

The New York Times Magazine

May 10, 2020



Can Democracy Survive the Pandemic? *By Emily Bazelon*

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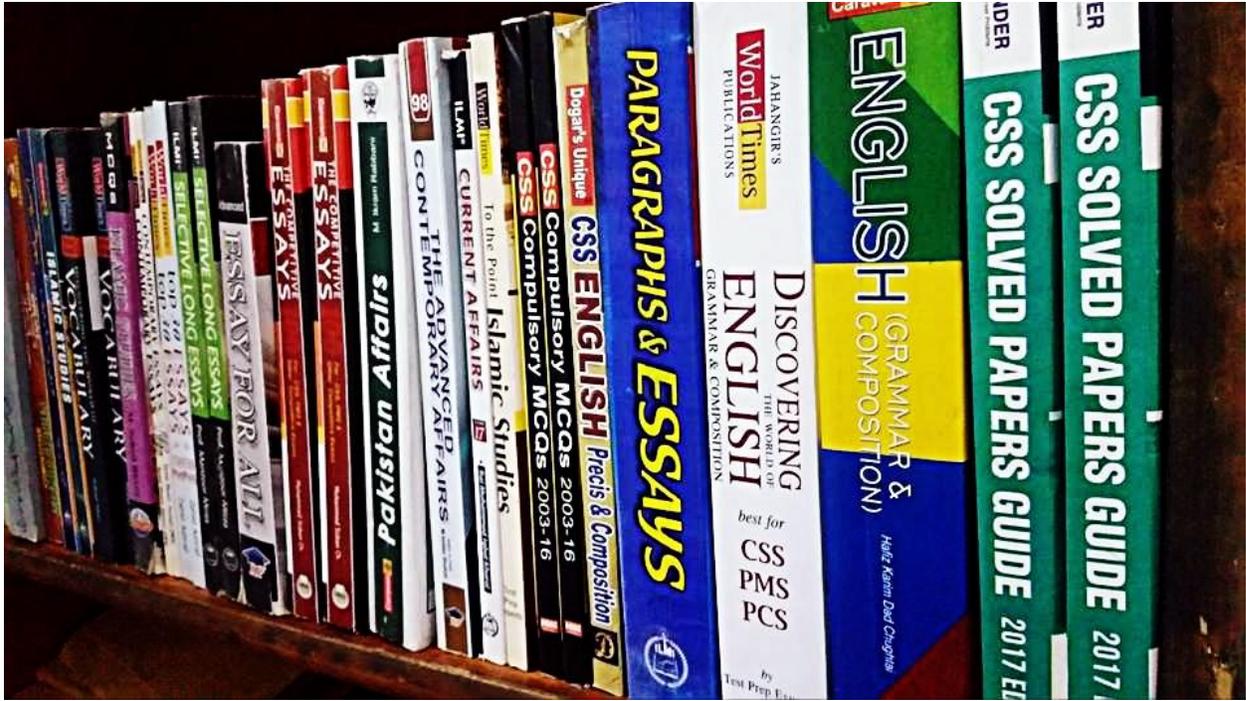
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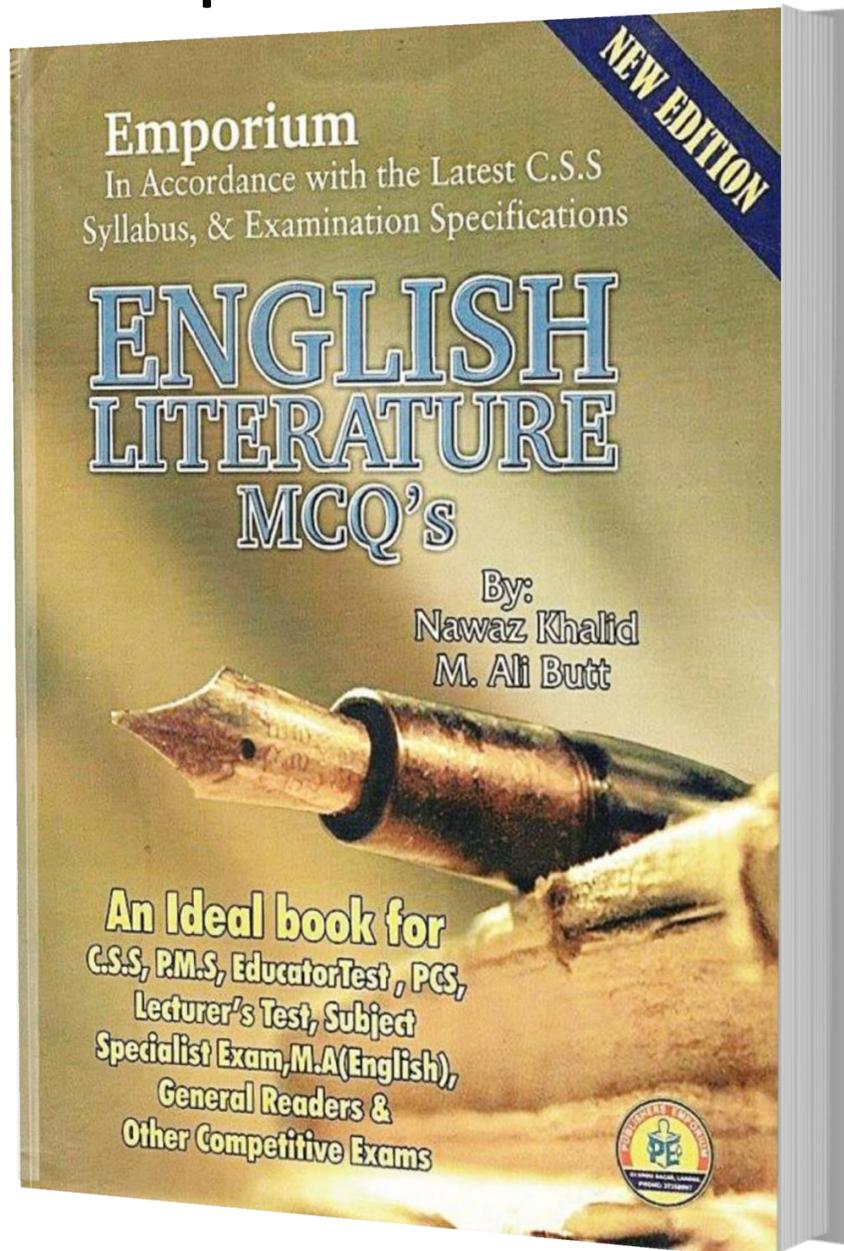
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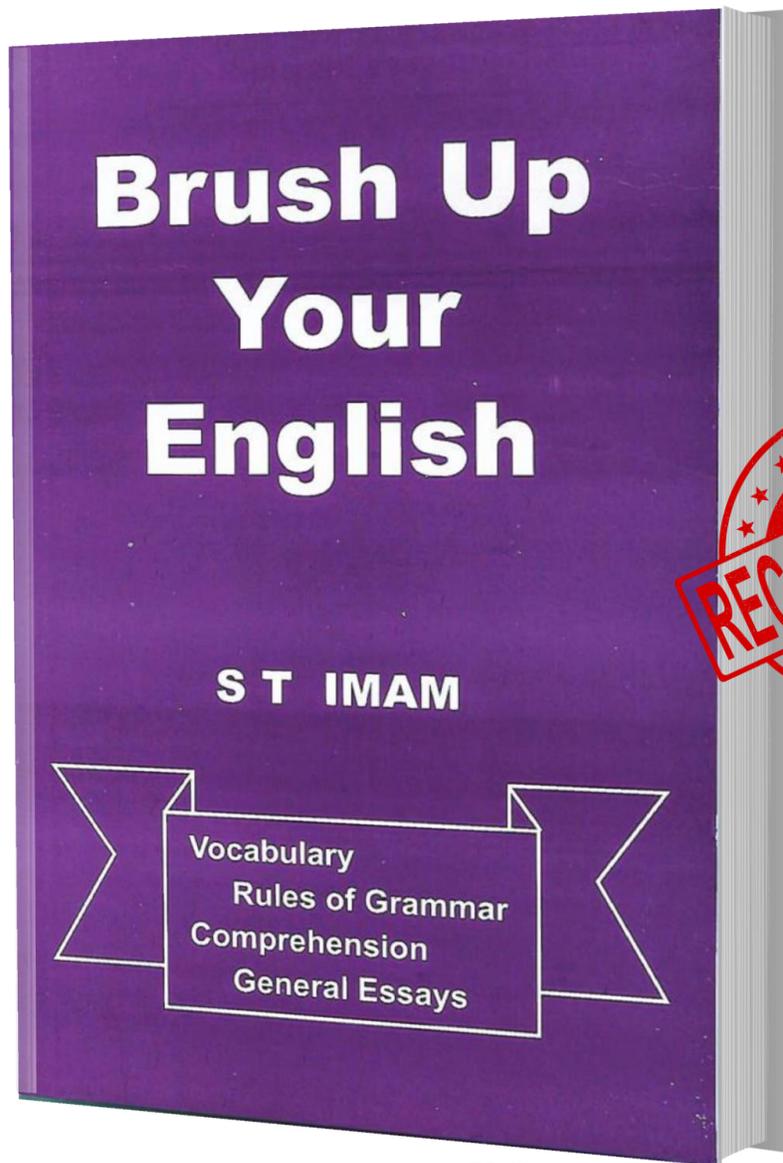


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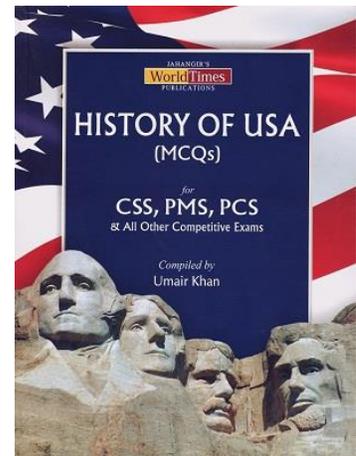
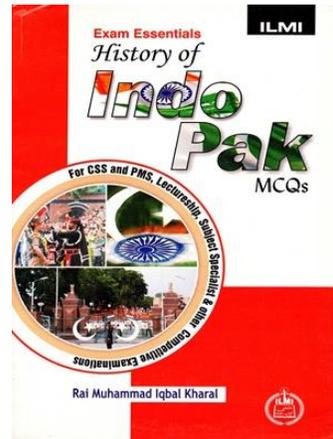
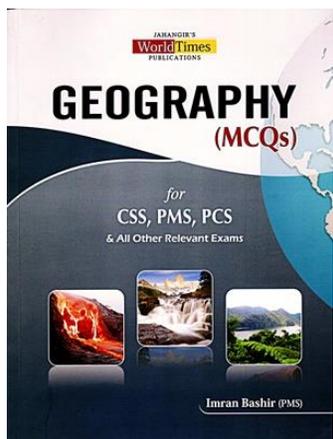
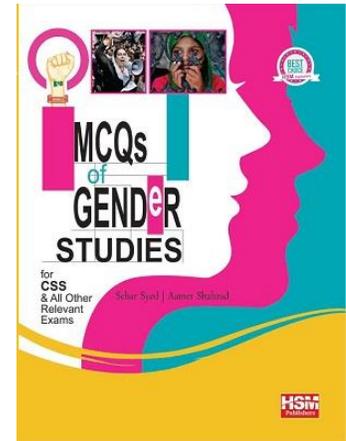
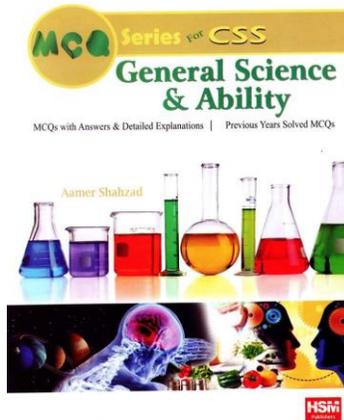
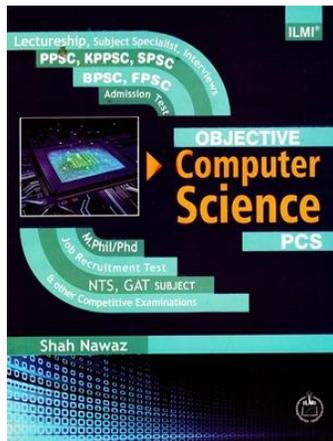
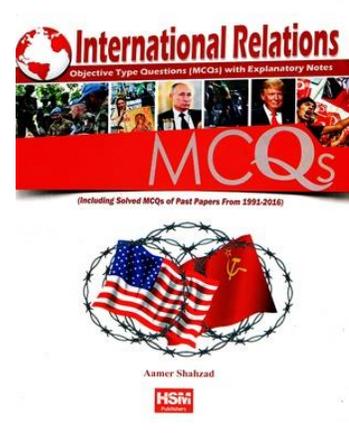
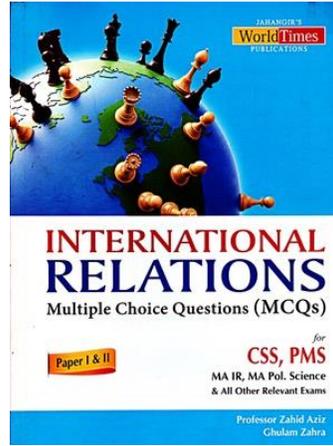
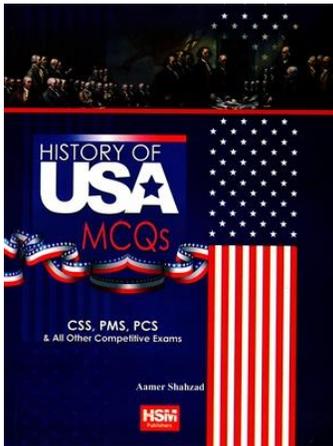
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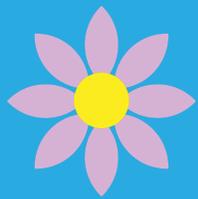
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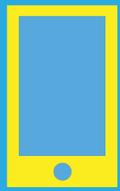
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to take care of yourself and others.

The New York Times Magazine

May 10, 2020

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Photograph by Jeff Minton for The New York Times

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By *Taffy Brodesser-Akner* / Cancer has taken Val Kilmer's voice, but the unlikeliest movie star in Hollywood history still has a lot he wants to say.

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By *Emily Bazelon* / The safest way to cast a ballot is by mail. But with opposition from the president, limited funding and time running out to shift to a new system, will that option be available to all voters?

32 **The Medical Safety Net**

By *Mattathias Schwartz* / In New York City and around the country, community health centers are being pushed to the breaking point.

Val Kilmer became radioactive in Hollywood after his early triumphs, but he now says: "I would've loved to have been on 'Saturday Night Live' as a regular. Fame wasn't my priority, and I had it." Page 18.

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Behind the Cover *Gail Bichler, design director: "Pablo Delcan conceived of an evocative photo illustration that reflected the complicated, life-or-death realities of upholding democracy during a pandemic. Bobby Doherty photographed the mask and the sticker, familiar items that, shown together, emphasize the perils of holding in-person elections and the urgent need for an alternative." Concept by Pablo Delcan. Photo illustration by Bobby Doherty.*

Emily Bazelon

“Can Democracy Survive the Pandemic?”
Page 26

Emily Bazelon is a staff writer for the magazine and the Truman Capote fellow for creative writing and law at Yale Law School. Her book “Charged” won The Los Angeles Times Book Prize for 2020 in the current-interest category. This week she writes about preparing for the November election amid the pandemic. “I learned two things from my reporting I want to pass on: If you vote by mail, take a little care with your signature because it has to match the one the government has on file for you,” Bazelon says. “And on election night, prepare to wait patiently. If lots of people vote by mail as expected, and it’s close, we may not know the outcome for days, not because anything has gone wrong but because election officials are counting mountains of absentee ballots.”

Taffy Brodesser-Akner

“The Iceman in Winter,”
Page 18

Taffy Brodesser-Akner is a staff writer for the magazine who last wrote about Luke Perry, a star of “Beverly Hills, 90210.” Her novel, “Fleishman Is in Trouble,” was longlisted for the National Book Award for fiction.

Carina Chocano

Screenland,
Page 7

Carina Chocano is the author of the essay collection “You Play the Girl: On Playboy Bunnies, Stepford Wives, Trainwrecks and Other Mixed Messages” and a contributing writer for the magazine. She last wrote a Screenland column about an advertisement for Dubai.

Jeff Minton

“The Iceman in Winter,”
Page 18

Jeff Minton is a photographer who lives in Los Angeles. He has previously photographed a Buddy Holly hologram concert, art projects of the collective called Meow Wolf and curling teams in Florida for the magazine.

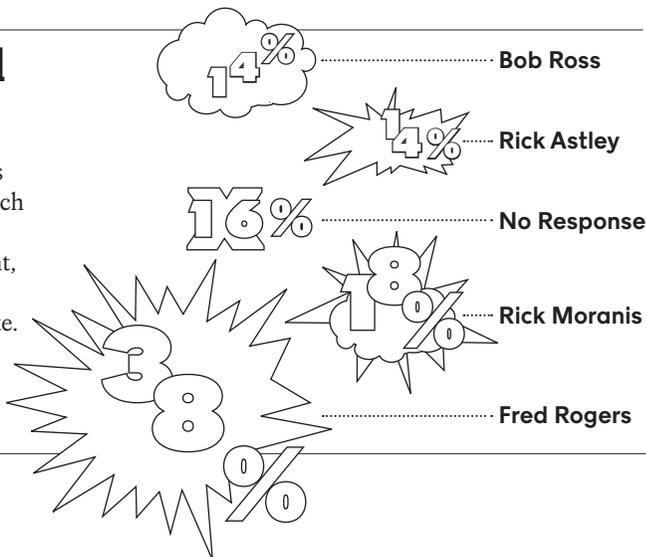
Mattathias Schwartz

“The Medical Safety Net,”
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Mattathias Schwartz is a contributing writer for the magazine whose previous articles include profiles of the former C.I.A. director John Brennan and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Dear Reader: Who Would Win in a Fight?

The magazine publishes the results of a study conducted online in March 2020 by The New York Times’s research-and-analytics department, reflecting the opinions of 2,250 subscribers who chose to participate.



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Readers respond to the 4.26.2020 issue.

RE: PRUNE

Gabrielle Hamilton wrote about closing her beloved Manhattan restaurant because of the coronavirus.



The writer's description of her feelings regarding the start-up of her restaurant, the growth to success, the decisions made to close Prune, feelings she had about asking for help, the "red tape" involved, the "spot on" description of what the restaurant scene has become — eye-opening to someone who enjoys going to restaurants but knows nothing about the business details involved. A sad tale, gripping in its telling. I sincerely hope Prune has a successful rebirth, for Hamilton's sake and for ours.

Bernie Strauss, Brewster, N.Y.

I've read many wonderful articles and stories in your magazine and often wanted to write to you about them. After reading "The Kitchen Is Closed," I just wanted Gabrielle Hamilton to know that I cannot wait to visit when your restaurant wakes up.

Karen Marrinan, Nanuet, N.Y.

Gabrielle Hamilton made me long to be one of her "old regulars" who could wander the Prune kitchen with her and have her lift the pot lids to show me what there is to eat. I found her piece about the opening, shuttering and now-sleeping restaurant to be both heartbreaking and hopeful. Gabrielle's soul-searching, her ethics and concern for others made for a very powerful article. To borrow her words, her reflections on the history and fate of Prune — and the restaurant business in general — feel "fresh and honest and immensely satisfying." I hope to dine at Prune one day when the

music of the ice in the shaker glass and good conversation play again.

Sara Fisher, Boston

This writer's raw and brutally candid journey overwhelmed me with its passion. Her conflicting emotions about the challenges of the pandemic, love for her staff and cynicism about the restaurant experience (and expense!) ensured that I felt the journey she was on. May she find the heart (and funds) to reopen Prune. I am eager to be the beneficiary of her love for her craft.

Barry Colodi, New York City

I have followed Gabrielle Hamilton since I read her memoir many years ago, and I want to thank her for laying bare the brutality of this situation from the perspective of a business owner, chef and Prune family matriarch. The loss, frustration and sadness must be overwhelming and yet, as always, her writing is threaded with gratitude, perspective and humor, all of which are appreciated and presently in short supply.

