (Three hours in the water circuit at the spa costs 50 to 60 Canadian dollars, or about \$37 to \$45, depending on the day of the week.)

It was a quiet weekday night, so the crowd was thin and nothing felt cramped or crowded. I followed the numbered water circuit elements, enjoying a sauna with a giant picture window looking out over the gray harbor and the hot pool on the deck before climbing into a macramé cradle in one of the many glassed-in resting rooms. Toward the end of my stay, I padded off the boat to the Jardin, part of the spa that is on land, and settled down for a brief snooze in a second-level (think bunk beds) napping space. My squad regrouped after about two and a half hours, prune, damp and smiling, and discovered the wild temperature swings had the same effect on our appetites as a half marathon. The dining room at Bota Bota was unexpectedly closed, so we disembarked and strolled a short way to

warmed my back. Then, after an up-to-my-knees cold plunge, dozed in a toasty white yurt in front of a brightly burning gas fireplace, the afternoon sun angling through barren trees just outside the window.

Because Strom is a 17-minute public bus ride from downtown Montreal, long waits for entry to the water-circuit can be a hassle, we were told by other spa-goers. It might well be worth the wait. (Unlimited time in the water circuit costs 59 dollars; 44 dollars after 5 p.m.; more during public holidays.)

All of the spas offer a variety of massages (which, read it and weep, many Canadians get reimbursed for as part of their employment benefits) and some body treatments like exfoliation, fat melting wraps and facials, which need to be booked in advance (an appointment can guarantee you access without waiting in line on a busy day).

But the groundswell of popularity of the Nordic spas around Montreal, said Mikkel Aaland, author of the 1978 book “Sweat,” is less about hewing to some abstract standard of beauty and more a concrete response to lives increasingly lived in a virtual world. Mr. Aaland, who is making his book into a nine-part documentary series about sweat-bath culture called “Perfect Sweat,” said the people who flock to Montreal’s spas are craving experiences that take them beyond their cubicles or cellphones.

“They know they are stressed, and sweating reduces stress. In this polluted world, sweating gets rid of the junk in their bodies, so it’s good for you,” he said. Spa-goers are wearing bathing suits (and sometimes thick woolen hats), so socializing occurs at a time when people are physically vulnerable and exposed to a wide variety of body types. “The combination of steam, water, fire and nature opens the door to a different kind of renewal. It’s physical. It’s social. It’s spiritual,” Mr. Aaland said.

After the spa weekend, the downsides of winter lingered. I still had to scrape snow off the windshield when I headed for New York. When I got home, the forecast, alas, was still calling for “wintry mix.” But my energy level was higher and my life force somehow stronger. The stretch of late winter that will inevitably lead to spring seemed more manageable somehow, as if the pilot light had been reignited in my soul.



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