In the midst of statistics and graphs charting death and hospitalizations, it is so important to read about the other loss and grieving that is happening in homes and businesses around the world. Thank you to Hamilton for revealing the "other story" of this pandemic, and thank you to The Times for recognizing that the "other" losses — our businesses, our dreams and accomplishments, our blood, sweat and tears, our safety nets and sense of security — are immense casualties of this war.

Jennifer Crone Prince, Holliston, Mass.

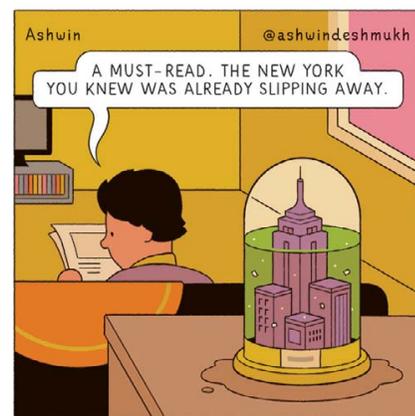
I wept as I read Gabrielle Hamilton's reflections on Prune. Her words brought forth my grief and longing for the New York where I spent my 20s — a Lower East Side I remember as surprisingly quiet in



THE STORY, ON TWITTER

Must-read essay with extraordinary photos.

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the years before the party scene arrived in force; my neighborhood haunts; that always-busy falafel stand; the bars where we sat and talked late into the night. Why cry about a restaurant where I only ever had one meal? (And the staff was rude to boot, lecturing me that "brunch is meant to move" when I asked for a pastry and coffee after finishing the best egg I'd ever eaten.) Still, it opened a well of nostalgia for a certain Lower Manhattan that is mostly long gone and a well of grief over the trials and transformations that the city I still love is going through. Thanks, Gabrielle. For that perfect egg. (With chickpeas! No one served eggs with chickpeas in 2003!)

Diana Lyon, Milford, Pa.

RE: WHEN CORONAVIRUS STRIKES A PRISON

An oral history of the first fatal outbreak in the federal prison system, in Oakdale, La.

The people within our justice system, both inmates and staff, deserve to be treated with humanity and foresight. This story is an epic farce of mismanagement, unnecessary suffering and loss of life. I believe that federal and state administrators should have acted early to educate staff, establish procedures and provide protective gear. This is a shameful story. Heartbreaking.

Laura, San Francisco

CORRECTIONS

An article on March 22 about the co-working space Wing described incorrectly a married couple's connection to it. The two women were engaged at a Wing location; they did not meet there.

Send your thoughts to magazine@nytimes.com.

'I wept as I read Gabrielle Hamilton's reflections on Prune. Her words brought forth my grief and longing for the New York where I spent my 20s.'

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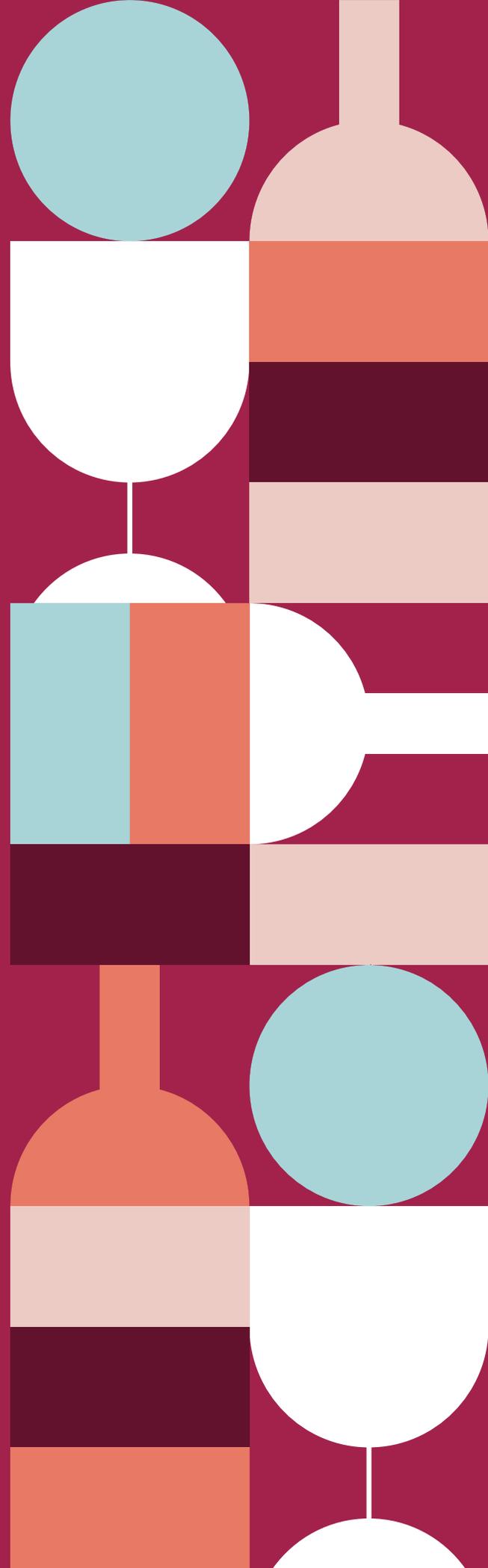
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Can Do



Celebrities seem unsure what they should be doing right now. The “One World” broadcast offered one answer: Tell us what we already believe. ● By Carina Chocano

● Jimmy Fallon’s appeal, such as it is, resides in his air of benighted, puppyish cluelessness — but in times of crisis, this sort of thing can quickly lose its charm. Fallon himself seemed to learn this in 2016, after he chummily tousled Donald Trump’s hair



during a “Tonight Show” appearance, sparking a public reaction so negative the host was pushed into a rare sulk. “What do you want me to do? You want me to kill myself?” he asked in *The Hollywood Reporter*. “I’m sorry. I don’t want to make anyone angry — I never do, and I never will. It’s all in the fun of the show.” Here he had a point. Jimmy Fallon is not like Stephen Colbert or Trevor Noah or John Oliver or Samantha Bee. His role is not to engage, however wryly, with real life. It is to show up every night and distract us from it, as though it’s not really there.

Last month, though, Fallon joined Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel as the hosts of “One World: Together at Home,” a concert organized to show support for the World

Health Organization and very much a response to real life. His role was the same as usual: goofy, innocent, like a child trying to get a smile out of his worried mother. At one point in the program — which aired for two hours on broadcast networks and six on streaming services and online — he and the scattered members of his show’s house band, the Roots, performed a slightly modified cover of Men Without Hats’ 1983 hit “The Safety Dance” (“We can dance/We can dance/Everybody’s washing their hands”), cut together with images of health care workers around the country. The medical personnel looked calm and can-do in fresh protective gear, dancing and singing as they scrubbed their hands and sprayed surfaces with

So far in this crisis, there has been a strange vacuum of basic shared-values platitudes.

disinfectants the president would soon recommend as potential intravenous remedies. Afterward, the actor Henry Golding spoke about the importance of vaccines. Later, Beyoncé talked about how the virus was disproportionately affecting African-Americans. Michelle Obama and Laura Bush spoke as a duo. Appearing just days after the president halted U.S. funding of the W.H.O., its director general, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, affirmed the need for global cooperation.

This being a concert with a mission, the celebrities performing from home continually redirected the spotlight onto health care workers, medical researchers, teachers, delivery people and other essential workers. They talked about



poverty, homelessness and the failures of the American health care system. They nodded to every last one of the humanistic, evergreen, model-U.N. values the bulk of Americans usually claim to aspire to: science, democracy, cooperation, responsibility, hygiene, reason and kindness.

Given that most of us have been hearing this talk since preschool, there should have been nothing remarkable about the broadcast. But so far in this crisis, and even before it, there has been a strange vacuum of basic shared-values platitudes. The president spends his time snapping at journalists, shifting blame or promising miraculous cures; other politicians snipe at states they see as enemies or idly muse about what number of dead seniors might

not be so terrible. We citizens, meanwhile, are free to consume our separate, personalized diets of information or disinformation. What the “One World” broadcast managed was to replicate something old-fashioned: a big, corny, mass-media entertainment, one that piously affirmed what feel like bedrock, mainstream values. And this time, instead of feeling like a stifling monoculture, it felt reassuring, like a dispatch from some consensus reality we’d all forgotten we’d ever inhabited.

The pandemic has lifted the veil on all sorts of obvious but seldom-acknowledged societal issues, but few have been as comical as the distance between ordinary people and the celebrities who pretend to

Viewership for the “One World” broadcast: **20.7 million**

Total networks on which it was carried: **26**

relate to them. Some stars’ behavior has come across blinkered and clueless, as when Ellen DeGeneres compared staying in her palatial home to being in jail. Others have seemed pandering and fake, as Gal Gadot did when she rounded up famous friends and made them sing “Imagine,” as though we were all living in a 1970s Coke commercial. Arnold Schwarzenegger enjoying a cigar in his hot tub while telling people to stay home was not a great look; nor was doing it from his lavish kitchen, alongside a miniature horse and donkey. This is the kind of thing that makes people post memes of fake Ikea manuals for flat-pack guillotines in the comments.

Over the past weeks, many people’s contact with the outside world has shrunk to

the size of a screen. But much of the artifice that helps those screens manipulate our feelings — lights, swooping cameras, the laughter of studio audiences — has been stripped away. In some cases, seeing stars exposed and unmediated has left them looking silly; in others it has made them seem relatable, trustworthy. We've seen hosts and anchors broadcasting from their kitchens, attics or sheds, telling jokes that are met with empty silence. We've watched Pete Davidson make a video for "Saturday Night Live" on a beige couch in his mom's living room, and we've seen stars flood the internet with homemade video, from the well-meaning (John Krasinski starting a "Some Good News" YouTube channel) to the engagingly odd (January Jones sweeping her foyer in a creepy Venetian mask).

Early in his job as the host of "The Daily Show," Jon Stewart made a decision to "straighten out our point of view here" and write "about how we really feel" — and spent the years that followed, in the wake of 9/11, excoriating the growing tendency for politicians to create their own realities when facts became inconvenient. The show that resulted may have felt pointed or partisan, but it was animated, Stewart told *The New Yorker*, by a sense that the nation was forgetting core principles of "fairness, common sense and moderation."

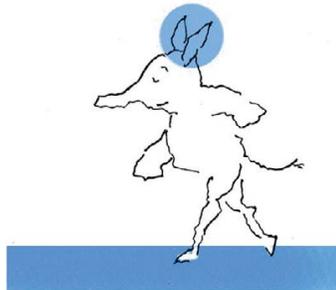
Something similar seems to have happened for "One World." In creating a mass cultural event, the celebrities and the vast entertainment apparatus behind it have discovered a purpose they can, for the moment, usefully put themselves to: standing for values that used to feel more uncontroversial than they do now. Amid a vacuum of leadership, they have taken up the sorts of jobs once done by U.S.O. tours and propaganda posters: boosting morale, stumping for shared beliefs, rallying people to action. Plant a victory garden! Wash your hands! We'll prevail together!

Thus: Jimmy Fallon, dancing innocuously amid clips of medical professionals. These were not the drained and overburdened doctors and nurses of the country's hardest-hit areas. They were friendly and confident, chins up and ready to do their part, like masked modern Rosie the Riveters. The program they appeared in was a parade of competence and calm, a six-hour balm — a reminder of what we were, or thought we were, or were supposed to be. ♦

They have taken up the sorts of jobs once done by U.S.O. tours and propaganda posters: Plant a victory garden! Wash your hands!

Poem Selected by Naomi Shihab Nye

If we were picking favorite words, "swerve" would be one of mine, but not the kind where a car slips and goes astray. Swerve as an awakening: to lean over into new knowing — change course in thinking — alter a path, suddenly — be jolted, advised. Ellery Akers's powerful poems in "Swerve" are prescriptions for awareness, bolts of care. Whether about the last inauguration, war, water, bad teachers or climate change — each poem, as in "At Any Moment . . .," glistens with detail, and attention.



At Any Moment, There Could Be a Swerve in a Different Direction

By Ellery Akers

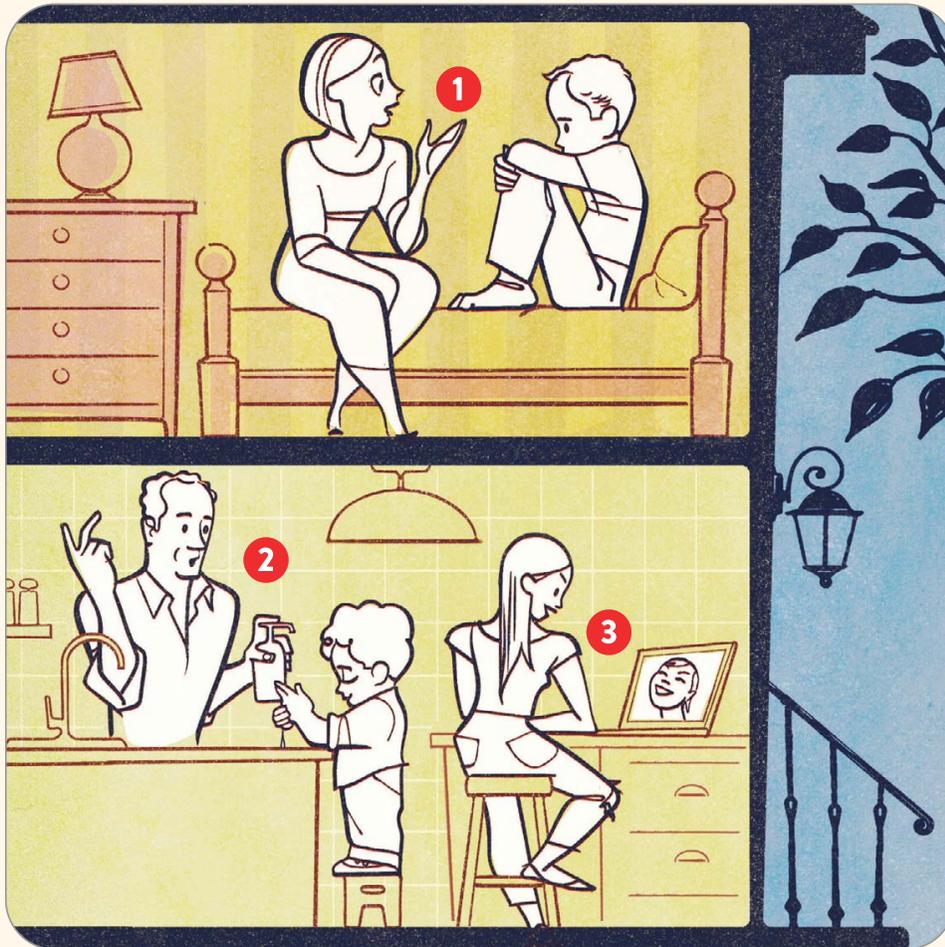
There was a moment
when shooting egrets for feathers became wrong.
There was a moment
when the Wilderness Act
changed the lives of billions of blades of grass.

I remember the moment when a river that used to catch
fire
turned from flammable to swimmable.

A swerve smells astringent, like the wind off the sea;
it tastes red, the way Red Hot cinnamon mints
burn in your mouth;
it's heavy, the way the weight of letters is heavy,
arriving in sacks at the Senate;
it sounds like the click of needles
as hundreds of thousands of women knit pink hats;
it looks like a coyote, crossing the freeway to go home.

Naomi Shihab Nye is the Young People's Poet Laureate of the Poetry Foundation in Chicago. Her latest book is "Cast Away," from Greenwillow Books. **Ellery Akers** is author of "Swerve: Poems on Environmentalism, Feminism and Resistance," from Blue Light Press, published earlier this year.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY



1 TALK TO YOUR KIDS

Your Children May Be Feeling Confused and Anxious.

- ▶ Answer questions and encourage them to share their feelings.
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2 WASH HANDS FREQUENTLY

It's the Best Way to Stop the Spread.

- ▶ Thorough handwashing takes at least 20 seconds.
- ▶ Do it when you come in from outside, before eating and after you cough or sneeze.

3 STAY AT HOME

Social and Physical Distancing Slows the Spread.

- ▶ This can be especially hard for kids. Staying home protects your family and other people.
- ▶ Keep playdates virtual.
- ▶ If you need to leave the house, stay a minimum of 6 feet from other people.

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FAMILY REMINDERS

Place notes like these to help your family stay safe.

DID YOU Wash Your Hands?

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HEY, Clean Your Phone.

Because, um, you touch it all day long.

STAR IN Your Own Video.

Visit with friends and loved ones via video instead of in person.

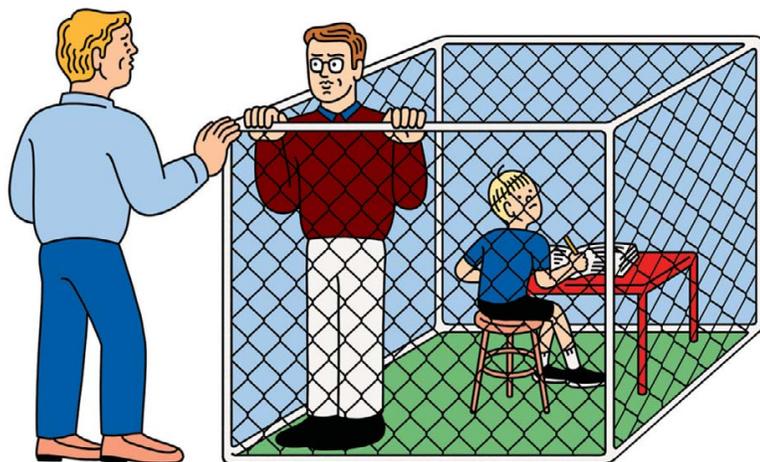
STAY Six Feet Apart.

Any time you are outside of your house, no exceptions.

TALK About It.

Sharing your feelings is a good thing.

My Brother Isn't Raising His Child Right. Should I Voice My Concerns?



I have strong feelings about the way my brother and his partner are raising their child. They have chosen to forgo all vaccines (my brother says they are “bad medicines that make you sick”), they are home-schooling their child, who behaves in age-inappropriate ways, and they never seem to say the word “no.” I believe my brother knows my opinions on child rearing, but we have never discussed them at length. Do I have a moral obligation to vocalize my views on the off chance that doing so might have a salutatory effect?

Name Withheld

The results of home schooling depend on the quality of the schooling. (And no, being schooled at home, as many schoolchildren are these days, isn't the same as being home-schooled.) But it sounds as if one thing that has motivated this and other choices your brother has made is a broader alienation from mainstream thought. He probably believes that public education poisons the mind, the way standard medicine poisons the body.

And it can be exceedingly difficult to persuade people who distrust the experts to change their views.

The typical way you win an argument about an empirical matter is by enlisting the collective authority of professional expertise. I'm continually learning that various empirical beliefs of mine are defective. If I assert that the earth is three billion years old, you can easily set me straight: Show that the scientific consensus pegs it at around 4.5 billion years, and I'll update my beliefs. Such disagreements are easily settled. It's as if you're opening the Encyclopedia of Consensus Knowledge to Page 1,043 and saying, “Look.”

This doesn't work with epistemic dissidents. Whether they fixate on climate change, the moon landing or vaccines, they distrust authority, including scientific authority. (Maybe they think that the medical establishment has been suborned by big pharma or bamboozled by ideology.) They know that beliefs have changed in the past and think they have a special insight into which of our current mainstream beliefs are the next to

go. They have invariably rabbit-holed into a detailed counterreality. We roll up with our big, dumb encyclopedia, triumphantly tap on a page with a stubby finger — and they roll their eyes. “Oh, *that* book of lies?”

The situation is different, by the way, with people who are merely “vaccine hesitant”; they've been spooked by terrifying stories encountered online, but if a trustworthy professional answers their questions and discusses their worries with patience and respect, they can come around. It would seem, however, that your brother is long past this point — that he has a whole self-confirming worldview.

You wonder whether you should express your opinions on the off chance it would change things for the better. Well, you know your brother. It's hard to imagine, though, that he would change his position about matters like these on the basis of a couple of casual observations, even if they come from a loving sibling. You could commit to a long series of conversations in which you heard him out and offered him evidence and arguments that he's not doing what's best for his child. But even if he were game for this, I'm not terribly optimistic about the outcome.

A sturdier argument for speaking up would simply be to clear the air, so that your relations with your niece or nephew's parents are based on an honest recognition of your disagreements. That's a reason to make your views clear, however blinkered your brother. But do so with caution. He could very well decide to shut you out. And this might be a problem for your niece or nephew: In the long run, having a sane uncle in her or his life — someone able to provide a vantage point outside the paranoia of the parents — could be of great value to that child.

I teach at a small private college in the Pacific Northwest. Two of my office mates have very dismissive attitudes about the outbreak of coronavirus. When the school was still open, they mocked news coverage, spouted bizarre conspiracy theories and generally denied the severity of this virus. This was done not only in my presence but in the presence of students. When I was alone with them and was asked for my opinion, I pretended that I was not hearing what I couldn't believe I was hearing. (Pretty chicken, I know!) I didn't want to get into a heated debate with my co-workers.



Bonus Advice From Judge John Hodgman

Megan writes: I've been playing Animal Crossing a lot lately. In the game, you inhabit an island full of anthropomorphic animals. You can also “visit” other players' islands. My sister wants to require that all visitors to her island wear virtual face masks. I feel this ruins the escapism of the game.

I haven't succumbed to Animal Crossing (yet), so I can only say that real masks help keep your potentially infected saliva on your own potentially infected face. Still, lots of people don't wear them, I guess because they think masks are merely symbolic. They're right. Covering your face is a symbol: that you belong to a civilization and that you're not necessarily a superbeing whose contrarianism can outthink a virus. This doesn't apply to video games, of course, but: your sister's island, your sister's rules. She's coping in her own way. Make your island a virtual tongue-kissing party!

To submit a query: Send an email to ethicist@nytimes.com; or send mail to The Ethicist, The New York Times Magazine, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018. (Include a daytime phone number.)

Nor did I want to listen to them. But the pressing issue for me was that they were airing these views when students were present. Should I have rocked the boat to raise my concerns? Or, and this is entirely possible, was I just overreacting?

Name Withheld

I know I've just had my say on epistemic dissidents, but I've got more to say still. In the past several weeks, tens of thousands of Americans have died from Covid-19; we're surpassing the numbers of Americans who perished in the Vietnam War over the course of a decade. Scoffing at the threat has made a mortal difference. With less scoffing, federal and state officials might have acted earlier and lives could have been saved. (Of course, if the officials had succeeded in minimizing the damage, the scoffers would have concluded that they were right.)

Unless the right policies are kept in place, moreover, the incidence of illness and death associated with the pandemic may well rise again. It matters whether people take the issue seriously. All of which is to say: No, you weren't overreacting.

Let me mention, too, that the social dimension of denialism and conspiracy mongering is critical. The internet has accelerated the spread of absurd theories, but these are a continuation of the sort of daft rumors that have always circulated in human communities. All great human cognitive tools — and language is among the greatest of them — bring enormous benefits; all have been put to bad uses. In his classic three-volume work of 1841, "Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions," Charles Mackay observed, "Men, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one." Spoken, written, printed and digital messages are what make the madness possible. But it's language that makes the recovery possible, too.

The students would have been well served by learning this. As a teacher, you might have wanted to speak up when there were students around, make counter-arguments and so, at least, convey your disapproval. And, if you were going to do that, you might as well have taken heart and begun to reject the nonsense when it was just the three of you. It might have chilled the atmosphere, but impeding the

flow of pernicious nonsense sometimes requires a drop in the temperature.

I may (marginally) improve my chances of surviving Covid-19 if I get a pneumococcal vaccine. (I have several risk factors that put me at heightened risk of death if I contract the coronavirus, and there is a small chance of fatal secondary bacterial pneumonia.) But public-health officials recommend avoiding the doctor's office in order to keep the rate of infection down. I have been self-isolating and will continue to self-isolate after this visit; moreover, I have scheduled the very first appointment of the day in order to minimize my contact with other patients. Am I very wrong for doing this?

Name Withheld

The rationale for self-isolation is that a lot of small chances for individuals can add up to a big risk for the community. If what you're doing is wrong, what's

The internet has accelerated the spread of absurd theories, but these are a continuation of the sort of daft rumors that have always circulated.

wrong isn't that it poses a serious risk to others (or yourself); it's that you're taking advantage of those who are contributing to "flattening the curve" by forgoing trips like these. This is a practice that benefits us all, and each of us ought to bear his or her fair share of its costs.

The right course of action for you depends on medical facts specific to your case. It's for your doctor, not me, to decide whether it's appropriate for you to venture out and get this vaccine. (Much rests on the question of how small this "small chance" is.) All I can tell you is that this decision must be made within the broader ethical context I've just sketched. It can't be reduced to the question of individual risk, incurred or extended. Ethically as well as epidemiologically, we're in this together. ♦

Kwame Anthony Appiah teaches philosophy at N.Y.U. His books include "Cosmopolitanism," "The Honor Code" and "The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity."



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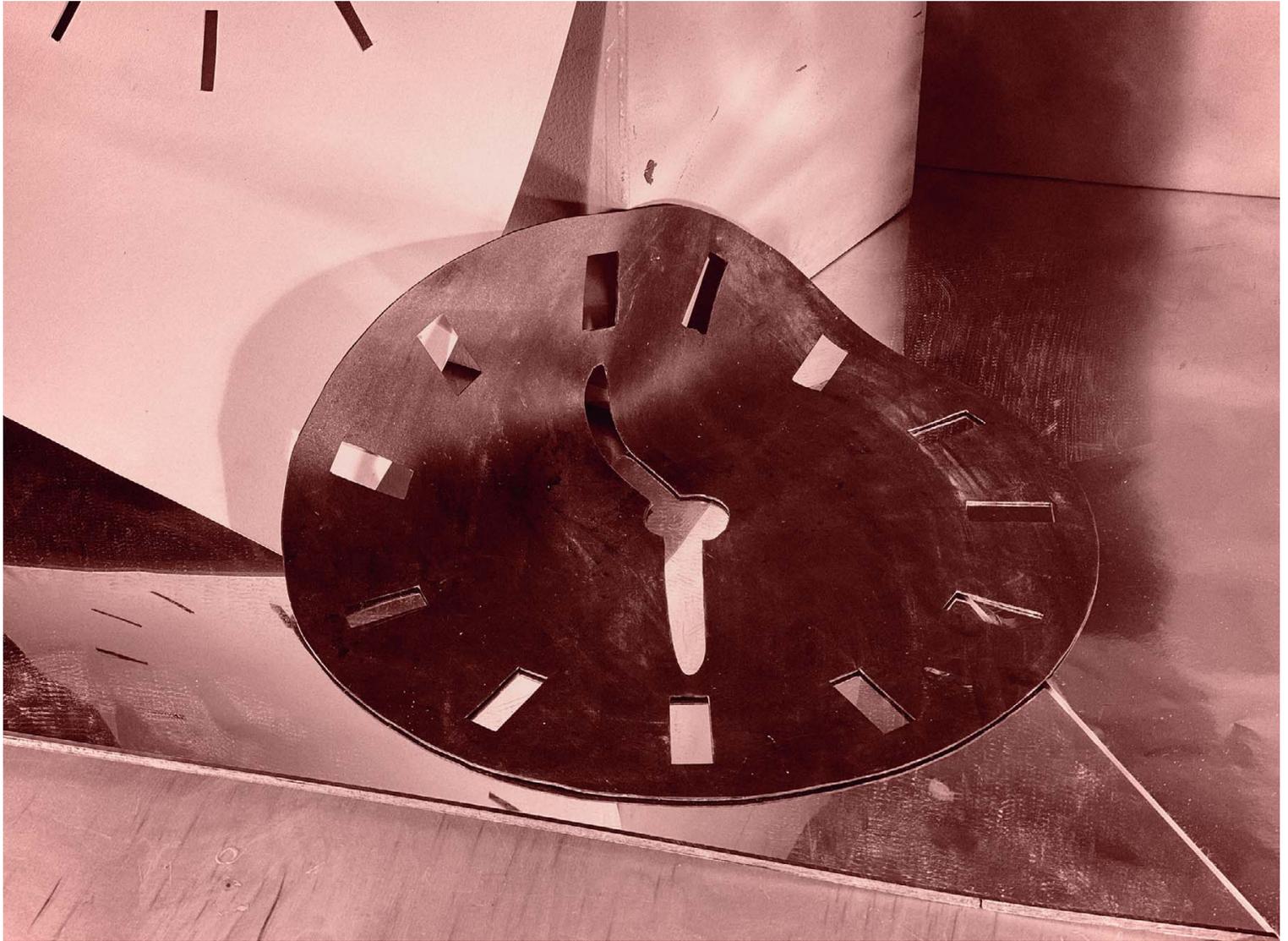
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Analog Clocks

By Deb Olin Unferth



My sister can't read an analog clock. She's 10 years younger than I am. No doubt that skill is disappearing from the populace, along with an avalanche of others: driving a stick shift, writing by hand, navigating by memory, using stamps. (I understood the world I knew was gone forever when I had to teach a college student how to operate an envelope.) I weep not for the stick shift and could never refold a map without making a crumpled mess, but I can't imagine going through life without being able to read a clock.

For any aliens (or little sisters) reading this: The analog clock, with its ring of numbers 1 through 12 around a circumference, has two "hands," one short, one long, affixed to the center and pointing outward, which revolve by force of a tiny mechanical engine. The muddle comes in these little hands. The shorter one is simple: Whichever number it points to is the hour. If it points to 1, it is 1 o'clock. The longer hand is trickier. When it points to 1, it means 5, as in five minutes. The 2 means 10, and so on. The delightful key

The hands evoke the rotation of the earth, the movements of celestial objects, the cosmos.

to the puzzle is that the numbers on the clock's face represent more than one value simultaneously.

When I was a kid, I loved all clocks — atomic clocks, clock radios, even clocks you couldn't see. (You could "call time" free of charge back then, dialing 976-1616 to hear a sentence that has never quite left my mind: "At the tone, the time will be. ...") Analog clocks, though, are special. Every minute, every second, the hands refute Zeno's paradox: They move continuously, never pausing artificially

on one number, passing through an infinite series of fractions of time — a visual demonstration of the fact that time is always in motion.

The clunky digital clock, by contrast, jerks along, stopping every minute like a Beckett character — *I can't go on. I'll go on* — falsely implying that time is a series of snapshots, a stop-action film rather than the seamless flux that it is. On the elegant analog clock, meanwhile, time swells and recedes, like waves and seasons and life. The hands evoke the rotation of the earth, the movements of celestial objects, the cosmos.

Why has the digital clock taken over our coffee makers, dashboards, watches, world? Tacky, robotic, inferior, it gives up its information too readily. It has blinding pulsing lights. It is dismissive of its ancient origins. “This is the age of science!” it says. “Look at that dumb analog! You can't even tell if it's 1:29 or 1:30.”

But the ambiguous quality of the analog is a strength. I could be a minute early or late, depending on my head-tilt. A visual demonstration of relativity. The digital numerals on your phone: That is time controlling you. On the analog, I'm my own boss.

It's important to get the right analog clock, of course. I had one that made a relentless clicking sound, forcing me to wear earplugs for *years*. Eventually I bought another at a garage sale, a squarish thing from the 1960s with one broken leg, a beauty, but it buzzed 24 hours a day. Next I bought one on Etsy made of repurposed iron. The hands got tangled, and the minute dragged the hour with it in a wrenching existential battle.

At last, this year I got one at a drugstore: \$5, a couple of simple hands. No funny business. It's perfect. Silent, rolling. So small I can fit it in my palm. An everyperson's clock. If it's anything like the clocks of my youth, it will outlive the cockroaches.

An analog clock gives you just enough information to keep you tethered to the world without overwhelming you. Try this: Sit in a chair by the window. Leave your phone in the other room. Allow yourself only this one small item: an analog clock. It's so easygoing compared with that screaming phone, which for me has become an endless scroll of death tolls and terrifying updates from our leaders.

An analog clock gives you just enough information to keep you tethered to the world without overwhelming you.

Deb Olin Unferth is the author, most recently, of the novel *“Barn 8.”* She teaches at the University of Texas, Austin.

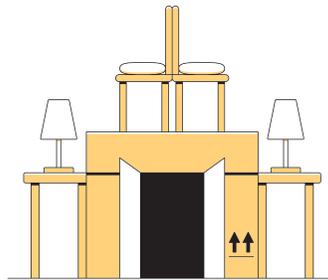
The clock offers such a simple connection to the rest of the world. It's calming. Gaze at it. Start with the second hand, if it has one, and as you settle in, move to the minute. A simple circle, it is the direct descendant of the sundial, connecting us to the mysteries of our forebears and their weird scientific achievements, to a time when the sky told humans how to live.

Why do we need to know the time in the first place? Sure, we have jobs and appointments, even now when so many of us are stuck at home, but I swear I have traveled through deserts and over mountains, strayed so far from civilization that I felt lost, at last — and on waking in dawn's glow, my first thought was, What time is it?

What could it possibly matter?

Tip By Malia Wollan

How to Build a Fort



“Use flat sheets for the roof,” says Alexandra Feldner, 25, a third-year medical student at Rush Medical College in Chicago. At the end of March, after more than a week of sheltering in place in her small apartment, Feldner and her boyfriend spent an hour building an elaborate fort in her living room. They shot a time-lapse video of their construction process and uploaded it to the social media site TikTok, where it has been viewed 16.5 million times. Feldner figures the interest is owed to some combination of childhood nostalgia and a general longing for companionship and safety.

Inventory your building materials, keeping in mind what might fall on you when the fort inevitably collapses. Clear away any breakable objects before you begin building. Gather couch cushions,

And yet we need our coordinates. Where am I on the space-time continuum? A question as urgent as ever.

If you stare long enough at your analog clock, your thinking can grow dark. The contamination of the earth. The possible world we will wake to when this current disaster is over. Perhaps the clock is a marker of our arrogance, a record of our insistence that we own and dominate everything, from water to animals to hours.

But if you stare longer, your mind will keep moving beyond those dark thoughts, beyond all thought. You will stay, instead of rising to meet your churn of responsibilities. You will wait (for what?) in the beauty of the pause, in the ever-shifting emptiness. You will feel the earth spin, time unwinding unheeded, while you sit and do nothing. ♦

pillows, chairs, sheets, blankets and fasteners of some sort (chip clips, hair bands, twine). “We probably used 30 binder clips,” says Feldner, who made one wall with an inflated air mattress and another with sheets clipped to a mop handle tied to a barstool. Don't use a television as a vertical support, and don't put holes in your wall or employ duct tape, which can pull off wall paint. Feldner and her boyfriend, Chris, both have fond memories of building pillow forts as children, but they were still surprised at how comforting it felt to crawl inside one as adults.

Psychology researchers have long noted fort building as a common global phenomenon of childhood. Such encapsulated spaces promote pretend play, give children a sense of agency and power over their environment and even change social hierarchies among children — from leadership by brute physical strength to imaginative world-building skills. If life feels dangerous and unmoored, a space built largely of bedding materials might calm someone of any age.

Still, don't get attached. This is ephemeral architecture: The ceiling will cave in; walls will tumble. Feel free to renovate and rejigger, but notice when maintaining the fort's structural integrity begins to be burdensome. Feldner removed hers after five days. Deconstruction took 15 minutes. It all started to feel more like a mess and less like a refuge. “We loved it when we first built it,” Feldner says. “And when we didn't, we took it down.” ♦

A Simple Sweet to Share: Let this icebox cake be a template, and you'll have a special dessert no matter what's in your pantry.



And so now we are four: On March 17, days after New York City “paused,” our son, Joshua, and daughter-in-law, Linling, came to live with us in our house in eastern Connecticut. Joshua was in preschool when we bought the house, and back then, we’d come here for weekends. His Lego villages are still intact, the models he built are still on shelves and there are still enough of his T-shirts around for him

to grab one and go practice foul shots. But ever since Michael, my husband, and I moved here full time about a dozen years ago, we’ve claimed corners of the small house for ourselves. Joshua’s childhood bedroom is now Michael’s office, as well as the room with the TV. There are bookcases everywhere and chocolate in cool, dark places upstairs and down. While there are enough plates, bowls

Cookies and cream: the Moka Dupont icebox cake.

and serving dishes to set the table for a banquet, the house can’t hold a crowd. It’s doing the best it can with four of us here. So are we.

I tried to convince myself that Joshua and Linling were here because they wanted to leave New York, but I always knew the truth: They came because they were worried about us, because they realized for the first time that we are older than

we feel, older than we act and old enough to be at a greater risk from the effects of the coronavirus. They came to help us, to shop so that we wouldn't have to leave home, to keep us safe. I fumble trying to find the words for my gratefulness and come up short trying to show it, so I cook. For them, for us and for myself — knowing that I'll be cooking dinner for my family sustains me.

I cook most, but not all, nights. Michael makes pizza every Tuesday. Joshua and Linling make elegant pasta dishes and vegetable plates on the weekend. Linling makes the salad every night — I love how her palate tips bitter and how smart she is about mixing things when we're short on greens, as we are a lot lately. I make food from cookbooks I never opened before, from recipes I created a long time ago and haven't thought about for years, from inspiration, from whim, from necessity: the wrinkled apple and the sprouted onion were braised with a chicken. When I made the Moka Dupont for dessert, the kids were as surprised by it as I was when I first tasted it.

The recipe comes from Bernard Collet. Bernard and his wife, Martine, Parisians, have been our friends for 40 years. We've eaten at each other's homes countless times. (Well, countless for me, but knowable for Martine, who keeps handwritten notebooks detailing the meals she cooks for dinner parties.) Given how long we've known each other, it's odd that it was only 10 or so years ago that I learned about the Moka Dupont, the cake that Bernard often has on his birthday and the one he often makes for family celebrations. When Bernard served it to us, I missed a beat before smiling. I'd been expecting a cake-cake, something tall, soft, frosted and fit for candles. I was waiting for a *gâteau* but got four layers of cookies held together with four layers of frosting. Bernard's cake is an old-fashioned icebox cake! It's homey — it's meant to be — with a sleek, spare look.

The first person in Bernard's family to make the cake was his grandmother, who got the recipe from her neighbor, a Madame Dupont, from whom the dessert gets its name. Bernard thinks he had his first Moka Dupont in the 1950s, maybe for his 5th birthday. The recipe, as it was given to Bernard and as he always makes it, calls for Thé Brun cookies, store-bought tea biscuits that are common in

The buttercream is very sweet, but the espresso is very strong. They bring out the best in each other.

France. (I think it might have been a back-of-the-box recipe, since I've come across similar ones, but Bernard holds to his family's story, and I like that.) The cookies are dipped in espresso — the "Moka" — arranged on a platter and then smoothed with a thin layer of chocolate buttercream. The buttercream is very sweet, but the espresso is very strong. They bring out the best in each other. Bernard runs a fork across the last swish of frosting, his hallmark on the cake. I don't, and he seemed a bit disappointed when he saw that I topped the cake with grated chocolate.

I've made other changes. I couldn't find Thé Brun in America, so I constructed the cake with Petit Beurre cookies. And now I can't even find those. My latest Moka Dupont was made with Nabisco Social Teas, an exceedingly plain cookie that's even older than the recipe. While Bernard is precise about the type and number of cookies he uses, the layout and the layers, the top decoration and the amount of seconds each cookie should be dipped in the coffee (too long and the cookies are too soft; too short and you don't get enough flavor), I take a more casual approach, one that felt quite American to me when I first made the cake and one that's perfect for this moment. I consider the recipe a template, using whatever cookies I've got and sometimes just making little sandwiches rather than a whole cake.

Every time I make a Moka Dupont, I remember how delighted Bernard was when he presented the cake to us. I feel the same delight sharing his cake with my family, passing it on to another generation, offering it as comfort during complicated times. And so I bring this pretty cake to them as a treat and a thank you, hoping that when they recall these months, they'll remember the sweetness of sharing something simple, made by hand, just for them.

Moka Dupont: A French Icebox Cake

Time: 30 minutes, plus at least 3 hours for chilling

- ½ cup/115 grams unsalted butter (1 stick), at room temperature
- ½ cup/100 grams plus 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 1 large, very fresh egg (preferably organic, since it will not be cooked)

- 3 ounces/85 grams bittersweet chocolate, melted and cooled
- ½ cup/120 milliliters hot espresso (made fresh or with instant espresso powder)
- 64 Nabisco Social Tea Biscuits (from 1 12-ounce package), or other plain, preferably flat cookies
- Grated chocolate, for decoration

1. Before you start assembling the cake, decide on the size you want. I make a cake that's 4 cookies wide, 4 cookies long and 4 layers high. Choose a plate to build and serve the cake.

2. Make the buttercream frosting: Put the butter in a small bowl, and beat it with a flexible spatula until smooth. Add ½ cup sugar, and beat again with the spatula until it's thoroughly incorporated. Separate the egg, putting the yolk in a cup and the white in a small bowl. Whip the white until it holds soft peaks using a mixer or, for a short but strenuous exercise, a whisk. Give the yolk a quick whisk, just to break it up, then stir it into the white.

3. Add the egg to the bowl with the butter, and using the spatula, stir and fold until blended. Scrape in the melted chocolate, then stir and fold again until the frosting is homogeneous. (It won't be perfectly smooth.) Taste the buttercream, and you'll feel grains of sugar on your tongue — that's the way it's meant to be.

4. Pour the hot espresso into a wide, shallow bowl, and stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon of sugar.

5. One by one, drop each cookie into the espresso, count 3 seconds, flip it over, count 3 seconds more, then place the espresso-soaked cookie on the serving plate. Continue until you have your first layer of cookies in place.

6. Using a small offset spatula or a table knife, spread a quarter of the buttercream over the cookies, working the cream to the edges of the cookies. Build 3 more layers of dunked cookies and smoothed buttercream. Top the last layer of buttercream with grated chocolate.

7. Refrigerate the cake until the frosting is set, at least 3 hours. The cake can be kept covered in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. (Once the frosting is set, the cake could also be wrapped airtight and frozen for up to 2 months. To serve, simply let it defrost, still wrapped, in the refrigerator for about 4 hours or at room temperature for about 1 hour.)

Yield: 8 servings. ♦

Cancer has taken
Val Kilmer's voice
but the unlikely
movie star in
Hollywood history
still has a lot
he wants to say

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It's

hard to believe now, as I write this, but just two months ago, when we were allowed to roam free, when we could board planes and alight from them and wander into rental cars and check into hotels — when we could chase down and replenish the beauty and wonder our very cells need to survive — I went to Los Angeles, where I was asked this question by Val Kilmer:

“Do you think South by Southwest will be canceled?”

But Val Kilmer no longer sounds like Val Kilmer, the movie star of the '80s and '90s who has mostly vanished from screens. He hasn't since his tracheostomy.

He can still squeeze air up through his windpipe, however, and past the hole that was cut into his throat and the tracheostomy tube, in a way that makes him somewhat understood — not very, but somewhat. The sound is something between a squeak and a voiceless roar. He says the fact that I can understand him is a result of the endless vocal exercises that he was trained to do when he went to Juilliard after high school, that he was taught to work his voice “like it was a trumpet.” He hated the authoritarian rule at Juilliard while he was there; he hated those stupid vocal exercises. Now look at him, still using his most beloved instrument when really, by all rights, it should be useless. See how it all turned out for the best?

All Val Kilmer's stories are like that, told with that same dash of preordained kismet. He was traveling in Africa in 1994 when he decided to spend a morning exploring a bat cave; later that day, literally seriously that day, he was inspired to call his agent, who had been trying to contact Kilmer for weeks to see if he was interested in playing the role of Batman, now that Michael Keaton was hanging it up. Another story: In the days before he set eyes for the first time on his (now ex-) wife, Joanne Whalley, he dreamed that he met the woman he was destined for and woke up and immediately wrote a poem called, “We've Just Met but Marry Me Please.” Then right after that, he went to London, and while he was there, he saw a play, and Whalley was in it. He was so taken with her that he followed her to the pub after-party just so he could look at her. This was crazy even for him, so he made no move. But two years later, in 1987, she would be randomly coincidentally serendipitously cast opposite him in “Willow,” and they would end up married. So yes, he can talk, and it's such a miracle that he has these abilities, because if you have enough faith, you'll see how every part of your life is just a piece of a bigger part of your life, and nothing is an accident, and everything is good.

We were in his office at HelMel, an office space/art gallery/artists' studio/retail museum for Val Kilmer's movie career that takes up several storefronts and more than half the block of Melrose Avenue between Edgemont Street and Heliotrope Drive in Hollywood. Officially, according to Brad Koepenick, his childhood friend and adult business associate, who was in the room to help me better understand Kilmer, HelMel's mission is to serve as “a fun, sacred space where eclectic artists gather with novices to collaborate, and through new technology, inspire change and spark giving in our local underserved community.”

Of its storefronts: One is a traditional art gallery. Another is a dark window display with three black cubes that say GOD stenciled in white paint, behind which is an inventory of merch from Kilmer's long and storied movie career — socks that featured his “Tombstone” character, Doc Holliday, and Jim Morrison coasters from his role in “The Doors” and some paintings that Kilmer himself created, some of which are about his film career (a rendering of his “Top Gun” character, Iceman, with the word “LOVE” stenciled across it) and some that aren't (a hummingbird in a forest).

The final storefront is a door that leads to the Willy Wonka core of HelMel. Inside there's a podcasting studio, a cafe area and a screening room. HelMel also houses a foundation Val and Koepenick created called TwainMania, which aims to send its Mark Twain curriculum into schools. Twice a week, high school students from South Central Los Angeles practice “Hamlet” and other plays there as part of a program called Inner City Shakespeare. HelMel started holding events last February: a screening of “Tombstone,” an Echo in the Canyon concert. It is the creative incubator of Kilmer's dreams — the fruition of a vision he had always hoped his 6,000-acre New Mexico ranch

would be before he lost most of it in the 2008 housing crash. “The idea is to create kind of a life that's active,” Kilmer told me. “It's active. It's alive. I want the feel of it being alive. You feel the electricity.”

He sat at his desk. Behind him was a replica of a painting he had sold to Robert Downey Jr. and, on the other side, a maybe two-foot-tall Batman figure with a Mark Twain head. Elsewhere were Apple computers from the 1980s and 1990s dipped in glossy red paint, a tumbleweed bathed in gold paint. There was a box of newly shipped hardcovers of his new memoir, “I'm Your Huckleberry,” which debuted on the best-seller list in April, a brooding photo of the Val Kilmer of your 1990s matinee memories on its cover.

On the walls were more of his paintings, swishes of paint and resin and oil (and sometimes spray paint) on sheets of repurposed aluminum. He makes them by swirling around the chemicals and paint until they look like an emotion or an element to him, at which point he adds a photograph, solidifying his theory into fact. I stood and admired a rectangle of blue-gray haze that he had determined looked like ocean waves, and so he had added photos of swimmers, diving into the waves, one after another.

Of all the projects going on inside the studio at that minute, it was a short animated film about Mark Twain that concerned him most. In it, Mark Twain falls asleep and dreams of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, resulting in his waking up and realizing that Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science — Val Kilmer is a lifelong Christian Scientist — was correct about God's eminent perfection and the theories of Mrs. Eddy, as Kilmer calls her, about God's capacity to heal. Kilmer loves a lot of things, but two of the tops are Mark Twain and Mrs. Eddy.

Kilmer wanted to debut the short at South by Southwest in a few weeks. It was early March. There were rumors that festivals and concerts and even air travel might be canceled. Kilmer believed that even if he and his team couldn't take an airplane, they could just drive to Austin and still screen “Mark Twain Dreams of the Resurrection” and, I don't know, will the festival into existence. He was undaunted by all the signs and portents that made it feel as if the world were dropping to its knees; he believed if he could get the film done and over to Austin, the rest would take care of itself. So when he asked me if South by Southwest would be canceled, I told him I didn't know. The surgeon general had started asking the public not to hoard surgical masks, and just that morning, Los Angeles had declared a state of emergency.

“You don't think we will be going to Cannes?” Kilmer asked. “How about the Olympics? The Olympics has never been canceled except in time of world war.” You can't cancel the world, right? Bad things happen, but you still need art.

And I thought: Right? *Right!* You still need art. You still need forward momentum. You still need to believe that all your effort wasn't for nothing, that we could — we will — survive a dark moment in history and that when that happens, we won't be left without the things that made those moments decipherable and meaningful and therefore tolerable.

The world outside had seemed to be getting so, so bad for so, so long, and this was the first whiff of overarching hope and positivity that I'd witnessed in I couldn't remember how many months or years now — so much so that I almost couldn't identify it when I saw it. The last glowing embers of hope coming from *Val Kilmer*? The movie hunk of my youth, who disappeared unceremoniously and now presented with

Kilmer in his HelMel offices in Hollywood.

an entirely different appearance and a bizarre accounting of where he'd been? But there was something familiar about it, like a faint knocking that came from inside me: It was the special kind of optimism that maybe only the faithful have, the enduring belief that some force will come along and save us from the centrifuge of despair we've found ourselves in. When is the last time you saw that up close?

Before you can understand the story of what happened to Val Kilmer, you have to determine for yourself who he was in the first place. Trying to compare him to any movie star working either now or then will fry your mental circuit board: He was an upwardly mobile conventional movie star; he was equally a fringe weirdo who would soon disappear.

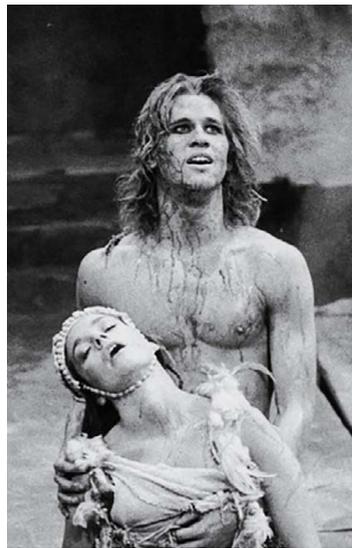
His first movie, "Top Secret!" (1984), about a rock star in East Berlin, was the follow-up to "Airplane!" by its creative team, and it was so funny, and such a strange thing to see this extraordinarily handsome young kid — a jaw like the sharp-cut bottom half of a stop sign, that true-Swede golden hair, a Cupid's bow that lays in shadow of the plump convex swoop of his upper lip — who also seemed to be in on the joke. The '80s were a time when a handsome young man with blond hair was mostly the butt of it.

He'd been on the road to something slightly more, say, classical when he was at Juilliard. He starred in "Orestes" and in "The Wood Demon." He wrote a play with his classmates called "How It All Began," which went on to run for a month at the Public Theater after Joe Papp himself saw it at the school. He starred in "Slab Boys" with Sean Penn and Kevin Bacon. He did "As You Like It" in Minneapolis with Patti LuPone.

But once Hollywood got a look at him, he was on too-fast a conveyor belt to safely step off. The success of "Top Secret!" begat a somewhat-starring role in "Real Genius," meaning that his Chris Knight, the apathetic, irresistible prodigy who helps something laser chemical transmitter radio something, is the guy on the poster, but he's not the character with the clearest narrative arc; he's more of a wise fool in the Shakespeare tradition. Another hit.

Then in 1986 came "Top Gun," and after that, everyone knew who Val Kilmer was. Because how could you not? Ice-man, the fighter pilot Tom Cruise's Maverick is trying to best for the "best of the best" of the best position, has maybe 17 words in the whole movie, but it is there that you can see Val Kilmer's greatest gift, which is to make something out of nothing — to breathe real life into a character who was only there to set the volleyball so that Maverick could spike it.

If you asked me then what beguiled me about Val Kilmer, I wouldn't have had the words for it. Instead, I would have pictured a man without a shirt (I am still hard-pressed to picture young Val Kilmer in a regular shirt), but it wasn't his body that stuck with me when the lights came on. No, it was his awesome physicality, him spinning that volleyball on his finger, him offering the most fraught '80s masculinity-soaked condolences ever when Maverick's radar intercept officer, Goose, buys it during a flight exercise — there was something in his immense focus and his full-bodied commitment to just plain Being-in-the-Scene that took my breath away. I read somewhere that Kilmer was so dedicated to inhabiting the role that he created Team Iceman and Team Maverick factions in the "Top Gun" movie cast. What I also remember is Ice-man's snapping his gum with his mighty jaw in nonresponse to Maverick's admitting that yes, he's dangerous. In that jaw



Performing in "Orestes" with Mary Johnson at the Juilliard School in 1981.



Kilmer in "Top Gun" (1986).

snap — which is my absolute favorite GIF to send to people — there's so much more than a weird way to end a conversation: It's arrogance and pathos, frustration and whatever the emotion is where you know that laughing at someone will hurt them more than insulting them.

The next few jobs came relatively quickly: the crazed, greedy, delightful Madmartigan in "Willow," shouting epithets at the hero of the story with a vitality and electricity that makes you somehow root for him; "Kill Me Again," in which he plays a dumb investigator who becomes the mark of a con woman (played by his wife at the time, Joanne Whalley); "The Doors," an Oliver Stone movie made extremely watchable by Kilmer's Method performance as Jim Morrison, so Methody and deep in the role, it's not so long into any kind of rewatching of that movie that I realize I can no longer remember what real Jim Morrison sounded or looked like. Then the beloved "Tombstone," in which he once again went deep Method on the tubercular dentist, Doc Holliday, sweaty and yellow, gasping for breath through his puffs on his cigarette.

It was around this time that both Kilmer and his viewing public ran into a problem. If you're good at acting, and you're superhunky, and you look good with your shirt off and also are willing to take it off, you are an excellent candidate for a promotion, and so Val Kilmer leveled up. Pretty soon, he was cast as pure leads of what were or were designed to be blockbusters: "Batman Forever," "The Island of Dr. Moreau," "The Saint."

He didn't do badly in any of those roles, exactly. It's more as if all the elements were there, but they couldn't unite to make a real person — the whole was less than the sum of its parts. His Jack Andrews in "Kill Me Again" is supposed to be some kind of Everyman, but he's really the absence of a person, a body without a soul. In "Thunderheart," Kilmer plays a regular-guy F.B.I. agent with some Native American lineage, and I couldn't really get through the rest. In

"Batman Forever," he barely moves his face, and well, here were the reviews: Janet Maslin in this newspaper said Kilmer was "hamstrung by the straight-man aspects of the role," while Roger Ebert raved that he was "completely acceptable."

There came reports of problems on sets — that he was complaining constantly and making impossible demands; that he was rude to his co-stars and stayed in character all the time, never bothering with even small courtesies to the other people on set. That he fought with Oliver Stone about glorifying substance abuse in a movie that was literally about Jim Morrison; that Kilmer, committed to the Method even through casting, became too aggressive with a woman during an audition in front of Stone and the casting director as he became swept up in an emotionally charged moment. (The incident resulted

in a settlement, though he maintains it was the actress who attacked him, and the casting director has said that both actors were physical with each other in the heat of this moment.) Joel Schumacher called him “psychotic” in an interview after directing him in “Batman Forever,” whose sequels Kilmer was supposed to star in. There are several different versions of why George Clooney replaced him — Kilmer says it was because of scheduling difficulties with the other movie he had a contract for, “The Saint” — but one factor was surely this assessment by its director. Multiple sources have claimed that on the set of “The Island of Doctor Moreau,” Kilmer touched his lit cigarette to a crew member’s sideburn. (He claims this was an accident that resulted from the cinematographer’s asking him to blow smoke from off camera very close to where a member of the camera crew was standing. “What kind of person would singe a fellow worker he spends 15 hours a day with, often less than a foot apart? Madness.”)

This all begins to explain why it’s hard to make sense of who exactly Val Kilmer was. His whole thing is telling stories, but at this point he didn’t yet know which story he was telling.

He can put it all together now far better than he ever could back then. He’d had his pick of roles; he was being offered lucrative franchises. His talent was in doubt by absolutely no one. His gift was both so overt and so subtle that he was the most memorable part of the movies he merely supported. And yet suddenly he was radioactive.

He didn’t know how to handle what was happening to him. He’d gotten into acting because he wanted to perform serious roles, but the bigger they came, the more empty and cavernous too.

“It was all silly to me,” he said to me in his office. “I’d been preparing to do ‘Hamlet’ for 10 years.”

He always thought of himself as a character actor. He could do “a hundred different voices” and a million different impressions. “I would’ve loved to have been on ‘Saturday Night Live’ as a regular,” Kilmer said. “Fame wasn’t my priority, and I had it.”

If you read his press around the time of “Batman,” all those interviews are mostly just him complaining about the suit; he liked to say he it was “a battering experience” because he loves wordplay. In interviews, he brought up Tom Cruise often, particularly his inclination for movies where instead of running from their oiled, volleyball-playing forms of yesterday, Cruise ran back toward them.

“I have very definitely had a different kind of career than Tom. You never know if a job has commercial success written all over it. I just think life’s too short to worry about that.” — *The Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 31, 1993

“I have nothing against Tom Cruise, but he must have a large capacity to deal with the business side of movies.” — *Details*, June 1995

Interviewer: “How about Tom Cruise. You make fun of him sometimes?”

Kilmer: “You can’t make fun of Tom Cruise. Poor thing.” — *Interview*, March 24, 2011

Maybe he was jealous that Cruise was getting all those leads. Maybe he really couldn’t take the leading-man pressure. Maybe he was burned out already from all that Methoding. But that doesn’t seem right. The burnout theory ignores that he was still doing smaller roles on the side in the same magnetic way he had before: his Elvis-inspired cameo in



Kilmer as Jim Morrison in “The Doors” (1991).



Kilmer in “Batman Forever” (1995).

“True Romance,” a movie in which he shines in a tiny role where they don’t even show his face; his bank robber in “Heat.” Forget that amazing shootout sequence that everyone talks about; the movie’s most mesmerizing moment is the 40-second microscene in which he watches a clerk verify that his fake license is real.

No, the problem was that he had been trained to inhabit any role he could find himself in; he just couldn’t find himself in a normie, and by the time Kilmer came online as a movie star, normie roles were all there were, the ’90s standard-issue regular guy in extraordinary circumstances. Kilmer’s greatest roles were always supporting characters. The roles of troubled men with broken souls went to the other guys because who would

believe that a guy who looked like him had real troubles or a broken soul?

But he couldn’t reverse course and bow out, either. By then, he had been seduced by a lifestyle. Look at his face in a tabloid photo of him and Cher circa 1984. Look at the pride; look how much he enjoyed being on Cher’s arm. It reminds him of something he heard once: “God wants us to walk, but the devil sends a limo.” He was invited to go to Toga by Tadashi Suzuki, whom he calls “the Japanese Stanislavski,” but he turned it down. He didn’t want to say yes to Hollywood, but look at that picture again: How could you say no?

By the time he realized how miserable he was, it was too late. He tried to supplement these movies with other artistic endeavors that nourished his soul. He began working on a documentary about nuclear disarmament in 1983, when he was doing “Real Genius.” When he was filming “Wonderland” in 2003, as the porn star John Holmes, he holed up with Ali Alborzi, who had been a protégé of Kilmer’s friend the wildlife photographer Peter Beard, to photograph the set and then make collages of the photographs and pages from the film’s script all over the walls of the Chateau Marmont, and also spill blood all over them, a complex art project I don’t fully understand.

He took the roles, always imagining that when he had enough money, he could get out with enough to support both that giant Santa Fe ranch, with its animals and staff, and the artists he wanted to invite to it. “I was gambling with being able to maintain the status, and I would’ve won my gamble, except for 2008.” Not only did he lose his status in Hollywood, but the one spoil he escaped with, his ranch, lost half its value, and he was forced to sell most of it away. “I just lost my home like a million other people. It was pretty awful.”

His casting problem was solved for him when no one wanted to work with him anymore. The roles went to people who, presumably, were not

known for unkindness toward movie crews; the phone stopped ringing. In his book, he sums up this period like this: “In an unflinching attempt to empower directors, actors and other collaborators to honor the truth and essence of each project, an attempt to breathe Suzukian life into a myriad of Hollywood moments, I had been deemed *difficult* and alienated the head of every major studio.”

He says this in an attempt not to apologize (clearly) but to make clear why he behaved the way he did. “Everyone has to work out their own salvation,” he told me. “How to live and by what morality, and I found that the part that I feel bad about is hurting somebody in the process.”

He remembered a story from his time as Batman. One day he was filming and about to take off the Batsuit when Warren Buffett and his grandkids came by. They wanted to see Batman, so Kilmer stuck around in the suit, but they didn’t want to talk to him. They wanted to try on the mask and ride in the Batmobile. He understood then that Batman isn’t meant to be a real guy. Batman is meant to be so anonymous that the person who is looking at him can see himself in him. “That’s why it’s so easy to have five or six Batmans,” he says now. “It’s not about Batman. There is no Batman.” And so what kind of thing is that to play, a person whose job is to be as nonspecific as possible. He looked good in the Batsuit, but wearing it was torture. When he took it off, he was finally free.

See what he did there? See how it all worked out? That’s a pretty happy ending to a sad story. The lesson here is Val Kilmer’s perpetual lesson, that if you have enough faith — if you can take the long view and remember that things will work out — destiny takes over. I say that to prepare you for the story of what happened to his body, because if you think that turning the story of a blown-up career into a best-case scenario is impressive, wait till you see what the Val Kilmer story-optimizer does with cancer. So:

By 2014, he was living a life he loved. He was no longer under contract for franchises he couldn’t put his heart into. He had some money, he had a place in Malibu, his kids nearby, and he could finally do what he wanted.

He began to pick the projects that mattered to him. It so happens that the animated short “Mark Twain Dreams of the Resurrection” is not the first movie Kilmer has made about Mark Twain. It’s not even the second, and I’ve heard there’s an additional screenplay for a feature-length script out there, too. But the main Mark Twain event is a film called “Citizen Twain,” and it was conceived as a live performance in which Val Kilmer dresses up as Mark Twain and does Mark Twain-and-Christian Science-related stand-up comedy. Take a minute with that sentence. I went to see “Citizen Twain” one rainy Friday night at the College of Staten Island, a half-filled theater, which I remember a little like a fever dream. There’s not a lot of marketing copy that can prepare you for its strangeness, and also its elaborateness, and also its sincerity, and also the delightful warmth of Val Kilmer, whom you will never see happier than when he is presenting this film of his — though it started out as a half-filmed, half-live performance, it is now, in light of his vocal condition, a totally filmed performance that Kilmer merely introduces.

The subjects of “Citizen Twain” range from sarsaparilla to congressional representatives being idiots, from Mark Twain quotes to Mrs. Eddy quotes to quotes Val Kilmer only wishes either of them had said. Here he was, using his celebrity and his talent, along with some heavy rubber prosthetics — Mark Twain

‘I feel like I could not possibly be in a better place for attracting better and better roles.’

was many things, but he was not a person who looked like Val Kilmer — to finally do something he wanted, which was to work out for himself the relationship of two people he absolutely worshiped but who were at odds in almost every way. Samuel Clemens was a Christian and a rational man who seemed fairly appalled at Mrs. Eddy’s interpretation of the Bible and its assumptions that healing from illness was something resulting from prayer, rather than medical treatment. He wrote a book about it called “Christian Science,” in which he clearly mocks all of it. But Kilmer believes he did this only because he was so drawn to it. With each project, Kilmer gets a little closer to making the universe conform a little bit more to what he wishes it were: a place where the two historical figures he loves most, Mark Twain and Mrs. Eddy, are finally no longer polar opposites but magnetically aligned.

Val Kilmer can’t remember when it was that Mark Twain first re-entered his life. And he certainly doesn’t know when he first realized that his life’s work would be about trying to meld the visions of Mark Twain and Mrs. Eddy into one. And he certainly can’t remember the year he started having symptoms of what other people (the ones with medical degrees who evaluated him) called throat cancer. Partly this is because he gets tired when he talks now, but mostly it’s because it’s hard to track time and mark space when you don’t believe in them.

As near as I can tell, in 2014, as he was touring with “Citizen Twain,” Kilmer found himself in Nashville with a big lump in his throat. He was having a hard time swallowing. He canceled the show. He’d been having symptoms for a while and had woken up in a pool of his own blood a time or two back in Malibu. A doctor eventually told him it was throat cancer, or as Kilmer told me Christian Science calls it, the “suggestion of throat cancer.” Meaning that in Christian Science, “the idea is rather than say I have it or possess it, there is a claim, there’s a suggestion that this is a fact.”

He knew the cure for him would be to work with his practitioner, Christian Science’s version of a spiritual adviser, to pray his fear away so that his body would no longer “manifest outwardly what can be diagnosed as a malady.” Meaning it’s not really cancer. It’s just his fear expressing itself — think of what he’d just been through losing all his land, reckoning with his career. He had to go away and pray to relocate his faith within himself.

But it wasn’t so easy. He has kids, a grown son and daughter he had while he was still married to Joanne Whalley, and they’re not Christian Scientists. His family couldn’t let him go heal by himself; cancer, as they know it, is a thing that spreads. He relented. “I just didn’t want to experience their fear, which was profound,” Kilmer said. “I would’ve had to go away, and I just didn’t want to be without them.”

He had surgery that year, which was followed by chemotherapy and radiation “that zapped my



The art in Kilmer's HelMel offices leans to the surreal. Here is a Batman figurine with Mark Twain's head.

whole throat, and it's still dry as a bone" and left him with the tracheostomy tube and a feeding tube. Shortly after, Kilmer was spotted wearing scarves, his head slightly askew, as if his neck couldn't properly hold it up. In 2016, Michael Douglas was doing a press junket after his own bout of cancer, and a reporter asked him about "The Ghost and the Darkness." Douglas mentioned that Kilmer, his co-star in that movie, was suffering from the same illness he had suffered from. Kilmer denied this, posting on Facebook that he had "no cancer whatsoever."

I asked Kilmer why he said he didn't have cancer, when it seemed to me, judging by the fact that the thing he described is absolutely the treatment for throat cancer, that he perhaps definitely did.

He said, "Because I didn't have cancer."

I blinked a few times. "They said I was denying that I had cancer, and when they asked me, I didn't have cancer. It was a bit like do you have a broken bone? And if you broke it in high school, you would say no." He continued: "Suddenly suspect. I have had a bone broken, but why are you being so aggressive? I had a bone broken. It was broken in my leg. 'Oh, so you have a broken leg.' 'No, no, I don't,' I say. *I did* have a broken leg."

It's not exactly mind over matter. It is, he tells me, the lost art of Christian healing. "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so," he said, quoting Mrs. Eddy quoting "Hamlet." "I prayed, and that was my form of treatment." The doctors did those other things, but it was the prayer that worked, he's sure. He is no longer suffering from cancer, he said. Or rather,

he never was. No, he's suffering from something quite different. He pointed at his trach tube. "That's from radiation and chemotherapy. It's not from cancer." His prayer, he said, was the true treatment; the medical response to cancer was the thing that hurt him. "That 'treatment' caused my suffering."

The next day, Kilmer sat at a conference table in HelMel and opened up a red Igloo cooler and began to mix liquids together from various canisters before putting them into a syringe. He opened his shirt, uncapped his feeding port and injected the food into a tube. It was lunchtime.

He has no vices anymore. He watches all the food shows — "Top Chef," "Chef's Table," "Ugly Delicious" — yearning for the time he'll be able to eat again, though it has been years and he's not sure how much longer it will be. When it is, though, he said, making his arms into a food-shoveling gesture, "I'm going to look like Orson Welles."

He's 61 now. He is still so handsome. His hair is still blond. His eyes are still the unimaginable green of Oregon grass right after the rain. His jaw is still the main event — the nasolabial area of his cheek bookending the inferior jowl so that his superior jowl appears sunken and his face takes on romantic geological proportions. He was wearing a very heavy turquoise and coral necklace that his mother, who died last year, wore for 20 years straight, along with her turquoise bracelet.

He was never scared during his medical treatment, he told me; he never panicked. Right as he was graduating from high school, his younger brother, Wesley, who had received a diagnosis of epilepsy, drowned in the family's Jacuzzi. Wesley had been a "supergenius," he said, a gifted filmmaker who made stop-motion animation ahead of his time. But Kilmer still talks to Wesley. Wesley shows up in his office, and they hash things out or trade ideas. His mother has appeared to him lately, too, as if "she's at a party, saying how happy she is to be with her husband again and Wesley, my little brother, so happy."

Death isn't death in Christian Science. It's simply that humans have limitations, and one of them is that we perceive people only through our five senses. When a person dies, they aren't gone. They are just not showing up in our senses anymore. So if a Christian Scientist prays and still dies (according to standard definitions of death), it doesn't mean the prayer didn't work. As Kilmer said when he was dressed up as Mark Twain, all prayers work: "It's just that sometimes we don't like the answer."

So how can you be scared of cancer when there's no such thing as cancer? How can you fear death when there's no such thing as death? The answer is you can't. "Someone comes up to you and says you have only four months to live, and the concept of time is a human one. So, if you describe the divine concept of time, there is no time."

He's been off the trach tube a couple of times, though each time, he has a setback: a cough, a cold, a fever. But why all this talk about the time that fear manifested in his body? He addressed it. He made it through that, and now he's on the other side, and his life is finally what he wanted it to be. By the time I met him, he had taken "Citizen Twain" to more than 30 cities.

"I feel like I could not possibly be in a better place for attracting better and better roles," he said. "If an actor is fortunate enough to do so, to steer their own course and own their own material, they control their own destiny, creating their own products." He talked about how Irwin Winkler and Francis Ford Coppola had each leveraged their wealth to get projects made. His slate these days is no different. "I haven't picked subjects such as boxing, jealousy or uncontrollable madness. Mark Twain and Mary Baker Eddy are the subjects of the film I've dedicated 20 years of my life to, on and off."

He told me he's filmed five roles so far this year. The opportunities are coming in the way they do only when you're peaceful and not desperate about them. There's a "Top Gun" sequel coming out this year. Kilmer is in it. He's not allowed to say anything about the new "Top Gun" except that he's in it. And that instead of being enemies with Maverick, their relationship has changed. "We're friends," he said. "This time we're friends."

As I walked out of HelMel that day, Kilmer presented me with a gift: It was the abstract painting I admired the day before, with the swimmers diving into the waves. I told him I couldn't take it — that Times *(Continued on Page 42)*

The safest way to cast
a ballot is by mail.
But with opposition from the
president, limited funding
and time running out to shift
to a new system, will
that option be available
to all voters?

CAN DEMOCRACY SURVIVE THE PANDEMIC?



IN MARCH,

as a wave of states began delaying their spring primaries because of the coronavirus, Wisconsin's election, scheduled for April 7, loomed. The ballot for that day included the presidential primary, thousands of local offices and four statewide judgeships, including a key seat on the Wisconsin Supreme Court. On March 17, the day after Ohio postponed its spring election, voting rights groups asked Wisconsin's Democratic governor, Tony Evers, to do the same. "No one wanted the election to happen more than us, but it felt like this wave was about to hit our communities," Angela Lang, the founder and executive director of the Milwaukee group Black Leaders Organizing for Community, a nonprofit organization, told me. While Evers weighed the idea of postponement, BLOC encouraged residents to apply for absentee ballots, which any registered Wisconsin voter can do by requesting one online. But some voters were struggling to figure out how to upload their identification from their phones to the state's MyVote website. City officials reported that they couldn't keep up with the overwhelming demand for absentee ballots; applications in Milwaukee rose from a typical daily count of 100 or so to between 7,000 and 8,000. "People were waiting on their ballots and asking where they were," Lang said. "We needed a plan. But we knew the governor was in a tough position with the Legislature."

The Wisconsin Assembly and Senate are firmly in the hands of Republicans, who drew a gerrymandered map a decade ago that has allowed them to retain a majority in the State Assembly even though they won only 47 percent of the vote in 2012 and less than 45 percent in 2018. Lang, who is 30, grew up in the city and started BLOC to increase political engagement — and power — in Milwaukee's mostly black and low-income neighborhoods. And Evers won in 2018 (defeating Scott Walker, a Republican seeking a third term) thanks in part to larger-than-usual turnout by black and Latino voters.

It wasn't clear whether the governor had the legal authority to suspend the election, and at the end of March, rather than calling for a postponement, Evers asked the Legislature to send mail-in ballots to every registered voter, regardless of whether they had applied for one. The Senate majority leader, Scott Fitzgerald, ridiculed the idea as a "complete fantasy."

On March 26, BLOC and several other groups joined a lawsuit that argued for postponing the

election because local officials would find it "functionally impossible" to conduct it properly. The suit was one of three election-related cases in Wisconsin that were consolidated before U.S. District Judge William Conley. On April 2, Conley ruled that while he recognized that an election on April 7 would create "unprecedented burdens" for voters, poll workers and the state, the court could not change the date in lieu of the governor and the Legislature. Instead, Judge Conley extended the deadline for voters to return their absentee ballots to April 13, citing the testimony of local officials that otherwise there would be no way for all the voters asking to vote by mail to receive and return their ballots in time.

The State Legislature, the state Republican Party and the Republican National Committee immediately appealed Conley's ruling. The next day, April 3, Evers called the Legislature into special session. The governor said he didn't have the power to postpone the election on his own, demanding instead that lawmakers cancel in-person voting and extend the mail-in deadline to late May. The governor's political opponents rejected his request.

As the days ticked by, Milwaukee announced that it could open only five of its 180 polling places, as poll workers — many of whom were over the age of 60 and at heightened risk from the virus — pulled out of staffing them. Green Bay said it could open two of its 31 polling sites. Election officials rushed out absentee ballots with instructions about the new April 13 deadline set by Judge Conley, and BLOC reached out to voters by phone and text, explaining that they would have six extra days to turn in their ballots.

On April 6, the day before the election, Evers issued an executive order postponing it for two months, despite his earlier statement that he lacked this authority. That day, the Wisconsin Supreme Court blocked the governor's order by a 4-to-2 vote. (The seventh justice, whose seat was up for election, recused himself.) The conservative majority said that the governor's authority by law to issue orders "he or she deems necessary for the security of persons and property" didn't mean he could override other valid laws, including those governing elections.

Later that evening, the U.S. Supreme Court voted 5 to 4 along ideological lines and reversed Judge Conley's decision to extend the deadline to return mail-in ballots, changing the date back to April 7. The court's unsigned majority opinion made no provision for the extraordinary circumstances of the coronavirus. It didn't mention the people who hadn't yet received their ballots, or those who had received instructions with the April 13 return date. That meant voters still awaiting ballots on April 7 — more than 12,000

statewide, according to preliminary data — had to choose between braving their polling places or sitting out the election.

On Election Day, people stood in lines that wrapped around the block, trying to keep their distance from one another. Robin Vos, the Republican leader of the State Assembly, went on Facebook Live while wearing a mask, gloves and full-body protective gear and assured voters that it was "incredibly safe" to go to the polls. One voter tweeted about her sister, a cancer survivor who was afraid to go out and expose herself to the virus but whose absentee ballot hadn't arrived. "The hardest was hearing from people who said they marched in the civil rights era and now they couldn't vote," Lang said. For days after the election, Milwaukee residents continued to take their ballots to library drop-off sites, following the instructions they received that extended the deadline to April 13. They would not be counted.

In the end, the liberal candidates won in the three judicial races on the ballot in which BLOC took a position. Lang didn't feel like celebrating, though — she was worried that people who went to the polls would wind up getting sick. In the weeks after the election, Milwaukee health officials traced at least 40 cases of the virus to in-person voting.

The election in Wisconsin shows that the coronavirus can block access to the ballot just as it has closed stores and schools and so much other civic activity. "Ultimately there were no provisions, no accommodations in state law for the pandemic when it came to our administration of this election," says Neil Albrecht, executive director of the Milwaukee Election Commission. If states and the federal government don't do more to help voters in November — starting now, with urgency — the barriers for some of them may be insurmountable. "A lot of people suffered because of the government's lack of responsiveness," Albrecht adds. "What I mean is, they lost their right to vote."

————— A national election is a giant pop-up event, larger in scale and significance than any other private or public occasion. Two-thirds of Americans expect the Covid-19 outbreak to disrupt voting in November, according to a late-April survey by the Pew Research Center. A successful election will require some Covid-era changes. The main one is enabling tens of millions more people to vote by mail (also called absentee balloting — the terms are synonymous) than have ever done so before. It's also important to make adjustments to keep polling places open for people who don't have stable mailing addresses — a group that increases as people are uprooted during an economic downturn — or

Voting in a time of masks and social distancing in Milwaukee, top, and Dunn, Wis.



whose disabilities, like blindness, make it hard to fill out a ballot unassisted.

The outcome of the presidential contest will most likely be decided in a handful of swing states. This year, the likeliest prospects are Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Florida, North Carolina and Arizona. All of them, along with 23 other states and the District of Columbia, already have laws on the books that give voters the right to request an absentee ballot without an excuse. But only one swing state is already set up for most people to vote by mail — Arizona, where 79 percent did so in 2018. In Florida and Michigan, about 25 to 30 percent voted by mail that year. In Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and North Carolina, very few voters have voted absentee in a general election; in 2018, the range was from 3 to 6 percent, according to The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School. (A total of 27 states fell below 10 percent, including Georgia and New Hampshire, which also may see close presidential results.)

To fundamentally change the way voting has been done in those states, they will have to move quickly to sign contracts with vendors and then order supplies, like specially certified paper for envelopes and ballots, high-speed scanners to count votes and secure drop-off boxes. If they

wait, they'll risk running into shortages like the ones that have troubled the country's efforts to fight the virus. In Wisconsin in April, when voting by mail rose to more than 70 percent, totaling over a million, from around 6 percent in previous elections, many people didn't get to vote because counties ran out of envelopes for a time and then couldn't fill all the applications for absentee ballots fast enough. "Wisconsin shows that you can't adopt vote-by-mail overnight," says Nathaniel Persily, a Stanford law professor and the head of the Healthy Elections Project, a new effort by Stanford and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to address the threat of Covid-19. "It's not as easy as people think. The boring stuff matters — the scut work of supply chain and logistics and management is crucial."

Significantly changing how elections are carried out will cost money, and all states face a giant funding gap as they scramble to prepare for the unknowns of November. The Brennan Center for Justice estimates the pandemic-associated costs of properly running the 2020 elections (including the primaries as well as the general) at \$4 billion. So far, Congress has promised \$400 million, with Democrats pushing for more and Republicans blocking their bills. The debate over funding the Postal Service,

which warns it could run out of operating funds at the end of September, is similarly split.

In a different world, preparation for the election and its accompanying costs would be nonpolitical. Five states currently have universal vote-by-mail, the system of sending all registered voters a ballot without requiring them to request one first: Utah, dominated by Republicans; Hawaii, Oregon and Washington, where Democrats tend to win; and Colorado, where members of both parties hold major statewide offices. A Reuters poll in April found that 72 percent of Americans want the government to require mail-in ballots in November to protect voters if the coronavirus continues to pose a threat, including 65 percent support among Republicans. Some Republican officials share the majority view: In Ohio, Gov. Mike DeWine and Secretary of State Frank LaRose made a video promoting the state's first primary by mail in June. "I wanted to see as much participation as we could get," LaRose told me. Chris Sununu, the Republican governor of New Hampshire, promised voting by mail for all in November, if the coronavirus is still an issue, despite the state's usual rule that voters can only receive an absentee ballot if they have an excuse like travel or illness.

Researchers have found that vote-by-mail hasn't obviously helped one party or the other. Nationwide, about the same share of Republicans and Democrats voted by mail in 2016, Charles Stewart III, a political-science professor at M.I.T., found. In partisan terms, "it is remarkably neutral," wrote Andrew Hall, a political-science professor at Stanford University and an author of a 2020 study (which hasn't yet been published) on voting by mail. Hall's study found that shifting to mailed ballots has modestly increased turnout — by about 2 percent — for each party; a 2013 study found similar results.

But even if vote-by-mail hasn't hurt them, conservatives have long focused on increased turnout as a threat and have worked to minimize it. In the days of Jim Crow, conservatives in the South (who were then generally Democrats) used the blunt tools of poll taxes and literacy tests to prevent African-Americans from voting. In the decades after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 stamped out those forms of overt suppression, newly elected black legislators and their allies increased registration with state laws that let people register at the Department of Motor Vehicles and public-assistance offices, or register at the polls on the same day they voted. They also increased access by opening polling sites in the weeks before Election Day.

Republicans generally opposed these efforts. "I don't want everybody to vote," Paul Weyrich, the conservative activist and co-founder of the Heritage Foundation, said at a meeting in Dallas

in 1980. “As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.” In the 2000s, Republicans began passing strict voter-identification laws, which could be justified as a way to prevent fraud — though in-person voting fraud is extremely rare. In 2010, after taking control of most state legislatures, Republicans eliminated early voting and same-day registration where they could. Since the Supreme Court effectively gutted a key provision of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, more than 1,600 polling places have been closed across the country.

Trump benefited from decreased turnout in 2016, especially in the vital swing states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan, where participation by black and Democratic voters declined from the historic levels that lifted Barack Obama. Wisconsin’s voter-ID law accounted for some of the decline in turnout in Milwaukee, according to Neil Albrecht, the city election director.

In March, Trump announced his opposition to a Democratic bid to include at least \$2 billion for state election preparation in the \$2 trillion coronavirus relief bill. Republicans usually don’t talk openly about suppressing turnout in the way that Paul Weyrich did 40 years ago. Trump broke that rule, saying at a news briefing that he thought his party would lose if more people voted. The Democrats’ proposals, he said, “had things — levels of voting that, if you ever agreed to it, you’d never have a Republican elected in this country again.”

In the weeks that followed, Trump shifted to the preferred Republican justification for making it harder to vote — preventing fraud. With the threat of the pandemic rising, he called voting by mail “corrupt,” imagining “thousands of votes are gathered, and they come in, and they’re dumped in a location, and then, all of a sudden, you lose elections you think you’re going to win.” In some states, Republicans following Trump’s messaging have denounced vote-by-mail as “devastating to Republicans” (David Ralston, the Republican speaker of the Georgia House), “the apocalypse” (Jennifer Carnahan, chairwoman of the Minnesota Republican Party) and “the end of our republic as we know it” (Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky).

In February, the Trump campaign and the Republican National Committee announced they would spend \$10 million on litigation and election monitoring in the 2020 cycle. Soon after, legal attacks on expanding vote-by-mail began. In March, the Republican Party in New Mexico sued to prevent 27 county clerks from shifting to vote-by-mail for the June primary. In April, three voters affiliated with the conservative group True the Vote filed a lawsuit to stop Nevada from conducting an all-mail primary election planned by the secretary of state. (A federal court

rejected the suit at the end of the month, calling its claim of voter fraud “without any factual basis.”) In Texas, Attorney General Ken Paxton interpreted the state law that requires an excuse like illness for absentee voting to mean that a voter must actually be sick rather than simply be concerned about becoming infected. Paxton threatened “criminal sanctions” for anyone advising voters to apply for a mail-in ballot based “solely on fear of contracting Covid-19.” When a state judge ruled in April that all Texas registered voters could qualify for an absentee ballot because of the pandemic, Paxton appealed the ruling, leaving the matter in limbo.

Before the coronavirus, the 2020 election was already vulnerable to disinformation campaigns, foreign interference and the country’s increasing polarization. The pandemic creates other challenges. In a nightmare scenario, officials could use the virus as an excuse to shut the polls selectively, to the benefit of their party. Or state legislatures could invoke the power the Constitution gives them to choose the electors who cast votes in the Electoral College, and thus actually select the president. (The states turned this power over to the voters in the 19th century, but they could try to take it back.) Any move like that would surely land in the Supreme Court, which has its own deepening groove of ideological division — and the dubious history of *Bush v. Gore*, the case in which the court intervened to effectively decide the outcome of the 2000 election.

With six months to go until the election (the date, the Tuesday after the first Monday in November, is set by an 1845 law, and both houses of Congress would have to agree to change it) the chances of a breakdown in its administration seem high. And this is a year when accusations of a stolen or broken election have more potential than they’ve had for decades to rip the country apart. It’s hard to overstate the importance of seeing the election done right. “It’s this simple: A disputed election in this environment poses an existential threat to American democracy,” Persily says. “It is that serious.”

Wisconsin shows how politically divisive basic access to voting could be in November. Three other swing states — Michigan, Pennsylvania and North Carolina — have the same kind of divided government, with Democratic governors and Republican-led legislatures wrestling for control, the dynamic that caused so much trouble in April. Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania also have major cities (Milwaukee, Detroit and Philadelphia) where African-Americans could play a decisive role in the election and have also suffered disproportionate Covid-19 infections and

deaths. The combination could especially imperil their constitutional right to vote.

The cities and counties of Wisconsin are learning from their experience in April. State officials can advise them on preparing for the pandemic, but it’s the local clerks and commissioners who have to make the logistics work. In Milwaukee, the City Council responded to the chaos and disenfranchisement by passing a resolution asking Albrecht, the election director, to send Milwaukee’s 300,000 registered voters an application for a mail-in ballot for November. Albrecht told me he would spend the summer overhauling operations. “I’m talking about all of it,” he said. He has submitted a request to the Postal Service for an investigation. Many Milwaukee voters who applied for absentee ballots on two particular dates, March 22 and 23, did not receive them. “Our forensic review shows we responded and sent them out,” Albrecht said. “Did the post office mess up? We don’t know.” Albrecht is also making sure he has the supplies of paper for added ballots and envelopes that he needs. Finally, Albrecht said, he is concentrating on voter education. People who were accustomed to going to the polls made mistakes, like dropping ballots through the book-drop slot at the library without the certified envelope, which disqualified their votes.

In Pennsylvania, the presidential primary scheduled for June 2 will be the first test of whether large numbers of people can successfully vote by mail. The Legislature last year passed a law that provides for absentee ballots for anyone who requests it without requiring an excuse. “We’ve had 160,000 applications for mail-in ballots for the primary in the last week,” Secretary of the Commonwealth Kathy Boockvar said when I spoke to her in mid-April. “For comparison, in 2016, we got 19,000 in the same period.” She stressed that federal funding would be crucial for preparing for November. In the long run, voting by mail can be less expensive. Counties that adopted it in Colorado, one of five states that sends ballots by mail to every registered voter, spent less than \$10 per voter in 2014 compared with about \$16 per voter six years earlier. But in the present, states need help to make the switch.

Three elected city commissioners are responsible for directing the logistics in Philadelphia. “To be honest, everything we were planning to do for November is on hold as we navigate through the virus,” Lisa Deeley, one of the three commissioners and the commission’s chairwoman, said when I called her in April. “All our focus right now is on the primary.”

A few days later, the National Association of Presort Mailers held a teleconference for vendors across the country that are in the niche business

In Wisconsin, voters in Milwaukee, top, and poll workers in Kenosha recognized the danger on Election Day — but showed up regardless.



of printing and packaging bulk mail, including mail-in ballots. They specialize in details like ensuring that the paper for the ballots and envelopes is certified so the ink printed on it will scan correctly.

On the call, according to the news site Talking Points Memo, companies warned that they were already at capacity for November, filling orders from longtime vote-by-mail states like California and Colorado. They could expand, but they would need to buy costly equipment that takes several months to obtain, a step they would only take with orders from states and counties in hand. “For example, the machine that folds and inserts the ballot into the envelope can cost up to \$1 million,” Richard Gebbie, chief executive of Midwest Presort Mailing Services and president of the national association, told me. “It normally takes 90 days to order one piece of gear. Then you have to get it installed and check everything, because the security and quality control has to be very, very high.” Gebbie’s company has been contacting county boards of election in the region, including in Pennsylvania, but he says so far it has received a cool response. “I think with the Covid, they’re not sure what they can do. We have one county in Pennsylvania, Mercer, that said, Let’s get a quote. The others said, Call us back in a month. The Catch-22 is: That could be too late.”

Deeley called me back later in April to assure me that Philadelphia would be ready for the fall election but gave few specifics. “Her heart is in the right place, but this is just a huge challenge,” says David Thornburgh, the president and C.E.O. of the Committee of Seventy, a good-government group in Philadelphia founded in 1904. “We are at the house-is-burning level of alarm in some cities,” says another voting rights advocate, who didn’t want to be identified criticizing local election officials. As of the end of April, Philadelphia had a backlog of almost 9,000 absentee applications waiting to be processed for the June primary. Voting rights advocates have filed a lawsuit asking the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to require the state to let all absentee ballots sent or postmarked by Election Day in June and November to be counted if they are received within seven days of each election.

In Michigan, where voters passed a 2018 referendum that allows voting by mail without an excuse, a big increase is also expected. “We are planning for 70 to 90 percent voting by mail in Detroit,” Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, who lives in the city, told me. “That means allocating resources, ordering supplies, developing educational materials.”

For a set of local elections throughout the state in May, Benson’s office is mailing applications

for absentee ballots to all registered voters, with return postage prepaid by the state. But Michigan doesn’t pay return postage for voters’ ballots for either the primary or general election. Stamps are a particular barrier for young people who have grown up communicating digitally, elections officials say. Most other states — including Florida and Pennsylvania — don’t pay return postage for applications or ballots. Mailing costs and other Covid-19-related expenses for the general election (and another election in August) would cost Michigan \$40 million, Benson estimates. The state has so far only received \$11 million for all election expenses related to the pandemic.

A coalition of more than 200 public-interest groups are pushing hard for Congress to include \$3.6 billion for the 2020 election cycle in the next coronavirus relief bill. They also want all states to offer online and same-day voter registration and to extend in-person early voting to avoid crowding on Election Day. Chuck Schumer, the Senate majority leader, called the funding a top priority on an April conference call with 20 civil rights groups. Some Republican secretaries of state, like LaRose from Ohio, support additional funding, but don’t want the federal government to tell them how to run their elections. Some Republican senators continue to see the funding proposal as an effort to give Democrats an advantage.

In the coming months, in the swing states and elsewhere, partisan fights could break out over whether to allow voters to request an absentee ballot online instead of by mail (many states currently don’t allow this), or waive the requirement that voters obtain witness signatures before returning their ballots (as North Carolina and Wisconsin, among others, mandate) because some voters are self-isolating during the pandemic.

Absentee-ballot fraud, the recent focus of Republicans, has occasionally taken place in isolated instances in states where low numbers of people typically vote by mail. “There’s a history of tampering with absentee ballots, mostly in pockets in Appalachia (including Kentucky), South Texas and sometimes in cities with party machines,” says Richard Hasen, author of the recent book “Election Meltdown” and a law and political-science professor at the University of California, Irvine. The most prominent modern-day case of absentee fraud occurred in rural Bladen County, N.C., in 2018. North Carolina, like a lot of states, bars people from collecting and turning in absentee ballots of voters outside their family. (Other states cap the number that people can collect.) Nonetheless, in Bladen County, after Mark Harris, a Republican candidate for Congress, won his election by 905 votes, evidence emerged (Continued on Page 43)

'It's Just So Hard

to Be Faced With What Someone Needs

and to Not Be Able to Give It to Them'

**How the pandemic is pushing community health centers to the breaking point.
By Mattathias Schwartz Photographs by Philip Montgomery**



began moving homeless shelter residents

believed to have Covid-19 to “isolation units” within existing facilities. In April, it began using the city’s inventory of empty hotels, which were supposed to be for residents who weren’t yet sick enough to need hospital care. There was plenty of space available; the problem was how to staff it. For one hotel, the city contracted with Housing Works, a nonprofit focused on homelessness and H.I.V./AIDS. Housing Works brought in Callen-Lorde Community Health Center, which serves L.G.B.T.Q. New Yorkers. Callen-Lorde’s staff learned the hotel’s exact location, in Queens, late in the morning on Friday, April 3. There were 133 rooms, expected to hold more than 170 patients. They had only a few hours to get the place ready: The first patients would begin arriving that night.

The chief nursing officer of Callen-Lorde, a 38-year-old named Anthony Fortenberry, already had his hands full. He had spent the first weeks of the coronavirus pandemic trying to build a system to track the center’s thousands of patients, even as their care shifted from Callen-Lorde’s offices in the Manhattan neighborhood of Chelsea to the internet. The center’s origins trace back to the era following the Stonewall uprising, when a single doctor offered free health care, including methadone treatment, contraception and pregnancy counseling, from a small clinic on St. Marks Place in the city’s East Village. Today the center has four different sites, with 66,000 square feet of offices, and serves some 20,000 people a year. One-quarter are H.I.V.-positive, and could be at greater risk of illness or death from Covid-19. Many deal with issues surrounding mental health, substance abuse or lack of housing. A number were shut out from traditional medical care because they lacked insurance; others decided to self-exile from a medical system that treated their sexual identities with confusion or even scorn.

“I would tell them that they needed to go to the E.R.,” Fortenberry recalls of some transgender

patients. “They would say: ‘Absolutely not. I would rather die than be misgendered or mistreated. It is not worth going through the trauma.’” According to a 2017 poll, 18 percent of L.G.B.T.Q. Americans say that fear of discrimination has kept them from seeking medical care.

In March, at least, much of Fortenberry’s work had involved doing everything possible to keep H.I.V.-positive patients *away* from hospital emergency rooms, where those who didn’t already have the coronavirus would be at the greatest risk of contracting it. Callen-Lorde’s main storefront clinic in Chelsea had cut back on staff, but Fortenberry continued to ride the subway from his home in Queens and work out of his windowless basement office, and a handful of other staff members remained on-site to advise patients who thought they might have Covid-19, or those with mental-health or substance-abuse issues who weren’t yet aware that the city was in the process of shutting down. Hundreds of patients were calling in each day to ask about Covid-19-like symptoms; over the weekend of March 28, more than 700 voice mail messages were left in what Fortenberry calls “a run on the pharmacy,” as patients rushed to stock up on medication in case the quarantine disrupted supplies. Some patients who were being treated for H.I.V. or gender transition were living with family members or roommates who were unaware — they needed to make arrangements to pick up medication at Callen-Lorde’s pharmacy or have it discreetly delivered to their homes.

Callen-Lorde continued monitoring patients through telemedicine, often laboriously chasing them down by phone and email. The center kept a close eye on its dwindling supplies of gloves, masks, gowns and hand sanitizer. Some staff members started to get sick; Fortenberry set up a team to monitor them in quarantine and decide when it was safe to return.

This wasn’t the first time the center had dealt with the possibility of a pandemic: After a 2012 outbreak of fungal meningitis among gay men, Callen-Lorde helped other area health centers come up with protocols for dealing with outbreaks of disease. Two years later, it had a dry run when a doctor returned to New York from Guinea carrying the Ebola virus. Fortenberry already had a rough playbook for Covid-19 — at least until April, when the city started moving people into its hotels and his job was transformed.

Minutes after he learned the address of the new quarantine hotel, Fortenberry called an Uber, threw whatever supplies and equipment he could into the trunk and rode to Queens. By the end of the day, his staff had filled the hotel’s basement gym with masks, gloves and gowns. They scoured nearby bodegas for more acetaminophen and ibuprofen. The staff turned the breakfast area into a triage space, with a row of tables serving as a makeshift barrier. Fortenberry had ordered a printer, scanner and filing cabinet for basic record-keeping, but these had not arrived yet. Handwritten files on the hotel’s first two dozen occupants piled up on a conference table in the business center.

One of the first patients arrived in a wheelchair pushed by paramedics. He was middle-aged and homeless, suffering from diabetes and advanced kidney disease. Under normal circumstances, any American in his condition would have been situated in a hospital intensive-care unit, or hospice. His blood oxygen was dangerously low, aggravating problems caused by his diabetes and kidney disease. He was, Fortenberry told me by phone that weekend, “actively dying.” “This

Opening pages: Anthony Fortenberry, chief nursing officer at the Callen-Lorde Community Health Center in New York City. Right: A patient receives treatment at Callen-Lorde.



patient is not going to make it,” he said. “Where that is going to happen is the question.”

Many of the patients in that first wave were in worse shape than Fortenberry was led to expect. The plan had been for the hotel to house “low-acuity” patients who were not at immediate risk of dying in order to free up hospital beds as the virus swamped New York. But as the crisis approached its peak, the meaning of “low-acuity” seemed to shift. Having stood up the equivalent of a field hospital in 24 hours, Fortenberry quickly realized he’d be receiving patients who were far more ill than his staff was equipped to deal with.

At the same time, the crisis was creating a third problem for Fortenberry: his budget. Even as the pandemic multiplied the needs of Callen-Lorde patients, the drop in face-to-face consultations was slowing the flow of Medicaid reimbursements to a trickle. The center applied for a loan from the federal government under the Paycheck Protection Program, but received no feedback beyond an acknowledgment that the application had been received. In April, senior staff members began discussions about the possibility that they would have to furlough staff. Outside New York, hundreds of other community health centers were grappling with similar problems — a spike in the need for urgent medical care for their patients, coupled with a sudden shortfall in government funding. The virus was doing more than filling up hospital I.C.U.s beyond capacity; it was stretching the resources of the country’s shadow medical safety net, the one that reaches patients whose location, economic circumstances or existing health status already puts them at greater risk.

Part of Fortenberry’s job, as he saw it, was compartmentalizing — filtering out his own fears so as not to pass them on to colleagues or patients. Before joining Callen-Lorde, he worked as a nurse at a Greenwich Village intensive-care unit, and before that, at a Level 1 trauma center in the Bronx. But the equanimity he absorbed

from these experiences was now being put to the test. “I think it’s very important for our staff to have the impression that I have everything under control and that everything is going to be OK,” he said. “The default is panic. Especially in this kind of situation, where we’re in way over our heads. I think the last thing that everyone needs from me is to show uncertainty. But deep down inside, I’m, you know” — he laughed softly — “it’s an untenable disaster.”

Callen-Lorde is one node in a network of more than 1,000 community health centers, or C.H.C.s, spread across the nation. By law, C.H.C.s work with “medically unserved” populations and receive federal funding from the Department of

‘They’re already under tremendous strain.’

Health and Human Services. There are centers that specialize in treating farmworkers, non-English-speaking immigrants, public-housing residents and rural communities. They work at the nexus of medicine and social care, with dedicated intake workers who help the undocumented or the uninsured navigate health care bureaucracy before they have a problem that sends them to the emergency room. Many patients are unable to wall themselves off from infection because they take public transportation to subsistence jobs in agriculture, sanitation or front-line retail, and it is these patients — the same ones who continue to arrive at the Queens hotel — who would die in disproportionate numbers if policymakers decided to pare back social-distancing measures. Attention and resources continue to

flow to hospitals, the first line of defense against the virus. But the nationwide safety net of C.H.C.s beneath them is being stretched to its limit.

The first C.H.C.s were founded by civil rights activists in the mid-1960s and began receiving federal funding as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society program. Today they treat nearly 30 million patients each year, two-thirds of whom live below the federal poverty line. One of the oldest and best-known centers, Eula Hall Health Center (previously known as the Mud Creek Clinic), serves families of coal miners in the Kentucky Appalachians. The federal government has used such C.H.C.s to screen coal miners for black lung and fund specific subsidiary programs to make sure that the homeless, public-housing residents and farmworkers have adequate health care. During the 2012 meningitis outbreak, the City of New York used Callen-Lorde to reach gay men, who were especially at risk, and provide free vaccinations.

Beyond their humanitarian value, these programs save the health care system money by keeping uninsured patients healthy, as opposed to waiting for them to get sick enough to call 911 or show up in an emergency room. But the immediate needs faced by C.H.C.s are often so great that even long-established organizations exist on a hand-to-mouth basis, plowing whatever funding they receive immediately back into payroll and patient care. “Many C.H.C.s don’t keep profits in a bank account,” says the University of Chicago’s Dr. Marshall Chin, who researches health disparities. “They’re already under tremendous strain from the needs of their patients.”

For many C.H.C.s, dealing with the immediate impact of Covid-19 is drawing down resources at the very moment they need to be making

Right, top: Alex Perez, a registered nurse, takes the temperature of a recent arrival at Callen-Lorde. Bottom: Henry Nguyen, a family nurse practitioner, counsels a patient at the center.



preparations for a more extended public-health crisis. One scenario is millions of newly vulnerable workers crowding patient rolls, even as the centers struggle to maintain their funding. “It’s the double whammy of the medical hit, and then the economic one,” Chin says. “If you’re a front-line worker, you have to drive that bus or that Uber. You can’t socially distance because your housing is too crowded. Then, if you get sick, you can’t get into your C.H.C. because the centers are letting go of folks.” The U.S. health care system suffers from a chronically under-resourced safety net. “So when something like Covid hits,” Chin says, “you have a lot of people who get hurt.”

For Albany, Ga., the metro area with the country’s second-highest number of deaths per capita from Covid-19, the rural outskirts’ local C.H.C. is Albany Area Primary Health Care. The center has been conducting much of its practice through telemedicine. Often this entails calling up patients who have missed appointments and walking them through how to download and use the right app. “I’ve almost become a telemarketer,” says Dr. Jim Hotz, the center’s founder. “People do not want to come into the office.”

Hotz himself found out he had prostate cancer earlier this year, but postponed definitive treatment after regional hospitals put the type of surgery he needed on hold due to the pandemic. At A.A.P.H.C., the number of patient walk-ins, too, has fallen by about half. Only 40 percent of the center’s patients have smartphones. “The people who are poor, rural and don’t have broadband are our highest-risk population,” he says. “And those are the ones we are least incentivized to take care of.” Much of the Covid-19-related work that the center has been doing spills over from health care into social work, like counseling the grieving wife of a terminally ill man who had been discharged from the hospital to a hospice, which had no staff left to take care of him at home. For the 45 minutes that Hotz spent talking her through her grief by phone, the center got a reimbursement of \$13.

Elsewhere, Dr. Laurie Zephyrin of the Commonwealth Fund has seen pregnant women foregoing prenatal care, and chronic conditions like heart disease and kidney disease left untreated. “It’s not that all of a sudden people are cured,” she said. “It’s that they’re not going to the doctor. People are losing insurance coverage, losing their jobs. There needs to be some focused investment on our health care infrastructure and policies for universal health care so we can provide for people as we bounce back.”

Social distancing may be especially hard on the L.G.B.T.Q. community, particularly younger people who are estranged from their families. In April, the Trevor Project, another nonprofit, published a white paper outlining the risks related to Covid-19 for L.G.B.T.Q. youth. Considerable research already indicates that this group is at greater risk of mental health disorders and suicide; now they are being deprived of the community spaces where they do feel supported. The number of L.G.B.T.Q. youth reaching out to the Trevor Project’s hotlines has at times more than doubled since the crisis began. “We’re seeing a lot of patients with mental health issues because of an oversaturation of news and fear,” Fortenberry said. “This is already a particularly vulnerable population at baseline. When these kinds of events happen, there can be relapses into substance abuse as well. People tend not to be able to take care of themselves as they normally would in these kinds of crises.”

It will be years before anyone is able to tally up the damage Covid-19 is inflicting on the populations that community health centers serve, especially when one accounts for the secondary costs to those who may never even contract the disease. The problems already emerging — in rural access to telemedicine, in access to medication for chronic conditions, in the dangerous isolation of L.G.B.T.Q. youth — could be the first indications of a much broader, secondary health crisis affecting treatment for the diverse range

of maladies, from opioid addiction to obesity to chronic depression, that are commonly addressed by C.H.C.s. As part of the current stimulus package, community health centers stand to receive some share of a \$50 billion line item aimed at Medicare-funded providers. But that money, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, will be divided up based on existing revenue, and it remains unclear whether any money will be specifically dedicated to dealing with the crisis’s secondary damage. Eventually, as epidemiologists compare mortality rates for 2020 and 2021 with previous years, the deaths caused by this lack of access to basic medical care may be lumped in with Covid-19 itself, despite a number of them having been more preventable.

‘It’s even more critical that we stay on top of their care now.’

As the geography of the virus’s impact continues to spread from New York to the rest of the country, more C.H.C.s will likely feel the same strains Callen-Lorde has as they try to balance their commitments to existing patients with the surging demand for care. Yet even as C.H.C.s are called upon to do more, the federal government is asking them to make do with less. Most of the centers’ funding comes from Medicaid, which compensates them for remote patient visits at a small fraction of the rate of live visits. The average reimbursement is \$12 or \$13, according to Dr. Ron Yee, chief medical officer of the

Right: Danyele Brown, a patient at Callen-Lorde.



National Association of Community Health Centers; there are likely millions of patients, meanwhile, who don't even possess the technology to connect with their C.H.C.s remotely. "Once we get through the surge, we could have more problems later on if we are struggling to keep up with our patients," Yee told me. "We're going to have to catch up on our chronic care, and kids who need vaccines. Our population of patients age 65 and up had already been increasing at a higher rate. It's even more critical that we stay on top of their care now."

In one of our first conversations, Fortenberry told me he planned on spending a day or two at the hotel, setting things up, until the regular staff settled into a rhythm. Two weeks later, he found himself still showing up most days at 8 in the morning and staying until 8:30 or 9 at night. Working behind a mask and goggles, he did what he could to form bonds, quickly and at scale, with individual patients. Sometimes he'd tell his Covid-19 patients that he was smiling behind his mask, though that may already have been clear from his large, almond-shaped eyes.

'Morale has been harder to maintain the longer we have to keep this up.'

The rooms at the hotel lacked IVs, heart monitors, oxygen masks and resuscitation equipment. By the second week of April, the site held about 150 patients. With five to seven medical staff at any given moment, that meant that medical check-ins took place around four times per day. But "if you're sitting in a hotel room and having trouble breathing, I don't want you to not call me," Fortenberry said. "Someone who is otherwise healthy can take a turn for the worse really quickly. So it's important that you feel comfortable calling. I want you to err on the side of caution." That day he had met a woman in her early 20s, most likely pregnant, who was living in a women's shelter because of a violent partner. She had asthma, a high fever and pneumonia, and was awaiting the results of a Covid-19 test. Fortenberry delivered all of her meals personally and asked about her favorite foods. "It's hard because you can't hold someone's hand," he said. "You're all gloved up." He said that he had sympathy for those who chose to walk out of the hotel. "People get stir-crazy," he said. "Anyone would. Imagine you're sick and you get stuck in a hotel room and you're not allowed to leave for an entire week. You can only watch so much TV."

Back at home, he stayed up attending Zoom meetings and catching up on email. There was

just too much to be done. On the second or third day, the hotel's staff engineer walked off the job, along with most of the cleaning staff. They took access to room keys and cleaning supplies along with them. The city was able to find replacements within 24 hours, but there were still only enough hands to clean rooms during changes between patients. During a patient's stay, the job of changing sheets, cleaning toilets and providing for daily necessities like soap and toothpaste fell to the doctors and nurses on Fortenberry's staff. The staff's medical gowns and N95 masks were worn until they became visibly soiled. The risks to their own health were significant, which was part of why Fortenberry stayed. "I don't want to ask them to do anything that I wouldn't do myself," he told me one evening during the third week of April. "Morale has been harder to maintain the longer we have to keep this up. The adrenaline has worn off."

It was our seventh evening phone call. For the first time, he sounded tired. "It's been increasingly difficult to compartmentalize emotionally," he said. Over the previous weekend, another homeless patient had come in who was suffering from diabetes, kidney disease and symptoms of Covid-19. He was on dialysis, but had grown confused and refused treatment for several days. He was close enough to death for Fortenberry to call 911. The paramedics who arrived refused to take him to the emergency room. "You don't know what's happening in the E.R. right now," one of them told Fortenberry. "People are dying in the hallway. We are *beyond* beyond capacity." Fortenberry reminded them that the hotel had no resuscitation equipment and that the patient was "decompensating," his vital systems failing. "They have to decompensate further before we can take them," the paramedic said. So Fortenberry waited another 24 hours. The patient got worse. Fortenberry called 911 again. This time, they took him.

Many of the patients coming into the hotel had not been tested at the hospital, but were assumed to have Covid-19 because of their exposure and symptoms. This made Fortenberry skeptical about claims by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and others that the crisis was about to reach its peak. "They're not testing people who I know to be sick," he said. "Maybe that's being accounted for in these official projections, but it's hard for me to reconcile." By late April, what he saw on the ground had begun to reflect the story contained in the official statistics. For now, the crisis was slowing down.

In New York State, Callen-Lorde and other C.H.C.s will likely suffer from \$2.5 billion in cuts proposed by the governor's Medicaid Redesign Team. After the center's cash flow plummeted in March, Callen-Lorde's senior staff members took pay cuts ranging from 10 to 15 percent, and management warned that there could be furloughs and layoffs ahead. Callen-Lorde received less than \$600,000 from the federal stimulus bill,

enough for one week of payroll. It never heard back about its initial loan application, made via a large commercial bank in New York. Loans for Shake Shack and Ruth's Chris Steak House, meanwhile, were approved. (After a public outcry, both said they would return the loans.) "I'm infuriated," Fortenberry said. "These are not small businesses. You would think there would be some prioritization of safety-net health care providers."

Callen-Lorde's staff was well aware of how thin the center's resources were stretched. Several sent out calls for equipment and funding to their own networks. On Instagram, a doctor's partner asked for donations of handmade gowns, and a few days later, a box showed up on her Park Slope doorstep. Inside were 17 handmade gowns mailed from Overland Park, Kan. When Fortenberry saw the gowns, "I went to the bathroom and just lost it," he said. He had his staff try them on — they had been sewn from fabric he fondly described as "the most hideous 1970s floral-patterned sheets" — and take a group photo. The gowns were sewn by Jan Durham, a quilter and self-described "fabric hoarder" who searches for her quarry at thrift stores and estate sales. "I hope these will be of use, although I also wish they were not needed," she wrote in an accompanying letter. "It just makes me furious that we're sewing P.P.E. at home," she told me by phone, a few days later. "I'm glad to do it, but we are a great nation. We should not have to rely on seamstresses in their homes to provide these critical things."

In Queens, Fortenberry was troubled by a parallel set of worries. Late in April, there was still no word back from the bank. Without a loan, Callen-Lorde would not be able to make payroll, and it would be up to Fortenberry to decide who among the medical staff was essential and who was not. "That's an impossible thing to ask me to do," he said. It was the first time that I had heard him complain.

As with the gowns, personal relationships compensated for the failings of the official infrastructure. A member of Callen-Lorde's staff had gone to college with someone who later became the chief loan officer at a small community bank in the South Bronx. By April 27, the bank was able to process a \$6 million loan, enough for six weeks of payroll.

"It was such a huge relief," Fortenberry said. "I didn't know how I was going to live with myself." It was almost May, and Fortenberry was busy setting up a second hotel for the city, this one for homeless L.G.B.T.Q. youth believed to have contracted the virus. The flow of patients into the Queens hotel had slowed, allowing him to catch up on paperwork and sleep. "In the beginning I was on autopilot, just making it work," he said. But the brief break hadn't exactly left him reassured. "It's almost more daunting," he said, "to have more time to think about what's actually happening." ♦

on days off
on off-days
on rainy Sundays
if you're alone
if you're on the phone
if your family is home
as a sweet treat
for a savory supper
for a spicy night
to master the basics
to sharpen your skills
to mix up your menu

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policy was that I couldn't accept anything even close to this. I put it down. He picked it up. I put it on a desk. He told Brad Koeppen, who stayed with us until the end of the interviews, to carry it out to my car and not let me leave without it. So I took it and put it in the passenger seat with a seat-belt around it, just me and Val Kilmer's abstract swimmer art driving down Melrose, and honestly, I felt so good and so weightless — spending the day with someone who doesn't believe in death is as fine an antidote to hearing all the stories of fear that were coming through the radio now as any — that instead of passing Cahuenga Boulevard back to my hotel, I hung a right and went to the movies, the way I used to when I was young.

I sat in the movie theater, watching "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" and thinking of stories Kilmer told me: about an accident his daughter was in, how she was walking and got hit by a car on Little Santa Monica and then thrown through a storefront window, but the storefront had been evacuated and so was empty, and even though she'd gone through the glass, she emerged unscathed; about a time he was driving to the airport from his ranch and a car wandered through the median, and he was going too fast to stop, and so his car went through this other car without colliding with it. He can still see the mole on the driver's neck as he went through him without causing material disturbance to either of their bodies or vehicles. These things happened because he'd been praying his whole life.

But the other thing he'd been doing his whole life was telling these stories, turning the way we are constantly walking along the edge of our imminent demise — sure, imminent if you believe in time, demise if you believe in death — and trying to make sense of what could happen to a person at any given moment: a religious person, a person who is trying to be good in the world. That his daughter could be hit by a car? That he could die on the way to the airport? That his reputation could be shattered? That he could have a hole in his throat? Who could blame a person who needed to make sense of the chaotic turns of his life with a story? But even more: What else was he supposed to do?

When he told me those stories, I told him it was hard for me to imagine that a person could heal themselves or prevent certain disaster with prayer.

He said, "It's not that difficult." When he said that, I realized that as the days had gone on, it had become easier to understand him.

The Times was calling for staff members to return to base and begin working from home, so I headed to the airport the next morning with my suitcase and my painting, which I promised myself I would mail back to Kilmer when I arrived at home. People were wearing masks on my flight and sanitizing the cups of soda they

received during in-flight service, and I drifted off to sleep feeling bad for them.

South by Southwest was canceled before I even landed. Cannes was postponed. Eventually, the Olympics were too. In the coming weeks, everything was canceled: school, outside, hugs. Peter Beard went missing, and Kilmer took a walk with Ali Alborzi, who was distraught. It was the longest walk Kilmer had taken in a long time, and he realized that two hummingbirds had been following him, had been following them for three days.

"Birds have always been a part of my family," Kilmer texted me. "Being the harbingers of life and the story of death." He believed the hummingbirds had a message for them about Beard. By then, I thought, "How beautiful."

Perhaps we had created the coronavirus out of our fear and wickedness — children in cages, the rich hoarding wealth; perhaps we had only the suggestion of a virus. I grew up with too many messianics in my household. I found this kind of thing too easy to believe, if only because it was more believable than the fact that in 2020, my young, healthy colleagues were in the hospital, the streets were bare, I was stuck inside my house and nobody knew how long that might go on for. For a few days, I stared at my beautiful painting, which I will absolutely return when it's safe to take a nonessential trip to the post office. It was so hard to parse all the fear that permeated society now — what was real and what had come as a result of our own hysteria. During the day I'd think that it was the fear that was hurting us most.

But at night my husband would shake me to wake me up because I'd been crying in my sleep. More quickly than I could have imagined, the world took on the hallucinogenic quality of right before you fall asleep, when everything is out-size and nothing makes sense. The margins on my suspension of disbelief started to close in on themselves, and the borders of things began to diminish, and now the world seemed like a word you stare at so long that it becomes nonsense. I watched all the Val Kilmer movies again, but this time they struck me as representations of a world that never existed, that couldn't possibly exist: What is sweaty shirtless fighter pilot? What is dentist with tuberculosis? What is Downtown L.A. shootout? What is Batmobile? What is Lizard King?

Amid all this, I received a phone call. One of my closest and oldest friends, Lydia, called me to tell me she had throat cancer. I had seen her a few weeks before, and she told me she had been having bouts of laryngitis. But now she had a diagnosis. It was Stage 0 — it had not yet spread. I cried into the phone with her.

But also here I was, finding this out while writing an article about a man who had throat cancer. I called up Kilmer and told him about Lydia. I asked if he had any advice to give her. He did. Kilmer told me she could "have a healing at any minute. It could happen right now, or when she's on her way to the hospital, or even while a doctor

is operating on her." I called her and told her this, and it made us both giddy for some reason.

But then, a few days later, her surgery was postponed because of the coronavirus, and we aren't sure, even as of this writing, when it will happen, and now her cancer might spread. I felt stupid for trying to find meaning and hope in what was happening to Lydia; I felt stupid for trying to make this into a story for her and for us.

In just two weeks, the palm trees against the bright blue sky that hung over HelMel seemed like something I made up, as weird to think about as a Batman figure with a Mark Twain head. (Was that even real? I searched my phone and found a picture of it. Phew.)

By now I understood that the story I was telling about Val Kilmer, which I'd thought had been about a man's relentless faith and optimism, was really about reconciliation: the squaring of two opposing things into something we swear is true despite all evidence to the contrary. Your beauty can sentence you to misery; Val Kilmer uses a tracheostomy tube, but he can talk; his brother is dead but only to our senses. Mark Twain despised Mary Baker Eddy, until you can will him into a dream where he doesn't. God is good, and there are no ventilators. My beautiful friend has cancer, and the treatment exists, but it's unavailable to her right now.

Here's the thing: Mark Twain, Kilmer's favorite storyteller, thought that storytelling couldn't (and shouldn't) try to capture an entire life, to draw its arc, to determine its meaning. He was suspicious of the kind of autobiography that Ben Franklin had done. He thought it should just be a mish-mash of remembrances told not even in the right order lest a person be tempted to force a story into a certain direction and make themselves a more sympathetic character than they deserve. Here's another thing: I spoke to his daughter, Mercedes, who told me that she did have a miraculous recovery, but that a bone in her face had been broken and that she was in a wheelchair for a month and required major surgery.

I spoke to Val Kilmer one more time. While we were on the phone, I stared at my painting, the divers diving in over and over — What is HelMel? What is ocean? — and I tried to remember how I felt when it was beside me in Los Angeles, in the passenger seat of the rental car. Kilmer told me that he and Alborzi were going to get in a car and drive to New Mexico, where he still has 160 acres of land. Meanwhile, Tom Cruise tweeted that the "Top Gun" sequel was moving to December, two of my colleagues were in the hospital and another's husband lay in his bed gasping for breath. I attended a Zoom shiva for a friend's mother, who was buried alone. Peter Beard lay in the woods, weeks away from being found. The Val Kilmer GIF snapped its jaw over and over forever in a text message. Lydia waited by the phone though she had not been told to expect a call, and Val Kilmer planned his road trip into the desert. ♦

Voting

(Continued from Page 31)

that a political operative working for him may have collected as many as 800 absentee votes, many from African-American voters, filled some of them in for Harris and perhaps tossed others away. The bipartisan state Board of Elections threw out the results and ordered a new election.

States that have adopted universal vote-by-mail have shown it can be done securely. “They have very strong track records,” Hasen says. Election officials create a clear, unhackable paper trail for ballots, sending them to voters with a bar code that can be tracked. Voters must sign the ballots, which means signatures can be checked, and send them back in a certified inner envelope, also signed and also with a bar code. “The claim of fraud is a distraction,” Jena Griswold, the secretary of state in Colorado, where 95 percent of people voted by mail in 2018, told me. “We have a history of clean elections. When we think there is the *possibility* of double voting, we send every case to the attorney general. Our number for 2018 was 0.0027 percent.”

One big question for 2020 is how states will verify absentee ballots to guard against fraud while also ensuring that voters are treated fairly. Many states lack uniform criteria or training for matching the signature on a ballot with the copy of the voter’s signature that the state has on file. As a result, rejection rates can vary a great deal from county to county. States including Pennsylvania and Michigan don’t require election officials to notify voters if their signatures are missing or have been rejected, so those voters don’t have a chance to fix the problem. The gaps in the law leave the decision up to county and local officials.

There are certain best practices. It’s better for counties to use databases that chart the evolution of voters’ signatures over time rather than relying on a registration file that may be decades old. In Washington, which instituted universal vote-by-mail in 2011, state patrol officers who investigate fraud train election workers on evaluating signatures, according to Kim Wyman, the secretary of state. “They teach us to look at the slant of the letters or the path of how the signer moves the pen,” she says. “After the training, you have more confidence that a signature can be a match even if it’s not identical.” If a signature fails a first check, it goes through another round of review and then to a three-member elected canvassing board, which examines any flagged ballots in a public session. “You have to be open and transparent about how you’re verifying, or people will think you’re just throwing out Democratic or Republican votes to win,” Wyman says.

It’s also important to give voters clear instructions about filling out mail-in ballots. “We had to educate the voters, and we also had graphic designers come in and help us,” Wyman says. “A lot is in the design — for example, putting a big red X with ‘sign here’ next to the signature line.”

The fate of thousands of ballots — and the outcome of a close election — can depend on the choices states make. “The problem of uniform standards can be easily overcome,” says Nathaniel Persily, the Stanford election expert. “But if states don’t address it ahead of time, you can imagine absentee signatures being the hanging chads of 2020.”

Before the pandemic, candidates rarely focused on vote-by-mail in their campaigns. One exception is Stacey Abrams, the Democratic candidate for governor of Georgia in 2018. Her campaign sent 1.6 million applications for absentee ballots to registered voters who signaled they supported her. “I think we were the first modern Democratic campaign to run a really aggressive vote-by-mail operation,” says Lauren Groh-Wargo, who was Abrams’s campaign manager. “It was integrated with our voter education, our ads, our field operation. We could track the delivery of the absentee ballots and also whether they’d been returned. We staffed a hotline to walk people through any issues they had filling them out.”

Abrams won the absentee-ballot count by about 53,000 votes. But in the end, her opponent, Brian Kemp, who was the Georgia secretary of state responsible for managing elections during the race, defeated her by close to 55,000 votes.

After the election, Abrams founded a voting rights group, Fair Fight Action, which sued the state later that November, along with a domestic-worker advocacy group, for suppressing the vote in several ways. One of them involved absentee ballots. Election officials had rejected thousands of them, often for errors like writing the date of the election in the field for a birth date. Daniel Smith, a political-science professor at the University of Florida, analyzed Georgia’s absentee-ballot data as an expert for Fair Fight Action in the lawsuit. He found a higher rate of rejection for voters of color, who tended to support Abrams, than for white voters.

Georgia now has a new secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, a Republican who has raised the specter of fraud by announcing an “Absentee-Ballot Fraud Task Force” for 2020 that prosecutors will help lead. The task force, nine of whose 12 members are Republican, would investigate, among other things, “every signature mismatch” on a mail-in ballot, Raffensperger said in a news conference. Groh-Wargo of Fair Fight Action called the task force “a submission to the Trump voter-suppression machine.” In her view, Raffensperger’s intention is clear: Intimidate and deter voters.

Republican officials have also increasingly pursued a practice that will matter in November no matter how voters cast their ballots, because it affects eligibility to vote by mail as well as in person — mass cuts to the voter-registration rolls. “Purges in and of themselves aren’t bad,” Kevin Morris and Myrna Pérez of the Brennan Center

wrote in a 2018 analysis. “They’re commonly used to clean up voter lists when someone has moved, passed away and more. But too often, names identified for removal are determined by faulty criteria that wrongly suggests a voter be deleted from the rolls.” Purging often disproportionately shaves away black and Latino voters.

Before she ran for governor, Abrams worked for years to register hundreds of thousands of new voters, many of them African-American and Latino, hoping to make Georgia (where people of color make up 40 percent of the population) more competitive for Democrats. Between 2016 and 2018, Kemp purged more than 700,000 registered voters, more than 10 percent of the state total. Most people Kemp cut hadn’t responded to a notice sent by the state after they didn’t vote in the last few elections. The state presumed the voters it cut from the rolls had moved away or died, but in 2019, an investigation by APM Reports from American Public Media estimated that at least 107,000 of them remained eligible to vote. Like many states, Georgia does not permit same-day registration, so people who show up to vote and find they can’t are not simply allowed back on the rolls.

Secretary Raffensperger purged another 309,000 voters in December (and then restored 22,000 of them, saying they were eliminated in error). Last year, Ohio took the unusual step of releasing to advocacy groups in advance a list of 235,000 voters it planned to purge. A watchdog group called the Ohio Voter Project discovered that about 40,000 voters were being cut in error, about half of them from a heavily Democratic county with one of the highest percentages of people of color in the state.

If the 2020 election is close, purges in swing states could shape the results. According to the Brennan Center, in the two years leading up to the 2018 election, North Carolina, which has a Republican Legislature and at the time had a Republican governor, purged 11.7 percent of its voters; and Florida, also a Republican-controlled state, purged more than 7 percent, compared with 0.2 percent from 2008 to 2010. (In 2000, Florida’s wrongful purge of thousands of voters, a disproportionate number of whom were black, probably contributed to George W. Bush’s presidential victory, according to the general counsel of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights at the time, in a 2015 article in *The Nation*.) In Wisconsin, a legal battle over purging voter rolls is continuing. Concerned about errors, state election officials tried to delay cutting 234,000 voters they identified as having changed addresses until after the November election. But a conservative group, the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, sued to force the state to make the cuts before voting takes place. The Wisconsin Supreme Court deadlocked 3 to 3 over the case in March, with the seventh justice declining to participate because he was the one who was running in the April election. After he lost, he wrote that it appeared that the reason for his recusal “no longer obtains,” signaling

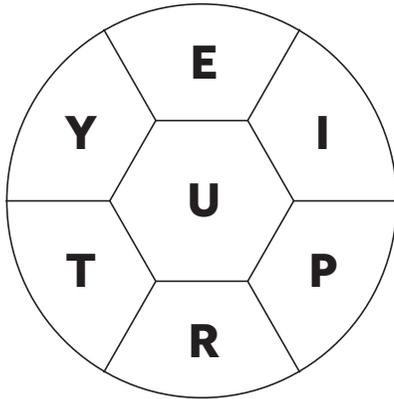
(Continued on Page 45)

SPELLING BEE

By Frank Longo

How many common words of 5 or more letters can you spell using the letters in the hive? Every answer must use the center letter at least once. Letters may be reused in a word. At least one word will use all 7 letters. Proper names and hyphenated words are not allowed. Score 1 point for each answer, and 3 points for a word that uses all 7 letters.

Rating: 9 = good; 16 = excellent; 23 = genius



Our list of words, worth 25 points, appears with last week's answers.

WHIRLPOOL

By Patrick Berry

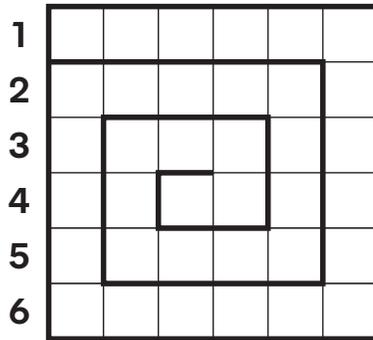
Row answers fill correspondingly numbered Rows. Answers to Whirlpool clues start at the top left corner and spiral inward along the heavily outlined path, one after another.

ROWS

- Daily ___ (Lois Lane's newspaper)
- Short promotional piece
- Saint Francis's birthplace
- Preliminary stage (hyph.)
- Region explored by Peary
- Distant correspondent

WHIRLPOOL

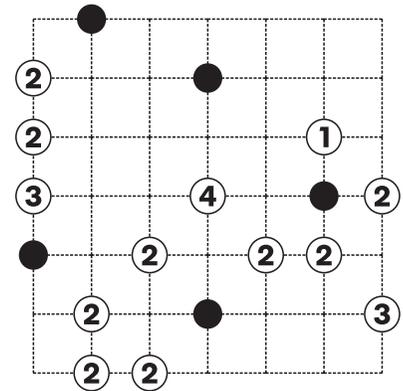
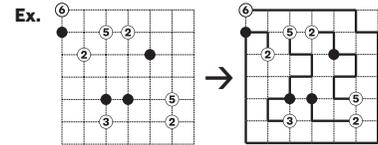
Journey by air (2 wds.) • Applaud • Nation on the south side of Everest • Relaxed (2 wds.) • Hearts or diamonds • Title heroine of a Shakespeare tragedy



GAS LINES

By Tinh Van Duc Lai

Connect each home (circled number) to a gas utility (black circle) by a line that follows the dots. The line must have the number of straight segments indicated. No lines can touch.



ACROSTIC

By Emily Cox & Henry Rathvon

Guess the words defined below and write them over their numbered dashes. Then transfer each letter to the correspondingly numbered square in the pattern. Black squares indicate word endings. The filled pattern will contain a quotation reading from left to right. The first letters of the guessed words will form an acrostic giving the author's name and the title of the work.

1	I	2	G	3	W	4	V	5	M	6	D	7	A	8	H	9	S	10	T	11	O	12	C	13	E	14	Q	15	R	16	K	17	N	18	W	19	L	20	H	21	D	22	M		
23	G	24	O	25	U	26	T	27	S	28	C	29	B	30	I	31	P	32	R	33	F	34	V	35	Q	36	W	37	E	38	D	39	L	40	J	41	S	42	G	43	A	44	U	45	M
46	P	47	H	48	O	49	I	50	R	51	W	52	F	53	T	54	C	55	J	56	E	57	K	58	B	59	G	60	P	61	M	62	I	63	N	64	R	65	A	66	U				
67	W	68	C	69	S	70	Q	71	B	72	H	73	E	74	D	75	J	76	I	77	F	78	R	79	K	80	U	81	S	82	M	83	T	84	N	85	B	86	O	87	V				
88	J	89	P	90	W	91	D	92	G	93	L	94	H	95	M	96	C	97	E	98	Q	99	F	100	N	101	K	102	U	103	A	104	I	105	L	106	D	107	O	108	M	109	R		
110	Q	111	H	112	V	113	W	114	G	115	F	116	E	117	L	118	J	119	N	120	C	121	K	122	R	123	S	124	I	125	U	126	O	127	B	128	V	129	W	130	M	131	D		
132	T	133	L	134	F	135	G	136	E	137	P	138	A	139	H	140	C	141	K	142	B	143	I	144	Q	145	J	146	W	147	N	148	V	149	T	150	E	151	U	152	L				
153	R	154	G	155	H	156	C	157	O	158	Q	159	P	160	J	161	T	162	A	163	M	164	U	165	B	166	E	167	N	168	V	169	C	170	D	171	R	172	H						

A. Act as a parent to; nurture

___ _ _ _ _
103 43 65 162 138 7

B. Consider in a different light

___ _ _ _ _
85 58 165 127 142 71 29

C. Fond feelings, tenderness

___ _ _ _ _
68 54 120 140 28 169 12 96 156

D. Cold and misty underworld of Norse myth

___ _ _ _ _
21 91 74 131 170 6 38 106

E. Cow with piercing vision (2 wds.)

___ _ _ _ _
166 150 136 56 116 13 73 37 97

F. Chica-minding matron

___ _ _ _ _
115 77 52 134 33 99

G. Wrapped in a tight embrace

___ _ _ _ _
154 92 42 59 114 2 23 135

H. Song from "Wicked," or, when doubled, a 1957 Johnny Mathis song

___ _ _ _ _
47 20 8 139 72 172 111 155 94

I. Secretary of state preceding Powell

___ _ _ _ _
1 49 76 104 30 143 62 124

J. In opposition to; contradictorily

___ _ _ _ _
75 145 40 160 55 88 118

K. "Cut that out!" (2 wds.)

___ _ _ _ _
141 101 121 16 79 57

L. Sequence of shots in film editing

___ _ _ _ _
19 105 117 39 133 93 152

M. The "spring" topping on a "four seasons" pizza

___ _ _ _ _
130 61 5 95 108 163 82 22 45

N. Expert in delivery methods

___ _ _ _ _
167 63 147 100 119 17 84

O. Enthusiasm, zeal, fervor

___ _ _ _ _
107 11 48 86 157 126 24

P. Candidate for redemption

___ _ _ _ _
46 89 31 159 60 137

Q. Inspiration for the country of Wakanda in "Black Panther"

___ _ _ _ _
110 14 98 70 35 144 158

R. Warm feeling following a success

___ _ _ _ _
109 78 64 171 153 32 50 15 122

S. Like tears or ocean water

___ _ _ _ _
41 27 81 123 69 9

T. Sister of Dollar, with Hertz as parent

___ _ _ _ _
53 83 26 161 132 10 149

U. Flower named for a prince loved by Apollo

___ _ _ _ _
151 102 80 25 164 44 66 125

V. 2006 memoir by Peace Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai

___ _ _ _ _
34 4 148 168 112 128 87

W. Engage in hot pursuit (2 wds.)

___ _ _ _ _
51 3 90 146 129 67 18 36 113

BORDER CROSSINGS

By Adam Fromm

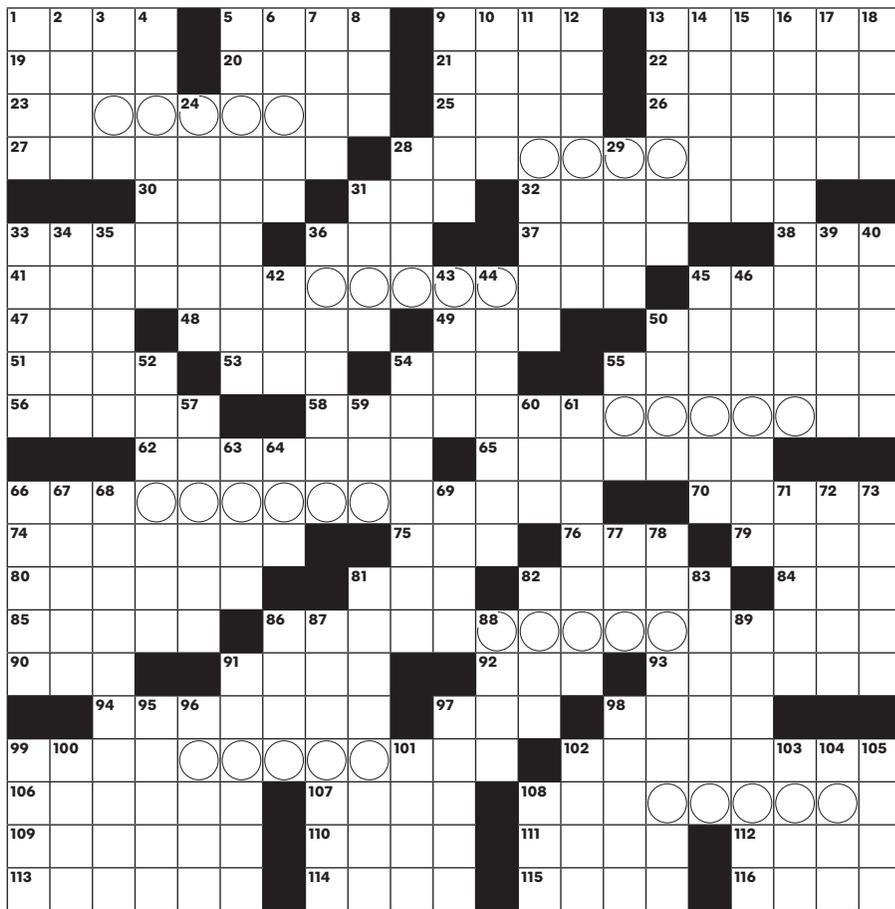
Adam Fromm is a songwriter/musician from Brunswick, Me., who has been making puzzles “as far back as I can remember.” His first published puzzle appeared in Games magazine in 2000. This one grew out of a geographical curiosity he noticed. Fun fact: Adam is a huge fan of Amazon Prime’s “36-Down,” which he was very happy to include in the grid. — W.S.

ACROSS

- 1 “For more ___ ...”
- 5 Some unwanted mail
- 9 Terse bit of advice
- 13 Half of an ice cream brand with a fake Danish name
- 19 Work up a sweat
- 20 Rent
- 21 Like tap water in a restaurant
- 22 Iris part
- 23 Wing it [Africa]
- 25 Blue
- 26 Chew out
- 27 Après-ski drink
- 28 Complete rip-off [Asia]
- 30 Barrel-flavored, as wine
- 31 Washington, D.C., legalized it in 2014
- 32 Wealthy king of legend
- 33 Recess
- 36 Charge for admission
- 37 See 101-Down
- 38 Quaint contraction
- 41 Record company [Central America]
- 45 Two-time third-party presidential candidate
- 47 “The Walking Dead” channel
- 48 Beyond great
- 49 Baking measure
- 50 Cerebral
- 51 Take in
- 53 ___ shoots (salad ingredient)
- 54 One of five for a dolphin
- 55 Supple leather
- 56 Proboscis, informally
- 58 What subjects and verbs must do [Europe]
- 62 Ancho pepper, before drying
- 65 Puzzled
- 66 Sort by urgency of need [Europe]
- 70 Misgiving
- 74 Where meditators look
- 75 ___ candy
- 76 Planet where the cry “Shazbot!” is said to have originated
- 79 Food-chain link
- 80 Treats prepared on an open fire

DOWN

- 1 Hankering
- 2 Manhattan neighborhood west of the East Village
- 3 Order
- 4 Cranky codger
- 5 “Reach for the sky!”
- 6 Sandwich often served with rémoulade sauce
- 7 Killer of the Night King on “Game of Thrones”
- 8 “Throw ___ bone”
- 9 Key of Debussy’s “Clair de Lune”
- 10 Black pie-crust component
- 11 Lead-in to many a joke on “The Daily Show”
- 81 Part of O.E.D.: Abbr.
- 82 Organic fertilizer
- 84 Hold up
- 85 Male 91-Acrosses
- 86 T-shirt size [South America]
- 90 Not to mention
- 91 Forest ranger
- 92 Shapes made by thumbs and index fingers
- 93 Glossed over
- 94 Like some toy cars
- 97 Sportage maker
- 98 ___ Cochran, Mississippi senator from 1978 to 2018
- 99 First month of the year without a U.S. federal holiday [Asia]
- 102 Dismissed out of hand
- 106 Want badly
- 107 Sit at a red light, say
- 108 Biblical outcast [South America]
- 109 Exclamation from a cheek pincher
- 110 Org. behind the New Horizons project
- 111 One whose job prospects go up in smoke?
- 112 Responsibility
- 113 Biggest U.S. union, familiarly
- 114 Set of two
- 115 City north of Des Moines
- 116 Resident of the Palazzo Ducale



- 12 Senator who once served as an editor of The Harvard Law Review
- 13 Hurt
- 14 Many Omanis
- 15 Group seen in gathering clouds?
- 16 Discovery that might cause a rush
- 17 Wellsian race of the future
- 18 Gram
- 24 Objects in one of Jesus’ miracles
- 28 Singer Lisa
- 29 Top of the line
- 31 Fruit with an obovate shape
- 33 Media for scientists
- 34 Unit of brightness
- 35 Raw material for Cadbury
- 36 Popular Amazon Prime dramedy from Britain
- 39 Kind of column seen on the Jefferson Memorial
- 40 “Funny Girl” composer Jule
- 42 Copy
- 43 Vaper’s device, informally
- 44 Nutritional snack from Clif
- 45 Trig, for calc, e.g.
- 46 Relaxed
- 50 Some wetlands

- 52 Snack with a recommended microwave time of just three seconds
- 54 Theater impresario Ziegfeld
- 55 Abbr. in a genealogical tree
- 57 ___ Strait, separator of Australia and Papua New Guinea
- 59 What one is in Paris?
- 60 Kylo __, “Star Wars” antagonist
- 61 Candy-heart phrase
- 63 Raises one’s paddle, say
- 64 Each verse of “Deck the Halls” has 32 of them
- 66 Host Tyler of “Whose Line Is It Anyway?”
- 67 Dishearten
- 68 Scottish tradition before battle
- 69 “We Three Kings” subjects
- 71 Deodorant brand
- 72 Sierra ___
- 73 “Whoops, sorry about that!”
- 77 Sensationalist newspaper
- 78 Openings under desks

- 81 Observance first celebrated in 1970
- 82 Big to-do
- 83 Like “Saturday Night Live”
- 86 Put up with
- 87 Pull back
- 88 Mother of 60-Down
- 89 Item in a toxic internet “challenge”
- 91 Region around the Beltway, informally
- 95 Just for laughs
- 96 Put on a show
- 97 Work with one’s hands
- 98 Poppycock
- 99 Classic computer game set on an abandoned island
- 100 Michelle of “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon”
- 101 With 37-Across, Ingrid Bergman’s role in “Casablanca”
- 102 Tricky pronoun to use
- 103 Wine opener?
- 104 ‘60s dance craze that evolved from the Chicken
- 105 Join
- 108 Helper during taxing times?

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BY CHARLES
SIEBERT

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